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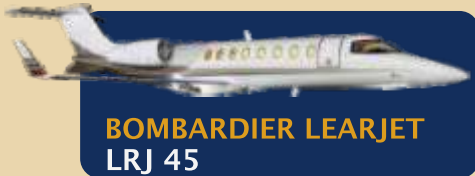
BOMBARDIER DASH 8
100/200/300/400

Line & Base Maintenance up to
C (8000Hrs) checks



LEONARDO
AW139

Line & Base Maintenance up to
1200/8years Inspections



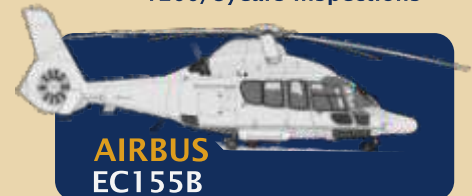
BOMBARDIER LEARJET
LRJ 45

Line & Base Maintenance up to
9600Hrs checks



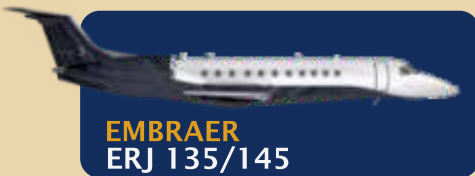
BOMBARDIER CHALLENGER
601/604/605

Line & Base Maintenance up to
2400 Hrs & 48/240 months Inspections



AIRBUS
EC155B

Line & Base Maintenance up to
6000/12years Inspections



EMBRAER
ERJ 135/145

Line & Base Maintenance up to
4C (5000hrs/48 Months) checks



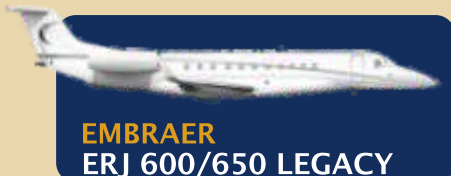
CESSNA
152, 172, 180/182

Line & Base Maintenance up to
100 Hrs & Annual Inspections



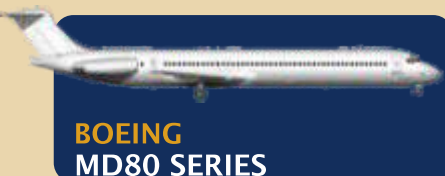
BELL TEXTRON
429

Line & Base Maintenance up to
5000/5 years Inspections



EMBRAER
ERJ 600/650 LEGACY

Line & Base Maintenance up to
2000hrs/96 Months checks



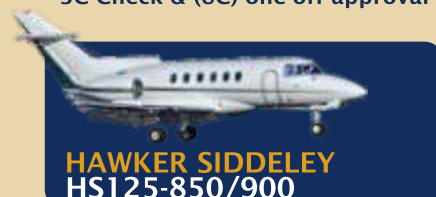
BOEING
MD80 SERIES

Line & Base Maintenance up to
3C Check & (8C) one-off approval



SIKORSKY
S76C/C+/C++

Line & Base Maintenance up to
100Hrs/12 months Inspections



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Is African Aviation Ready to go Green?



Sustainability has become a buzzword globally, even though it's being mentioned at different aviation fora and, in some cases, the main theme of the conference. We often struggle to understand the concept of sustainability as the word is being bandied about.

Economically, African airlines have not been sustainable for the most part of their operations due to varied reasons stemming from undue government interference, lack of corporate governance,

wrong business models, etc.

Emphasis is often given to air connectivity, route development, network planning, and fleet expansion while ignoring the red flags that make airlines unsustainable. At the core of any airline or aviation business must be economic sustainability before anything else.

The concept of Net Zero and Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) brings us to environmental sustainability. Aviation accounts for 2.5% of global CO2 emissions. It's now a global issue as airlines look for ways to offset their carbon emissions.

Kenya Airways was the first airline in Africa to fly on Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF). But how many airlines

and aviation businesses in Africa have embedded environmental sustainability framework into their policies?

Aviators Africa has created an annual platform to deliberate on sustainability within the context of the African aviation industry. The platform offers industry stakeholders the opportunity to discuss not only economic sustainability but also ESG. This will unlock how the travel and tourism ecosystem can contribute to a green future.

At the 2023 African Aviation Sustainability Conference, which holds from 28-30 September in Johannesburg, South Africa, participants will benefit from experts as they discuss Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSA). To join us in pioneering African Aviation Sustainability, kindly visit www.theaviatorsafrica.com to register.

In this edition of Aviators Africa Magazine, the cover personality is Engineer Isaac Balami, the founder and CEO of 7Star Global Hangar. Based in Nigeria, 7Star is an indigenous MRO facility making a difference with a team of young, vibrant, and brilliant professionals. Among other things, Balami shared his grass-to-grace story. You will find it very inspiring.

Also for your interesting read are brilliantly written and highly informative feature articles as well as our regular scintillating travel stories.

Seat back, relax, and get fly!

“ Aviation accounts for 2.5% of global CO2 emissions. It's now a global issue as airlines look for ways to offset their carbon emissions. ”

TONI UKACHUKWU
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toni@theaviatorsafrica.com



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As a ForwardKeys Insights Expert/Data Analyst, Shingai George leverages ForwardKeys data to provide travel industry stakeholders with invaluable insights on travel market trends. His diverse professional background combines expertise in IT, coupled with a decade's experience in aviation safety, airline sales and flight and airport operations. Passionate about aviation, Shingai is a trusted voice in the sector: in addition to speaking at industry events, he contributes articles for various publications on subjects including air travel, mobility and sustainable alternative fuels. He is also a member of the General Aviation Safety Strategy Focus Group, in the South African Civil Aviation Authority. Shingai is also a Contributor for the think tank, Future Africa Forum; where he lends his expertise in the areas of Infrastructure and Development.





Asap

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SUSTAINABILITY
AFRICA
PODCAST

WITH

TONI UKACHUKWU



South African Airways Expands in Europe with New Codeshare Deal with Lufthansa

South African Airways (SAA) customers can now fly to Frankfurt and connect to a host of European destinations thanks to a new codeshare agreement between Lufthansa Airlines and SAA. The SAA codeshare on Lufthansa is now open for sale.

The agreement allows customers to book a long-haul trip with SAA to European destinations serviced by Lufthansa from Johannesburg.

Furthermore, SAA is excited to announce that once regulatory approval is granted, Swiss Airlines which also belongs to the Lufthansa Group will codeshare with SAA. Customers will similarly be able to book on the SAA codeshare on Swiss flights out of Johannesburg to Zurich and onward to other European destinations on a single ticket.

“We are thrilled to resume our codeshare agreement with the Lufthansa and soon with Swiss airlines, who are both members of STAR Alliance, the largest Alliance amongst airlines” said SAA Chief Commercial Officer, Tebogo Tsimane. “It is a key step in reconnecting our travelers from around the continent to

a wider range of international destinations through their SAA ticket and earn Voyager miles.”

A codeshare agreement means that customers will only need to book a single ticket and have their checked-in luggage carried seamlessly to their destination. A single ticket is more cost-effective, and the codeshare agreement means that travellers do not have to worry about the logistics of travelling between continents on multiple airlines.

“We are very pleased to announce that we have re-established our codeshare agreement with South African Airways,” said Matthias Lefèvre, General Manager of Sales at Lufthansa Group Airlines for Southern Africa.

“Building on our long-term partnership with SAA allows us to offer greater flexibility and a larger variety to our customers in South Africa. Lufthansa and SWISS passengers can add a connecting flight from Johannesburg to Cape Town or Durban within the same booking.”

