

Aviation - Safety Oversight - African Economies

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Civil Aviation Administration has to make sure country lives up to international safety rules

1. Introduction

North America and Europe score highly in terms of aviation safety. This is not to say that no accidents happen in these regions, but the percentage of aircraft accidents is much lower than in Africa. So a flight over Europe is still safer than a flight over Africa.

Air transport is vital to most countries in the world, in particular land locked countries. Having no access to the sea means that all intercontinental transport has to come in by air. For example, for a country like Zambia, most of the 800.000 tourists rely on regular and safe air transport at some point for their stay in Zambia. Tourism adds some 5% to Zambia's income. Businessmen and investors depend on frequent & reliable opportunities to visit Zambia by air. Some 2000 ton cutflowlers largely rely on air transport to the Netherlands alone, not even taking into account exports to other markets.

The global press carries regular reports about the 'unsafety' of aviation in the African region. These statistics are made up of numerous factors that cause such unsafety. Some of these factors are poor safety oversight by states, inadequate fire and rescue services, overloading of aircraft & flight crew training deficiencies.



Some deficiencies are quite specific to the African situation. They require a flexible oversight organisation to provide pragmatic solutions.

2. International rules

Airlines, airports and government authorities must comply with a large number of rules in order to operate within international safety standards. These rules have been agreed internationally. They are set in the Chicago Convention and United Nation's technical agency for aviation, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). With 190 member states, almost all nations of the world are bound by its work. Many of the rules of ICAO are binding in international law. In this, it differs from guidance material provided by numerous other bodies affiliated to the United Nations such as the World Health Organisation. The ICAO rules are called Standards and Recommended Practices. Next to those Standards and Recommended Practices, there is a whole range of guidance documentation on almost every subject, making worldwide standardisation in this global industry easier.

There are safety rules for almost any area of aviation, contained in 18 so called Annexes to the Chicago Convention. They cover issues such as the issuing of pilot's licenses and the safe use (operation) of aircraft. Other topics covered are requirements for maintenance of aircraft, rules on communication equipment as well as the lay out of airports and the organisation of airport fire services¹.

The constant advance of knowledge & technology leads to continuous improvement of safety standards. The international rules are therefore being regularly tightened up. In practice, it has been found that some countries do not themselves have sufficient financial resources or know-how to comply with international safety standards. This can therefore create a weak link in the chain of worldwide air safety. The international community has pledged that air traffic should only grow if safety can keep pace

with it. This leaflet focuses on the safety oversight part of aviation safety.

3. Role of civil aviation administration

In reality, airlines and other air operators have the prime responsibility for safety. The country's civil aviation administration has to make sure these operators have the right systems and procedures in place to manage safety and risks.



A civil aviation administration sets the standards and carries out safety oversight and checks, but it cannot deliver safety every day, on every flight. That is quite properly the job of the air operators. If an airline has the right training and checking systems for their pilots, the flight crew can be expected to perform to the required standards. If an airline has robust systems to control maintenance, work on their aircraft can be expected to meet the correct standards. A civil aviation administration makes it clear to the aviation industry that safety is more than just complying with the rules. Safety is a commitment that individuals and organisations must make to achieving practical outcomes in every-day operations.

Safety must be a top priority for all involved in aviation and it must start from top management down. As the regulator, it is the civil aviation administration's job to encourage and motivate the aviation industry to continually work to find ways of lifting safety performance.

A civil aviation administration has to operate within modern aviation laws and regulations. Not all countries are able to satisfy this requirement. The drafting of such legislation requires considerable legal, technical and operational expertise. Another crucial component is political support in governments and parliaments to enact such changes.



A major problem for civil aviation administrations throughout the world is retaining personnel. This applies in particular to Africa. Many experts that the civil aviation administration needs, can work with the industry or abroad for much more competitive salaries. Their expertise is very international in its nature. This is the same with some other professions such as medical doctors. For aviation, the solution can lie in the creation of an independent authority.

4. Financially & politically independent

ICAO recommends that states form a financially autonomous civil aviation authority (CAA) or join a regional safety oversight organisation.

An autonomous CAA may be financially possible with users of the aviation system paying fees for the services. In many cases, airlines pay fees in hard currency (dollars) for using a country's airspace, landing their aircraft at an airport and benefiting from the air navigation services that guide and assist aircraft on their journey. Equally, pilots pay for their flying licenses and aircraft operators pay for certificates of airworthiness for their aircraft. However, in many African countries, that income flows to the Ministry of Finance who usually distributes it to many worthy causes such as the health and education sector. As a result, airlines are reluctant to pay more for the services as long as the money is not used to purchase and maintain systems that are critical to their safety.

Safety oversight may be improved if the aviation administration is transformed into an authority that is allowed to reuse its own income. Experts with international expertise such as flight inspectors can now be hired at fairly competitive salaries and retained. Many of them would like to help build their own country if offered more favourable conditions.

If an aviation department is restructured, it is important that the resulting a civil aviation authority (CAA) can also work free from political interference. Decisions taken by the civil aviation authority for safety reasons may affect aviation companies. These companies are increasingly owned by captains of industry who may try to use political ways to influence a decision they think is not fair.

