

What's the future of aviation in Africa?

 By [Abel Alemu](#)

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African airlines are faced with challenges and competition just like most other airlines in the world. To stay competitive in the aviation industry however, one needs to have a proper forward-looking strategy and roadmap. It's a matter of airlines looking at the facts and figures on hand and then managing their planning accordingly.

Africa's population was estimated at 1.2bn in 2015 and is expected to double by 2050. This kind of growth opens the door to numerous possibilities. More people living on the continent, quite frankly, means more people travelling - both locally and internationally.

This growth will be gradual, giving airlines time to plan and gear up for the increase in traffic which will inevitably follow. With entities such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund predicting that some of the fastest growing economies in future will be from Africa, it's hard to ignore the potential for growth within the aviation industry.

This is a continent where 13 of the 54 countries are landlocked, which makes air travel the preferred mode of transportation, both for passengers and freight.



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Currently, Africans do not make up a large portion of the world's travellers and there are many reasons for this.

Lack of domestic flights, stopovers lengthening travel time and economic factors such as ticket prices all influence how likely a passenger is to travel. Not only is it expensive to travel to and from Africa, but it is also expensive to travel within Africa while business travellers find themselves in situations where they are forced to take connecting flights through global

hubs, adding costs and time to their flights. Add to this the fact that only 12% of Africans have passports.

Non-African carriers currently cover more than 80% of the African market and although we at Ethiopian Airlines have seen a steady increase in our numbers – competing with the likes of these European and Middle Eastern carriers is not always easy.

Having said this, aviation in Africa has grown tremendously and we are optimistic about the future of African aviation.

Strategic partnerships are key

Aviation is a capital-intensive industry and as such, partnerships are key to survival in this industry. We are likely to see interesting partnerships form as the passenger numbers continue to increase creating opportunities to develop better intra-Africa connectivity through the rise of more national carriers as well as low-cost carriers.

Partnerships such as the strategic partnership between DHL Global Forwarding and Ethiopian Airlines to build the Leading Cargo Logistics provider JV company in Africa, enhance the product offerings of the airline and further extends their reach into the African market.

Key partnerships in 2019 will increase traffic between African cities and the resulting potentially lower fares will have a positive impact on business and operational costs – an economic benefit for all parties involved. We can expect to see the application of policies and strategies that will increase efficiency, productivity and competitiveness. More international carriers will start incorporating technology into their product offerings, such as accessibility to a mobile app and online visa applications.

African citizens require a visa in order to travel to 51% of other countries on the continent whilst Africans can get visas on arrival in only 24% of other African countries. So 2019 could very well see the start of partnerships between the relevant governments, tourism authorities and airports that will potentially streamline visa requirements, making these countries more easily accessible.

Infrastructure plays a major role in the evolution of the aviation industry and we'll more than likely see African hubs undergo upgrades, as the Bole International Airport has recently undergone, but this will be dependent on the partnerships formed between governments and airlines.

Ethiopian Airlines is already expanding its network of hubs in line with its Vision 2025 – the most recent example being the partnership between Ethiopian Airlines and the Government of Chad which will see the new Chad national carrier servicing Central Africa.

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