Airlines within the Lufthansa Group offers more than 35 weekly connections from South Africa to their hubs in Europe.



Air Seychelles Gets New Board, CEO and CFO

The Office of the President of the Republic of Seychelles has announced the appointment of Chief Executive Officer and new Board for Air Seychelles.

Captain Sandy Benoiton, who was discharging the role of Acting CEO since 1 July, 2021, has now been appointed as the new Chief Executive Officer of Air Seychelles, effective from the 1 August, 2023.

Similarly, a new Board of Directors has been appointed for Air Seychelles for a 2-year period, effective from 27 July, 2023. Mr Egbert Laurence is the Acting Chairperson. The other Board Members are Daphne Hoareau, Irene Crois e, and Paul Lebon.

Air Seychelles has also announced the appointment of Tyrian Gendron as its Chief Financial Officer effective 15 August 2023. Tyrian had been discharging the role of Acting Chief Financial Officer since July 2021.

Founded in 1977, Air Seychelles is the national carrier of the Indian Ocean Island of Seychelles. The carrier is wholly owned by the Government of Seychelles.

From its hub at the Seychelles International Airport Mahe, the carrier currently flies to several domestic, regional, and international destinations, including Praslin, Tel Aviv, Johannesburg, Mumbai, Colombo, and Mauritius. It also operates charter services throughout the archipelago.



Kenya Airways and Delta Air Lines Expand Codeshare Partnership

Kenya Airways PLC (KQ) and Delta Air Lines (DL) have expanded their strategic partnership to include Kenya Airways’ Nairobi to New York service, effective 5th August 2023. Kenya Airways currently operates a daily service connecting Nairobi to New York, it is the only nonstop flight from East Africa to America. The expanded partnership also offers customers additional travel options within the U.S. and increased flying opportunities within Africa increasing customers’ travel options to more than 31 destinations in Africa and 57 cities across the U.S. and Canada. Tickets will be available to purchase from kenya-airways.com as well as through trade and corporate channels including travel agencies.

Apart from enjoying the benefit of having the most direct route and wider connectivity options between KQ and DL operated flights, frequent flyer customers of Kenya Airways’ Asante Rewards or Delta’s SkyMiles program will also earn miles on the services. Commenting on the expanded codeshare, Allan Kilavuka, Kenya Airways PLC Group MD and CEO said that the partnership is significant as it will enhance connectivity between U.S. and Africa and offer the KQ product directly through its American Partner.

“Kenya Airways prides itself in connecting Africa to the World and the World to Africa. The expansion of the codeshare is historic as it not only allows KQ to expand its footprint in the U.S., but also significant because it provides seamless connectivity on a single ticket for those travelling for business, leisure or studies into the U.S. while giving seamless connectivity to those visiting Africa through JFK and KQ’s hub at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (JKIA) in Nairobi.” says Allan Kilavuka.

Alain Bellemare, Delta’s President International added: “At a time when we are seeing unprecedented demand for travel between North America and Africa, expanding our strategic partnership with Kenya Airways offers our customers more travel options as well as supports our priority to deepen our presence across the African continent.”.

KQ currently offers daily flights from Nairobi, Kenya to the U.S. via JFK airport in New York. Delta has been operating nonstop service between Africa to the United States since 2006. Delta currently operates flights from Accra, Ghana; Dakar, Senegal; Cape Town and Johannesburg, South Africa; and Lagos, Nigeria.

TAAG Angola Airlines Increases Frequency Between Luanda and Kinshasa

In order to better promote trade, business development and mobility between Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), thus, following market demand, TAAG Angola Airlines will provide an additional frequency between Luanda and Kinshasa from 14 August ahead. The Kinshasa route will have four (4) weekly frequencies, departing from Luanda on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, operated by a DASH-8 aircraft, with total capacity of 74 passengers, 64 in economy class and 10 passengers in business class. Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo shared multiple synergies, and coincidentally, today is taking place the first Economic Forum Angola – DRC in Kinshasa, with the main topic "Economic Partnerships towards mutual growth". This event brings together Government representatives from both countries, corporate segment, chamber of commerce and similar, among other participants. Angola shares an extensive border with the DRC and a significant flow of bilateral trade. Both countries develop strong cooperation and are integrated into regional organizations, namely: Southern African Development Community (SADC), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Gulf of Guinea Commission

(CGG) and International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR). Overall, TAAG is deeply committed to providing greater connectivity and convenience services to the customer, positioning Angola as an important hub within the region. TAAG Angola Airlines was founded in 1938 and it is based in Luanda, Angola’s capital city. TAAG is the leading airline having grown its current network to 12 domestic and 13 international destinations.



Ethiopian Aviation University Graduates over 1,500 Aviation Professionals

Ethiopian Aviation University has graduated 1,551 aviation professionals in pilot training, aviation maintenance, cabin crew, commercial, and hotel operations professions. The graduation ceremony took place today, 5 August, 2023 at the newly upgraded Ethiopian Aviation University, Commercial Building.

The graduates are from Pilot Training, Aviation Maintenance, Commercial, Cabin Crew Schools, and Hotel Operation.

Congratulating the aviation professionals, Ethiopian Airlines Group CEO Mr. Mesfin Tasew said, “Human capital development is one of the key pillars in Ethiopian Airlines growth strategic road map; and today’s graduation is a testimony of our commitment to ensure that we invest a lot on our aviation brainery. As part of our continental commitment, we will continue to provide Africa with skilled aviation professionals. We are delighted to see today youths from seven African countries completing one chapter and opening another in their aviation endeavor. We believe in the potentials of Africa’s youths to shape the continent’s aviation and continue to educate them at our center of excellence. Today the industry welcomes 660 male and 891 female graduates.”

Ethiopian የኢትዮጵያ Aviation Academy

PIONEER OF AVIATION EXCELLENCE

Since its formation in 1956, Ethiopian Aviation Excellence Center has been offering various aviation courses, mainly to African youths. Today youths from Rwanda, Togo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, Uganda and Sudan completed their education.

Currently, the University offers undergraduate and postgraduate programs in aerospace and hospitality fields. Courses being offered at the University include: BSc in Aeronautical Engineering, Aviation Maintenance Engineering, Aviation Management & Operations, BA in Tourism & Hospitality Management, MSc in Data Science, MBA in Aviation Management.

The University also offers Diploma and Certificate Programs in Aircraft Maintenance Technician, Pilot Training, Cabin Crew and Commercial Training, Leadership & Career Development, Catering Training, in addition to ICAO Courses and Online Courses.

Ethiopian also owns training facilities in regional cities including in Hawassa, DireDawa, Bahir-Dar and Mekelle.

SITA Partners with Envision Digital to Drive Sustainable Airport Operations

Air transport industry IT provider SITA and Envision Digital, a Singapore-headquartered global net zero partner and Artificial Intelligence of Things (AIoT) technology leader, have signed a new partnership to help airports reduce operational costs and support their net zero ambitions.

The companies have developed solutions that allow real-time data IoT flows, enabling airports to monitor and report their energy usage, emissions from aircraft and other vehicles, and their carbon footprint. Airports can use insights from these data feeds to take action to reduce consumption costs and resulting emissions. In future, the above solutions will allow airports to harness and orchestrate renewable energy sources. These solutions will be pivotal to SITA’s Total Airport Management concept, which will help airports manage every aspect of their operation and bring sustainability into the heart of holistic operational decision making.

Drew Griffiths, Head of SITA AT AIRPORTS, said: “Today, SITA works with nearly 1,000 airports globally to manage every aspect of their operations, from baggage and passenger processing to airside and aircraft operations.