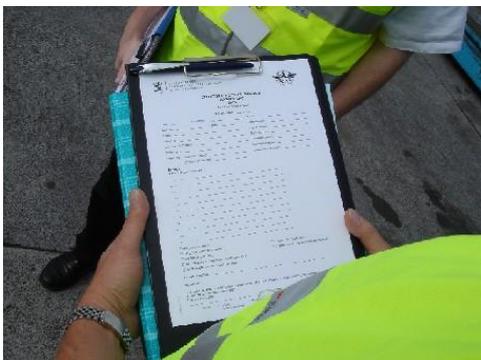
International developments on safety oversight require almost continuous training of staff, requiring sufficient funds which can usually only be secured in an authority setting.

If a civil aviation authority is positioned away from mainstream politics, it will be much better able to guard safety to the maximum. The resulting international recognition of such safety oversight is increasingly important.

5. Closing the net

Traditionally, the International Civil Aviation Organization has no means to force countries to implement the rules. The Chicago Convention is only asking countries to notify ICAO if they haven't managed to implement a standard.

However, aviation has grown tremendously over the past decades. 'Unsafety' in one region of the world more and more influences safety in other regions. Therefore, the international community wanted to check to what level the 191 ICAO Member States had actually implemented the standards and recommended practices.



Since 1999, ICAO checks whether its rules are indeed implemented through audits. The Universal Safety Oversight Audit program has visited almost all countries in the world. These audits lead to a report in which an overview is given of the (level of) implementation of the rules. Also, the reports provided recommendations to States on how to correct any deficiencies found. So far, those audits have mostly focussed on safety oversight by the

government, covered by three out of the 18 annexes. Recently, they have also started to look at most of the other annexes, providing a much more complete overview of a country's system to keep safety in line.

From March 2008 onwards, the reports of the audits are public and available to each and every newspaper on the world through ICAO's website (www.icao.int). It is only a matter of time before reputable newspapers pick up those reports and begin highlighting the bad aviation safety performers.

6. Increasing international pressure

Since the ICAO system does not provide any classification or judgement to the findings in the report, some countries and regions wanted to go further than that. One of the main motivations is that they want their citizens to know on which airlines they can fly safely. Also, they want to make sure that aircraft or airlines entering their country and airspace, operate safely.

Most of those systems may lead to some sort of 'blacklisting' of a country or an airline. This can have an enormous impact on the economy of a country.

6.1 Assessments by the USA

The United States Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) established the IASA program in 1992. If an airline from anywhere in the world wants to operate to and from the United States, the United States government will assess the safety oversight ability of the country where the airline is registered. It wants to know whether the government of a country makes sure an airline operates safely. The US government will check adherence to international standards and recommended practices for aircraft operations and maintenance established by the International Civil Aviation Organization.

The USA classifies a country in category 1, 2 or 3 on the basis of this assessment. If a country gets a category 2 or 3 rating, no airline from that country will be allowed to fly to and from the USA unrestricted.

6.2. Blacklist of European Union



Since 2006, the European Union (EU) publishes a so-called blacklist of airlines that are no longer allowed to fly to the European Union.

A committee of aviation safety experts looks at the results of the ICAO audit and of quick checks (ramp inspections) carried out at European airports of non-European aircraft (if that airline flies to Europe). In those checks, the inspectors look at the operation and maintenance of the aircraft. On the basis of certain criteria and following a set procedure, the EU may impose a complete or partial ban on an airline. If the EU observes shortcomings that are the result of bad safety oversight by the national civil aviation administration responsible for monitoring that airline, the ban may cover all airlines from that country.

At present, the blacklist bans some 150 airlines from flying to Europe, most of which come from Africa.

The first case of a long standing airline that flew cargo to Europe but that has gone bankrupt as a result of being blacklisted, has already been reported.

6.3 Airline peer pressure



Scheduled airlines in the world usually want to join the International Air Transport Association (IATA). To be part of the global aviation market,

airlines really can't do without IATA membership. It opens up all kinds of benefits that make the running of an international airline much more profitable. For example, IATA membership is critical for ticket sales through worldwide accredited travel agents.

IATA now requires its members to pass a strict safety audit (IOSA). Those airlines that didn't pass the IOSA audit at the end of 2008 saw their IATA membership cancelled.

7. AviAssist Foundation

As the regional affiliate of the Flight Safety Foundation (www.flightsafety.org), the AviAssist Foundation provides safety support to the East and Southern African region. It identifies threats to safety, analyse the problems and work on practical solutions to them. The Foundation gives impulses to permanent improvements through program & policy support.

For more information, contact the foundation at info@aviassist.org or visit www.aviassist.org

8. Final remarks

Responsibility for aviation safety is shared by the civil aviation administration, the airlines, the aerodromes, the maintenance companies and numerous suppliers.

In all, African government increasingly can't afford improper safety oversight if they are serious with developing tourism and stimulating foreign direct investment.

A financially & politically independent civil aviation authority may be needed to realise that. Countries that have a properly functioning civil aviation authority in place, have seen themselves gain international recognition. This recognition is crucial to continue to be part of the global aviation community.



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¹ Annexes to the Chicago Conventions cover the following subjects:

1. Personnel licensing (pilot licenses, air traffic control licenses etc.)
2. Rules of the air
3. Meteorological services
4. Aeronautical charts
5. Units of measurement used in aviation
6. Operation of aircraft (safe use of aircraft)
7. Aircraft nationality and registration
8. Airworthiness of aircraft (safe maintenance of aircraft)
9. Facilitation (immigration, customs, public health etc.)
10. Aeronautical telecommunications
11. Air traffic services
12. Search and Rescue
13. Aircraft accident and incident investigation
14. Airports
15. Aeronautical information services
16. Environmental protection
17. Security
18. Transport of dangerous goods by air