Supporting airports to reduce costs and cut their greenhouse gas emissions is a natural extension of this offering and one our customers have asked for. We look forward to working with Envision in delivering this new capability as part of our wider airport offering.”

As part of the partnership, SITA will create a new Center of Excellence to accelerate product development and customer project delivery. The partnership harnesses Envision Digital’s strengths in energy management and smart building solutions, with SITA’s strengths in air transport technology and

operations to support airports and make their operation more efficient and sustainable.

Michael Ding, Global Executive Director at Envision Digital, said: “Airports have been progressive in their ambition to reach net zero. This partnership combines our AIoT leadership with SITA’s expertise in the air transport industry to create low-carbon aviation solutions that help the industry to reach its goal.”





South African Airways Appoints GSA for North America

South African Airways (SAA) is expanding its reach into North America through the appointment of a General Sales Agent (GSA) for the region. The appointed agent, Discover the World (DTW) will sell passenger space on behalf of South Africa’s national flag carrier.

This partnership is expected to see the airline grow revenue across North America by raising awareness with more trade and corporate partners.

SAA’s Chief Executive Officer, Prof. John Lamola said the move is part of the airline’s long-term growth strategy that is yielding fruit. Prof. Lamola says activating the partnership with DTW in North America is another strong sign that the airline is regaining its international stature.

“SAA is pleased to once again be able to welcome our valued

travellers from North America. We look forward to treating them to the warm South African hospitality that we are celebrated for,” said Lamola.

SAA was recently awarded Best Cabin Crew in Africa for 2023 by global airline and airport review and ranking consultancy, Skytrax, at its World Airline Awards held in Paris.

Aiden Walsh Head of Airline Development at Discover the World says they are excited about the partnership.

“We are delighted to grow our partnership with SAA to cover the North American markets. Our excellent sales and marketing teams in both the USA and Canada will be focusing on reintroducing the fantastic SAA Brand to our trade partners. Discover the World already represents SAA in the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland and Germany.”

Embraer Appoints Carlos Naufel as Vice President of Services & Support



Embraer has announced that Carlos Naufel, current Technical Director of Azul Linhas Aéreas, will be the new Vice President of Services & Support, effective on September 1, 2023. The current VP of the area, Johann Bordais, will assume the role of CEO at Eve Air Mobility, as Embraer announced in July.

With 27 years of experience in the aviation sector, Naufel graduated with a degree in Mechanical Engineering and earned a Master’s in Business from FAAP University, in São Paulo, among other specializations. At Azul for almost five years, Naufel now leads Azul’s Technical Department, which has more than 2,000 employees and covers the areas of engineering and maintenance (line and heavy maintenance), quality, and logistics. Starting this year, he also became

responsible for Azul TecOps, a new business unit created to sell services.

Prior to joining Azul, Naufel worked at Embraer for more than 18 years, holding various roles in the service and support area. Between 2017 and 2019, he was Vice President of Technical Solutions, being responsible for maintenance engineering, fleet performance and technical support for Commercial, Executive and Defense Aviation customers.

“Naufel combines a successful history in Embraer’s services area with customer vision and broad technical knowledge,” said Francisco Gomes Neto, President and CEO of Embraer. “I’m confident he will continue the ongoing transformation in the area and accelerate the profitable growth of the business.”

“I helped to shape the Embraer Services and Support area together with Johann Bordais, and over the last several years, I’ve had the privilege to successfully run Azul’s technical, quality and logistical areas, dealing with several other aircraft manufacturers in a very complex airline environment with nearly 1,000 flights a day. Recently, Azul was named the World’s Best Airline by Trip Advisor and the World’s Most On-Time Airline by Cirium,” said Naufel. “I am thrilled to bring back all this knowledge and expertise to Embraer to help shape the future of the services business unit increasing customer satisfaction as well as business results.”



Ethiopian Airlines, Boeing and ThinkYoung Inaugurate STEM School in Ethiopia

Ethiopian Airlines, Boeing and ThinkYoung have launched the STEM School, an initiative designed to equip young individuals and teachers in Ethiopia with the necessary skills for better employment opportunities. The program focuses on underprivileged African youth especially women, fostering their pursuit of higher education in STEM with a focus on aviation.

The STEM School will be hosted at the Ethiopian Airlines Aviation University, leveraging the expertise of the flagship carrier of Ethiopia. This collaboration ensures that students and teachers will benefit from the extensive knowledge and resources of the fastest growing Airline in Africa, enhancing their educational experience and providing them with real-world insights.

Ethiopian Airlines Group Chief Executive Officer Mr. Mesfin Tasew said about the program: "We are delighted in our collaboration with Boeing and ThinkYoung to launch the STEM School initiative, which helps Ethiopian youths to succeed in education and in their future careers, primarily in aviation fields, and to become the next generation of innovators. We believe in going at a compatible pace with the speed of technology and being prepared for future demands. This cooperation and initiative will develop young people to meet the future needs of the fast-growing Ethiopian aviation industry."

A comprehensive, immersive program spanning six weeks, the STEM School will provide over 300 hours of classes and hands-on training. The program will welcome 24 students in grades 11-12 from different regions of Ethiopia. 50% of students will be girls. The students will learn the basics of STEM, coding and programming as well as soft skills such as teamwork and problem-solving. Job shadowing at Ethiopian Airlines will allow students to experience various STEM-related roles and improve skills gained during the program. The students will have an opportunity to meet with the

professionals from Ethiopian Airlines who will mentor them during their individual projects. This internship also has the added benefit of providing professional recommendations, resume-worthy experience, and networking opportunities.

Kuljit Ghata-Aura, president of Boeing Middle East, Türkiye and Africa commented, "The partnership between Ethiopian Airlines, ThinkYoung, and Boeing embodies a perfect blend of leadership in African aviation, global aerospace innovation, and educational excellence. This synergy will undoubtedly contribute to the success of the STEM School, facilitating the creation of a steady talent pipeline to support growing commercial aviation in Ethiopia." Anbessie Yitbarek, Boeing Commercial Airplanes Sales and Marketing vice president in Africa added, "We value our partnerships with Ethiopian Airlines and trusted NGOs that in the long run help boost the economy in Ethiopia and beyond by developing and attracting local talent. We are proud of the community work we do in Africa and believe in developing the skills and encouraging young people to consider the aviation industry for their studies and careers."

Another portion of the partnership is the Teacher Training Program. 24 educators from Ethiopia will attend a teaching workshop to improve their ability to teach advanced STEM concepts. After one week of training the teachers will return home with a kit they can use in their classrooms. Andrea Gerosa, founder of ThinkYoung Africa said, "ThinkYoung is honored to join forces with Boeing and Ethiopian Airlines in introducing our transformative STEM School program, aimed at supporting Ethiopia's commitment to addressing skills gaps, particularly in the field of STEM education. Together, we want to create a lasting impact on the lives of Ethiopians, empowering them with the essential education and skills needed to not only adapt but thrive in the ever-evolving digital future."

Boeing Unveils \$950,000 Scholarships for Pilot Training

Boeing is investing as much as \$950,000 in scholarships for pilot training to grow and diversify talent required to meet significant long-term demand for commercial airplane pilots. The American aircraft manufacturer is donating \$500,000 to fund 25 scholarships with five aviation organizations committed to developing future pilots, including:

- Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association
- Latino Pilots Association
- Organization of Black Aerospace Professionals
- Sisters of the Skies
- Women in Aviation International

Boeing is also donating \$450,000 to Fly Compton, a Los Angeles-based nonprofit that introduces minority youth to career opportunities in aerospace. This investment will increase flight training classes offered to students in L.A.'s Compton community and introduce career topics related to designing, building, and maintaining airplanes and drones. "The demand for qualified and diverse pilots remains high at airlines worldwide. While becoming a pilot provides a lifelong career, access to training remains a barrier to entry for many," said Ziad Ojakli, executive vice president of Government Operations at Boeing. "These organizations are helping the next generation of pilots realize their full potential while also showing communities that are historically under-represented in the industry that a future in aviation is possible."



The long-term demand for newly qualified aviation personnel remains strong. Boeing projects that 602,000 new pilots will be needed to fly and maintain the global commercial fleet over the next 20 years. Boeing will release its latest Pilot and Technician Outlook on July 25.

"We are seeing more women and individuals from diverse backgrounds entering the pilot profession because of the mentorship and guidance that aviation organizations like these provide for early career professionals," said Chris Broom, vice president of Commercial Training Solutions for Boeing Global Services. "The work they're doing to implement changes needed to remove social and financial barriers to entry are critical."

Since 2019, Boeing has invested more than \$8.5 million to bring pilot training programs to underrepresented populations in communities across the United States.

As a leading global aerospace company, Boeing develops, manufactures and services commercial airplanes, defense products and space systems for customers in more than 150 countries. As a top U.S. exporter, the company leverages the talents of a global supplier base to advance economic opportunity, sustainability and community impact. Boeing's diverse team is committed to innovating for the future, leading with sustainability, and cultivating a culture based on the company's core values of safety, quality and integrity. Join our team and find your purpose at boeing.com/careers.

Ethiopian Airlines Launches Flights to London Gatwick

Ethiopian Airlines, the largest network operating carrier in Africa is expanding its offering in the UK market with the launch of a direct service to/from London Gatwick Airport. The new service will start from 21 November, 2023 and will operate three times a week on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays using an Airbus A350-900 aircraft.

Regarding the commencement of the flight Ethiopian Airlines Group CEO Mr. Mesfin Tasew said, "We have a 50-year relation with UK. We give high regards to our Heathrow services and now we are excited to add Gatwick to our vast global network. We are ready to stretch our reach to Gatwick and provide our renowned, award-winning services. History has it that we last served Gatwick in 2005 and 2006 using the Boeing 757. Now the route will be served by the most modern Airbus A350-900 aircraft."

Over the years, we have established commendable partnerships with over 100 UK based companies in the aviation sector. Our expansion in the UK, among others, will enable us to nurture this cooperation and partnership to a higher level."

The new service by Ethiopian will offer a direct flight between London-Gatwick and Addis Ababa onboard Airbus A350 with Business Class and Economy cabins, providing seamless connectivity to Ethiopian Airlines' vast global networks stretched across Africa, Far East, the Americas and Asia. Mr. Henock Woubishet, Area Manager UK & Ireland commenting on the new service said, "The UK is a strong and important market for Ethiopian. Adding London-Gatwick to

our UK schedule is truly great news as it will enable us to provide much-needed capacity not only for our passengers but also for our cargo services carried in the belly hold. Ethiopian will now serve London Heathrow, Gatwick, and Manchester Airports."

Stephanie Wear, VP Aviation Development, London Gatwick said, "We are delighted to welcome Ethiopian Airlines back to London Gatwick this winter. As the largest carrier in Africa, this is an excellent addition to our network and adds a valuable, direct connection to Eastern Africa. Ethiopian Airlines is the latest in a number of carriers looking to operate long-haul routes from Gatwick, which further highlights the strong demand for slots at our airport. It's also fantastic news for passengers across London and the South East to have more choice and direct services to Addis Ababa, as well as greater opportunities for onward connections across Africa, Asia and the Middle East."

The new service will complement Ethiopian Airlines daily non-stop service to London Heathrow and 5 weekly service to Manchester. From the UK, passengers can connect to more than 60 destinations in Africa as well as Far East and Asia.





Voyager Space and Airbus to Build and Operate Starlab

Voyager Space (Voyager), a global leader in space exploration, and Airbus Defence and Space (Airbus), the largest aeronautics and space company in Europe, have announced an agreement paving the way for a transatlantic joint venture to develop, build, and operate Starlab, a commercial space station planned to succeed the International Space Station.

The US-led joint venture will bring together world-class leaders in the space domain, while further uniting American and European interests in space exploration.

“We are proud to charter the future of space stations with Airbus,” says Matthew Kuta, President at Voyager Space. “The International Space Station is widely regarded as the most successful platform for global cooperation in space history, and we are committed to building on this legacy as we move forward with Starlab. We are establishing this joint venture to reliably meet the known demand from global space agencies while opening new opportunities for commercial users.”

Voyager was awarded a \$160 million Space Act Agreement (SAA) from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in December 2021 via Nanoracks, part of Voyager’s exploration segment. Part of NASA’s Commercial Low Earth Orbit Development Program, this SAA sets the foundation to create Starlab, a continuously crewed, free-flying space station to serve NASA and a global customer base of space agencies and researchers. The program’s mission is to maintain continued human presence and American leadership in low-Earth orbit (LEO). Today’s announcement builds on an agreement made public in January 2023, where Voyager selected Airbus to provide technical design support and expertise for Starlab.

“With a track record of innovation and technological firsts, Airbus prides itself on partnering with companies that are looking to change history,” said Jean-Marc Nasr, Head of Space Systems at Airbus. “This transatlantic venture with footprints on both sides of the ocean aligns the interests of both ourselves and Voyager and our respective space agencies. This pioneers continued European and American leadership in space that takes humanity forward. Together our teams are focused on creating an unmatched space destination both technologically and as a business operation.”

In addition to the US entity, Starlab will have a European joint venture subsidiary to directly serve the European Space Agency (ESA) and its member state space agencies. This announcement follows a major design milestone in Starlab’s development, the Systems Requirements Review (SRR), which baselines the major space systems, technical readiness, and ability to meet NASA’s mission and safety requirements. The Starlab SRR, was completed in June 2023 in coordination with NASA’s Commercial LEO Development Program team.

“Today marks a major step forward for the future of commercial space destinations,” continues Kuta. “We are proud to have NASA’s trust to build the replacement for the ISS, a partnership that expands Starlab’s ecosystem to global space agencies, and a team that is mission driven and dedicated to reimagining the future.”

The implementation of the joint venture will be subject to applicable regulatory approvals.



It is Time to Rebuild Passenger Confidence in Checked Baggage

By Nicole Hogg

Recently, I was on a flight that was severely delayed with most passengers trying to bring their luggage into the cabin. There was simply no space on board. The flight ended up leaving more than an hour late. No doubt fears of their bags being misplaced or long delays waiting at the baggage carousel were weighing heavily on most passengers' minds. They no longer felt confident checking their baggage.

What are the numbers telling us?

Data from the latest SITA Baggage IT Insights report confirms a spike in baggage mishandling emerging from the pandemic. Over the past year, we've seen a swifter-than-expected recovery of passenger demand, particularly for international travel.

The latest data from IATA shows global traffic for April 2023 to have reached 90.5% of April 2019 levels, with traffic surges at holiday periods matching and even surpassing pre-pandemic levels. This has coincided with airlines, airports, and ground handlers still suffering staff and resource shortages, along with a lack of baggage experience and expertise in new staff. The 2023 Baggage IT Insights report shows the global rate of mishandled bags per thousand passengers jumped 74.7% from 2021 to 2022, reaching 7.6.

One of the biggest pain points contributing to this is transfers, where bags are connected from one flight to another. The proportion of mishandled bags delayed at transfer increased to 42%, owing to the resurgence of international and long-haul travel. The likelihood of mishandling a bag on

international routes is about eight times higher compared to domestic routes due to the challenges at transfer.

Rebuilding passenger confidence: digitalisation is the key

The industry recognizes that restoring passengers' confidence to check their baggage is a top priority. Digitalisation has proven a tried-and-true lever to achieve this while boosting operational efficiency and customer satisfaction. Wide implementation of technologies for the automated tracking and repatriation of baggage contributed to a 70% drop in the mishandling rate from 2007 to 2019.

Airlines and airports have already been investing in IT solutions that deliver greater automation and self-service to tackle the current challenges. According

to SITA's 2022 Air Transport IT Insights, by 2025, 84% of airlines plan to provide real-time baggage status information to their staff and 67% plan to offer this to passengers. In addition, touchless bag tagging options that rely on kiosks and passengers' mobile devices are a priority for 98% of airlines and 95% of airports.

We know that passengers embrace this too: SITA's 2022 Passenger IT Insights report found that greater technology adoption giving passengers more autonomy and control in baggage processes correlates with more positive emotions from passengers.

From 2016 to 2022, technology adoption at the bag collection stage rose from zero to 29% of passengers receiving mobile notifications for bag collection. In the same period, passengers reported a 9% increase in positive emotions at bag collection.

Identifying and addressing key pain points in the baggage journey

The post-pandemic recovery has thrown into stark relief the key challenges airports are facing along the baggage journey, and the major advantages of having greater visibility and digitalization

across the whole value chain.

At SITA, we continue to work directly with airlines and airports to help resolve key pain points in the journey through smart automation, tracking, and digital platforms, with the aim of restoring passengers' confidence to check in their bags.

For example, in partnership with Lufthansa, we have developed the WorldTracer Auto Reflight system in direct response to the high mishandling rates observed at transfer. This collaborative innovation uses digital automation to suggest suitable routing for rush bags and informs the baggage system of new bag routing using the original bag tag.

It proactively informs the passenger upon arrival of any delay, allowing them to save time by bypassing baggage collection and tracking their bag's new journey and delivery via mobile.

The results of the recent Proof of Concept suggest that we can automatically reflight as much as 70% of Lufthansa's mishandled bags at Munich Airport. With repatriation of mishandled bags costing an estimated

\$150 per bag, we estimate that automation of reflight operations could save the industry up to \$30 million per year.

Elsewhere we're working to provide end-to-end visibility of the whole baggage journey, eventually ensuring passengers can track their bags in the same way they would track the delivery of a parcel.

We have worked closely with our industry partners to develop solutions like SITA Bag Manager, which scans and evaluates every bag that is loaded onto a plane, a ULD, or a cart, and SITA Bag Journey, which transforms baggage processing information from each step of the journey into a chronological, user-friendly view of what has happened to the bag.

With smart technology like this on their side, airlines and airports are equipped to provide both staff and passengers a precise, real-time view of where bags are at each step of the journey, via mobile for maximum convenience, allowing them to breathe easy with their bags checked.

Nicole Hogg is the Director of Baggage at SITA.





From East Africa to West Africa: A Kenyan Girl in Cotonou

By Maureen Murimi

“**B**onjour Madame. Bienvenue à Cotonou. Qu’est ce qui vous amène?”

These are the first words that welcome me to Cotonou, Bénin, a small country located in the francophone part of West Africa.

“Je suis désolé. Je ne parle pas français,” I respond.

This is the only line I had memorized to get me out of conversations and hopefully get into one with a person who speaks English.

There is much to be said about packing up your life and moving to a strange land. You worry about the sounds and the smells, the people and their culture. You worry about what you will miss once you leave your hometown and fellow country people. There are so many things that run through your mind, but none of them prepared me

for Cotonou, the country’s economic capital.

I had read about the tropical city, the voodoo practices, the massive Islamic following and the huge Catholic faith presence. It is from the articles I consumed every day that I knew of the conservative people and the less than developed economy.

It is one thing to read about a country, but until you fully experience it, I am afraid you will have a skeleton image and understanding of a place. Eight months ago, the plane carrying my small family of three landed at the Douane Cotonou Cadjehoun Airport. The airport is tiny and time efficient. There is no hullabaloo. No shops or cafes or hotels within the airport. There is nothing except the unassuming act of passing through and minding your travel business.

One simply lands, goes through immigration, customs, the baggage collection area and then you are out into the unforgiving and harsh heat of West Africa. Mosquitoes in this part of the world are on steroids and they feast on you like they know you are new blood. They move faster than you can put your hands together in a deathly clap.

The vibrant sounds of the city are nothing compared to what we are used to in Nairobi. There is no Uber, Little cab or Bolt to ferry you from one place to another. Instead, you are presented with Kekenons or as we call them back home bodabodas. There is a national taxi service that is very expensive and inefficient time wise.

It is an interesting switch, coming from a place that is so vibrant with the use of technology to suddenly quitting cold turkey. Very few businesses have engaged the use of apps for services like



food delivery. As a matter of fact, there are only two businesses, I know, that accept payment via a bank card. Mobile money is slowly picking up. It is strange to look into your wallet and see actual bank notes.

When is the last time your wallet was full of money? For the most part, Kenyans have it easy. We pay for everything via Mobile money. Why have actual currency when everything operates on a digital platform? Every business; Banks, cabs, supermarkets, restaurants, Kenya Power, Kenya Water etcetera operate on mobile money. Now imagine moving to

a place where you have to forget all of that.

Imagine having to actually go to a shop physically or having to go pay your electricity or water bills physically. This is my reality in Cotonou, where there is almost a non-existent digital footprint where avenues for trade and services are concerned. Initially, it used to annoy me because of the inconvenience.

However, I realize now, that without leaving the house and interacting with people, I would not speak the amount of French I know now or interact with

the beautiful people of Cotonou. My neighbours say hello, they ask about my son and call me in case something goes wrong, I love the neighbourly camaraderie. There is a certain freedom in engaging with fellow humanity.

Away from the fast-paced Nairobi city, I find that I could get used to the village-like lifestyle where there are no airs, just people conversing. We all crave human contact and all we have to do sometimes, is look up from our mobile devices and experience life with the person standing next to us.

By Debbie Egwuogu

Jinja:

The Thrills of The Adventure Capital of East Africa

By Debbie Egwuogu

As soon as the official run of POATE 2023 was done, we were ready to explore Uganda and my destination of choice was the quaint town of Jinja: the adventure capital of East Africa.

A Few Things About Jinja

Jinja is a town in southern Uganda, on the shore of Lake Victoria. It is situated along the northern shores of Lake Victoria, where the Victoria Nile flows out of the lake and starts its journey towards becoming the White Nile. Jinja has a rich history that dates back centuries. The area around Jinja was originally inhabited by the indigenous Basoga people, who relied on fishing and agriculture for their livelihoods. In the 19th century, Jinja became an important trading centre due to its strategic location along the Nile River. Arab and Swahili traders established settlements in the area, taking advantage of the river's navigability to transport goods. In 1862, the British explorer John Hanning Speke arrived in Jinja and became the first European who saw the source of the Nile River. His discovery brought attention and interest to the area, eventually leading to the establishment of the town of Jinja.

During the colonial era, Jinja became a significant administrative and commercial centre. The construction of the Uganda Railway, which connected Jinja to the main port of Mombasa in

Kenya, further boosted the town's importance as a transportation hub.

When you drive through the streets of Jinja, you will also find a major Indian influence in the way especially in the culinary offerings. The Indian influence in Jinja can be traced back to the colonial era when Indian labourers were brought to Uganda by the British to work on various projects, including the construction of the Uganda Railway. Many of these workers settled in Jinja and played a significant role in the town's development.

The Indian community in Jinja established businesses such as shops, restaurants, and trading companies, which contributed to the town's economy. They also introduced new crops, such as cotton and sugarcane, and played a crucial role in the development of the local sugar industry. Overall, the Indian influence in Jinja is evident in various aspects of the town's culture, economy, and infrastructure. The Indian community has made significant contributions to Jinja's growth and continues to be an integral part of the town's identity.

What To Do in Jinja

Jinja has been crowned the "adventure capital of East Africa" due to its abundance of outdoor activities and tourist attractions.

White-Water Rafting

One of the main highlights is the Bujagali Falls, a series of rapids and waterfalls on the Nile River, which provide opportunities for white-water rafting.

White water rafting is a thrilling and popular adventure activity, particularly in the town of Jinja, offering a unique and exciting experience for adrenaline junkies. Bujagali Falls has varying classes of rapids, ranging from milder ones suitable for beginners to intense and challenging ones for more experienced rafters.

Rafting trips usually start with a safety briefing and instruction on paddling techniques. Participants are then provided with safety gear, including helmets and life jackets, before getting into the raft. Knowledgeable and experienced guides accompany the rafts to ensure everyone's safety and provide instructions throughout the journey. While in your White-water rafting, you're surrounded by stunning natural scenery and the opportunity to see wildlife such as monitor lizards, monkeys, and a variety of bird species along the riverbanks. The rapids provide an exhilarating ride, with waves, drops, and swirling water adding to the excitement.

Bungee Jumping

Another bucket-list activity of note you can enjoy in Jinja is Bungee jumping. Bungee jumping in Jinja offers a unique opportunity to experience the thrill of

free-falling while enjoying the breathtaking views of the Nile River and the surrounding natural landscape. It is a popular adventure activity for thrill-seekers. The main bungee jumping spot in Jinja is operated at the Nile River, near Bujagali Falls. This location provides a stunning backdrop for the jump, with the Nile River flowing below and surrounded by beautiful natural scenery.

When bungee jumping in Jinja, participants are securely strapped into a harness and attached to a bungee cord. They then take the leap off a high platform, plunging towards the rushing waters of the Nile River. The bungee cord stretches and recoils, creating an exciting and adrenaline-pumping experience.

There are also options for tandem jumps, where two people can jump together, or even night jumps for those looking for an extra thrill. The experienced staff ensures safety and provides all necessary equipment, including harnesses and helmets.

There's yet another activity in Jinja that gets you giddy once you step on it and it is QUAD BIKING. I absolutely love Quad biking but the experience I had in Jinja tops all my Quad biking experiences.

Quad biking in Jinja, Uganda is another popular adventure activity for those seeking a thrilling experience. Jinja is known for its diverse landscapes, which make it the perfect location for quad biking adventures.

Quad biking involves riding a four-wheeled all-terrain vehicle (ATV) through various terrains such as dirt trails, forests, and even water crossings. It allows participants to explore the stunning scenery and natural beauty of Jinja while enjoying an adrenaline-pumping ride.

During the quad biking excursion, participants can navigate through muddy tracks, race along open countryside, and even ride along the shores of the Nile River. The tours usually take you through a variety of terrains, allowing you to test your skills and enjoy the thrill of off-roading.

Like any adventure activity, it's important to follow all safety

instructions provided by the operators and wear all appropriate protective gear, including helmets and safety goggles provided by the operators. Additionally, participants should have a basic level of physical fitness and be prepared for a physically demanding ride.

The final bucket list activity I experienced in Jinja is ZIPLINING. This is almost like Bungee Jumping, but not as daunting.

Ziplining in Jinja is another popular adventure activity that offers breathtaking views and an adrenaline rush. It involves sliding along a steel cable suspended between several points high above the ground. Participants are securely fastened to the cable and can soar through the air, taking in the panoramic views. Before starting the ziplining adventure, participants are given a safety briefing and demonstration on how to properly use the equipment.

During the ziplining excursion, participants can enjoy the rush of flying through the air and taking in the breathtaking scenery. Some ziplining tours in Jinja even offer options to soar over the Nile River or above dense forests, adding to the excitement and adventure.

Ziplining in Jinja is suitable for individuals of various fitness levels, as long as they meet the weight and age requirements. It is a popular activity for thrill-seekers, nature enthusiasts, and anyone looking to experience a unique adventure in a beautiful setting.

As with any adventure activity, it is important to follow all safety instructions provided by the operators and wear appropriate protective gear provided by the instructors. Ziplining can be physically demanding, so participants should be prepared for some physical exertion.

Ziplining in Jinja, offers a thrilling and unforgettable experience, for me, it is an activity I want to do again and again, there is the lightness you feel after being up above the trees for an hour. For me, Jinja was a dream come through because of the activities it made me experience. The highpoint of my adventures was definitely my time on the Nile; white-water rafting, cruising and swimming in the river. Then the rain came, drenched us and then the sun came and dried us up. It is was both an exhilarating and calming experience, never to be forgotten. Thank you Uganda for an amazing experience. I shall be back.



Isaac Balami

Where there's a will, there's a way. Perhaps, you've heard this expression so many times that it has become a cliché. But no expression captures the story of Engineer Isaac Balami better. Born in Borno State Nigeria, Isaac Balami is the Founder and CEO of 7Star Global Hangar Limited which has taken the Nigerian aviation industry by storm. An Aircraft Engineer and former National President of the National Association of Aircraft Pilots and Engineers (NAAPE) in Nigeria, Isaac is not your typical Nigerian youth. Against a poor background and other odds, he has carved a niche for himself in the aviation space. But beyond aviation, Isaac Balami is a philanthropist and a progenitor of nation building ideas. In this exclusive interview with Aviators Africa's editor crew, he spoke on growing up, aviation feats, humanitarian gestures, and political ambitions.



By Chidozie Uzozie





AA: Tell us about yourself. Who is Isaac Balami?

IB: My name is Isaac Balami. I am from the southern part of Borno State in Nigeria. My parents are both alive. And we're 7 in number: 6 boys and 1 girl who passed on last year. I'm into aviation, human capital development, and the academia. I am also an entrepreneur.

AA: Tell us about your childhood and growing up.

IB: I will say that I was privileged to come from a very humble background. I say I am privileged because there are a lot of things that God has allowed me to go through in life that somebody who is born with a silver spoon, or somebody who is from a rich home might not have had the privilege to go through. My parents did their best to give me all I needed in life. However, I discovered myself as a young person early in life - at the age of 11.

Because of too many responsibilities at home and financial constraints, my parents wanted me to go to a particular school, which I did not like. So, I had to work at the age of 11 for 9 months at the Maiduguri timber shade market in Borno State. I worked from Monday to Saturday and I was able to save about N1,200 which was a lot of money at that time. With the money I had saved, I went to my parents and they were able to support me with what they had. And that was how I was able to go to the school of my choice.

During the holidays, all through my secondary school years, instead of going home to play football and enjoy myself, I went to the bush to farm. We call it Numan Kudi or Barima. We spent between 4 and 6 weeks in the bush in those days, farming on up to 10 hectares of land, which could be of maize, sesame seed, groundnuts etc. We used to go to the farm settlements with drums of water and bags of garri. We drank the garri with kulikuli because sugar was a luxury and we couldn't afford it.

Growing up was hard and quite exciting, but I never complained. My father used

to tell me that hard work doesn't kill anyone, and that helped to build me and make me who I am today. At some point, while growing up, I was also privileged to be a bus conductor and a manual soakaway evacuator. I also hawked on the streets.

But honestly, for me, those things are the things that actually excite me now. Today, when I look back at where I came from, and where God has taken me to you, I find reasons to always give back and help other people.

AA: Your story is very interesting and inspiring. Do you think that those days of humble beginning prepared you for today's challenges?

IB: I'm happy about my upbringing because of what it has done to me, it only made me a stronger person. Today, I can afford to sleep anywhere, fly first class or business class or even on a private jet. But the growing up process has also helped me today to help others. For example, when I meet the elite people that are depressed or frustrated by life, and I share my story with them, it actually gives them hope. I faced a lot of challenges in my life. And sometimes, it was my past experiences that helped me and my team to surmount and overcome some of those challenges. If I did not have the privilege to grow up in such a manner, I would not have had such life-saving experiences. So basically, I don't see my past as a challenge. I see it as a privilege. I see it as what has shaped me today to be a better person. I am not somebody who is entitled.

While growing up, I was passionate and focused, but not many people, including my teachers and instructors, thought I would become somebody in life. Even my classmates and peers didn't think my future was bright. But today, my story is different. So, apart from hard work, I would say that God's grace found me.

AA: You are an Aircraft Engineer and former National President of the National Association of Aircraft Pilots and Engineers (NAAPE) in Nigeria. At what age did you catch the aviation bug?

IB: I caught the aviation bug as an adult, I was in my early 20s. I think it was just a divine intervention. I have always been an activist and a comrade, even in Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) Zaria from where I was expelled because I was fighting for students' right as one of the Student Union Government's leaders. ABU Zaria is just next to the Nigerian College of Aviation Technology (NCAT), Zaria. So, when I was asked to leave ABU, I made up my mind and told myself that I probably didn't even belong to ABU Zaria. I went to the Nigerian College of Aviation Technology and met friends who helped me with some contacts and one Engineer Lily Tachio, who helped and stood by me as a guarantor and I was given admission.

AA: Considering your poor financial background, how were you able to pay your tuition fees at NCAT?

IB: Actually, I couldn't pay my tuition fees as they were very high and I was the only self-sponsored student at NCAT. One day, I went to the school management, and thanks to people like Dr Kole and Dr Odutola who was the Rector then. And with the then Registrar, they gave me an opportunity to work, school, and pay. So I went back to ABU Zaria again, this time to look for work opportunities. After some consultation, I was given a space where I was doing suya grills. It was called McDoda.

So, every morning by 6am, I was out of my room, and by 7:30 am I was done with breakfast and proceeded to the classroom for lectures. We had lectures from 8am to 4pm every day, from Monday to Friday for about 4 years. After lectures, I would climb my bike with my aviation uniform and drive straight to PZ where I bought about 40 kilos of beef. I would then go to a Lebanese woman who was making the bread for me. I usually took about 50-100 pieces, depending on demand. I would then go straight to ABU Zaria to prepare it, and by 7pm, McDoda was ready.



Surprisingly, I was making over N300,000 every month after paying my staff. That money was enough to keep me at school. It was tough sometimes until Aero Contractors and Canadian Helicopter Company came to my rescue in my third year. And that was how the whole story changed.

AA: You are the Founder/CEO of 7Star Global Hangar. What inspired you to establish the company?

IB: For me, going into Maintenance Repair and Overhaul (MRO) and airline business became a doctrine of necessity. I was the National President for Aircraft Pilots and Engineers in Nigeria for 8 years. In those 8 years, I had the privilege of working with 6 Aviation Ministers and Permanent Secretaries. At some point, I even had the privilege of recommending, to a sitting President, who should be given what appointment. I was recognised by the government and I worked closely with them.

As somebody who represented Aircraft Engineers and Pilots across the entire

country for 8 years, I would always go to the airline owners and CEOs to share my passion, my vision, and my ideas for the industry. Some of them listened to me, and some of them never took me seriously. There was a time me and my friend, Engineer Rowland, who was my Vice President then and now our MD here at 7Star Global Hangar, were going round to advise the owners of airlines in Nigeria. And they said to us: “If you guys are this smart, why don't you go and start your own airline.”? By the time the third person said the same thing to us, we took it as a challenge.

When I left Aero Contractors, I don't think I had more than 2,000 US dollars. And dollar was 100 and something at that time. But we just had to start. For 3 years, I got a team of experts, including Engineer Nock, and Engineer Azeez. I got people that had worked with airlines as Directors of Flight Operations, Directors of Maintenance, and as Managing Directors. I got the best team because I was the President of National Association of Aircraft Pilots and Engineers in Nigeria. I knew them.

Of course, we couldn't even afford to pay rent for an office space at the airport, not to talk of owning a hangar, but the vision was there. For 3 years, I carried all sorts of aircraft manuals in the boot of one of my cars. Each time I opened the boot to drop or pick something, I was reminded of my vision. And gradually, we got an office space and a hangar. Now, we have a second hangar and the third hangar is coming onboard. The expansion has been quite impressive.

AA: What inspired you to choose the name '7Star'?

IB: I was in Dubai some years ago, and I saw the amazing architecture and the design around the Burj Arab which is the only seven-star hotel in the world. I looked at the security features and other aspects of the building and I felt we could actually establish a seven-star global hanger and even a seven-star global airline. So, the name '7Star' was actually inspired by the engineering ingenuity and the global appeal of the

Burj Arab. '7Star' was also inspired by '7' which stands for perfection in Christianity.

AA: What new or different did 7Star Global Hangar bring to the table?

IB: The idea behind 7Star Global Hangar is to ensure aircraft serviceability across the entire Africa. In 2012, there were a lot of plane crashes which raised concerns. As we were taught in aviation school, there's no parking space in the air. So, in establishing 7Star Global Hangar, we set out to bring 7-star procedures to maintenance and 7-star procedures to operations. Our target is to achieve zero incident and zero accident.

I had the privilege to meet people from Singapore Airlines, which is a very safe airline globally, and also one of the world's most profitable airlines. I also had the privilege to meet with one or two persons from Qantas in Australia, which was then rated as the world's

safest airline. And I found out what they do that made them to be safe. And that's what gave birth to 7Star Global Hangar.

AA: 7Star Global Hangar is the first privately-owned MRO facility licensed by the Nigeria Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA). What has the experience been for you? At what point did you earn the respect and trust of your clients?

IB: Before you earn the respect of clients, you have to earn the respect of the regulatory authority which is the Nigeria Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA). It was a tough one, because we were just young boys and girls coming to apply for the biggest aircraft maintenance, repair and overhaul capabilities. NCAA did their own research and found out there was no billionaire behind us. In other words, there was no Godfather, of course, except God the Father. No bank was behind us and there was no bank loan, but our vision was very clear, and we

kept faith and remained focused on the goal.

Over time, NCAA came to the realisation that we were actually serious. We had to fight most times, sometimes we had to dialogue, and sometimes we had to beg, but we went through all the certification processes. After we got the licence, there were trust issues on the part of the airline operators who were, at the time, taking their aircraft overseas for maintenance, repair, and overhaul. So, we called them in for audits. And when they came in, they were surprised, because we had invested millions of dollars in equipment. By that time, we already had over 60 Aircraft Engineers that were trained both locally and internationally, including myself.

Normally, there are about four major variables you need to put in place to be trusted by anybody in the world. You need the vision and a clear direction, but you also need the facility. You need the equipment, you need the personnel and,



AVIO COVER

you need the certification by the authorities. We were able to get all that. One audit that shocked me (in a good way) was when the Presidential aircraft fleet came to audit us to see what we had, and they were very impressed. And that was a motivating factor for us and actually boosted our morale and encouraged us. As at today, we've done maintenance for the Presidential fleet, we have done maintenance for airlines, and private jet owners as well as VIPs. We currently have 3 aircraft on jack and the 4th one is going to be on jack by this weekend. So, we are quite busy and it's quite encouraging.

AA Star Global Hangar was granted operating licence by the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA) in 2021. And just 2 years after, you've become so popular. What's your driving force?

IB: If you can solve a problem, and meet demands, people will definitely come to you. 7Star has never done any adverts and we're even planning to see how we can meet demands. We have

done so well for ourselves and for our clients, giving them better services than they would get even overseas.

Before 2021, I was the President for Aircraft Pilots and Engineers for 8 years. I've been involved in a lot of talks, workshops, I'm also former President of the AREWA Consultative Forum Youth Congress. I was also the National Spokesperson for the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria. I also run one of the biggest NGOs in Nigeria which is the Nigerian Rebirth Foundation. I am also the Founder of the Isaac Balami Foundation which is impacting on over 500 children as of today. So, before 2021, I was already very popular. These are some of the things that have given us mileage in terms of popularity. I don't like going to the media every now and then, except when necessary. Our work speaks for us.

AA: With the harsh operating environment in Nigeria, how has 7Star Global Hangar managed to operate profitably? Are you thriving or barely surviving?

IB: Well, I won't say that we are barely surviving, since we have been able to pay our staff salaries and our rent, but it can get better. The economy is down. There are airlines that have aircraft we should fix, but they can't pay. The issue of forex and the economic meltdown have increased the overhead costs for the airlines and it is affecting everything. We just hope that the country's leadership will look inward and see how we can encourage more people to create jobs, because right now the airlines are actually struggling.

AA: What major challenges do you encounter as an MRO facility operating in Nigeria and Africa?

IB: The major ones are having access to forex to stock aircraft parts, and having access to the banking sector. The Nigerian banking sector doesn't believe in startups. As a startup, we have to grow organically, they will not look at you and give you \$1 million or \$2 million just because they like your face or because it's a great vision. They want



you to bring collateral which most young people don't have. In terms of having access to collateral, it's not easy for any startup. The issue of taxes is also a major challenge. You're just starting, and by the time you put out a signboard out there, the government agencies are all over you, and it's so frustrating. They don't come to you with the aim of supporting you to grow to that point where you can pay more tax. They just come to you to rip you off, and they are so corrupt. But we believe that things will change someday. And for us, we just want to do things right.

AA: In 2022, 7Star Global Hangar broke record by successfully performing a C-Check on an MD-83 aircraft. What can you attribute this to?

IB: For me, I think it's just sheer hard work and dedication from my team. There were fears that we couldn't do it and that we needed to bring the white people to help us do the job. But it was something we could do very well as most of our Engineers trained overseas and even finished with distinctions. The 'local' Nigerian employees were able to look inwards and self-motivated themselves. We didn't just do that maintenance, we did it on time. Normally, if Dana Air takes that aircraft overseas, it will be grounded there for months, sometimes up to a year. But within a month we were done with the check, and Dana Air was quite happy and we were also happy. As at today, we've done the second one and the third one, and we'll do the fourth one by this weekend. Dana Air is quite happy and excited, and we're also happy. I dedicate the success of the checks to my team because they work day and night and they put in their best.

AA: In terms of capacity building, how important is local content to you? What's the ratio of expatriates to local staff at 7Star Global Hangar?

IB: With all sense of responsibility, aviation is a global business. Most of my colleagues and classmates are now working in Canada, US, UK and Middle East. In aviation, the issue of expatriates

“... And they said to us: “If you guys are this smart, why don't you go and start your own airline.”? By the time the third person said the same thing to us, we took it as a challenge.”

doesn't really count. It's all about safety. However, I will tell you that the ratio of expatriates to locals at 7Star is about 5% to 95%. When I finished my training in the US, I could have stayed back to work there, but I decided to come back to set up 7Star Global Hangar because I believed in Nigeria. And I can assure you that our training arm of the business will continue to train people. We are not just doing aircraft maintenance, there is no training facility across the entire Africa that has trained the number of Engineers that we have trained in the last two years. Over 1,000 Aircraft Maintenance Engineers have been trained on Boeing, Embraer, Airbus and other aircraft types by our sister company called Leadstream Aviation Training here in Lagos Airport, and we are proud that we are giving back. We might not be out there making noise about it. But we are proud that across the entire Africa, what Leadstream has done in Nigeria, no training hanger or institution has done that in the entire Africa. So, this is actually our own way of giving back.

AA: What range of services do you provide at 7Star Global Hangar?

IB: We have the biggest operational capability Op Specs. And we have capability for the Boeing, the MD 83, Bell, Sikorsky Helicopters, Augusta Helicopters, Learjet, Bombardier Challenger 604/605, Airbus Helicopter and so on and so forth.

AA: Are you saying that 7Star Global Hangar is a one-stop MRO facility?

IB: Yes, it is. Today, we cover 80 to 90% of the aircraft Nigerian airlines operate.

AA: In terms of capability, 7star Global Hangar is now the biggest independent MRO facility in sub-Saharan Africa. How did you achieve this feat in such a short time?

IB: It hasn't been easy. At the initial stage, we struggled with the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA). But the rule is that if you want to do a certain level of maintenance, you need to have a certain level of equipment, personnel, facility, and tooling. If you prove that you have the necessary requirements, they have no reason to deny you the licence. Actually, the NCAA has evolved overtime. The NCAA of those days was a bit archaic in their thinking and rigid. They didn't want growth because the old people that ran the NCAA felt that if maintenance was done overseas, they had the opportunity to travel to the facilities overseas to inspect the maintenance. That way, they made more money in terms of estacode. But at some point, they came to the realisation that the country had to grow. With the huge capital flight and the current forex challenges, the airlines can't even access the dollar, and going overseas to do maintenance is no longer sustainable. But today, we are enjoying the full support of the NCAA.

AA: Aviation is a dollar-billed industry. And the weakness of Naira against the dollar is a major challenge. How has 7star Global Hangar helped Nigerian and West African airlines to reduce capital flight in aircraft maintenance?

IB: For the local airlines, we require that a minimum of 70% of the payment should be made before we start the job. Sometimes, we go below that. And sometimes, the airlines ask to pay us in naira and we agree on a rate that is a win-win for both parties, whether you call it official or black market. Sometimes, airlines come to us and say



they can't pay us 50 million naira to take their aircraft, but they can pay us 5 million naira every day as they fly. And we accept and it's a win-win for everyone. What is more important is that the airlines are surviving and they can raise enough money to come back tomorrow for the next check. At 7Star Global Hangar, we are reasonable and very considerate.

AA: There are several other MRO facilities across Africa, and even in Nigeria. Why should clients choose 7Star Global Hangar?

IB: The reason why most airlines that have come to 7Star stick with us is, we are so efficient in what we do. We know that if you operate a Boeing 737, for example, for everyday you don't fly the aircraft, you're losing about \$100,000. And your maintenance at the end of the year is a function of the number of cycles or hours of flight, or calendar. So, whether you're flying the aircraft or not, you must do certain number of

“ At 7Star, we have found a way to ensure efficiency and speed. If you're taking your aircraft to America or Europe, and it's going to spend 3 months there, 7Star will do it in half of the time because we will come to work on Saturdays. Our staff are so hardworking and the level of productivity at 7Star is quite high. ”

maintenance on the engines, the landing gear, and the airframe every year or every 18 months. If you look at those costs, whether you're flying or not, your Pilots are there, your Engineers are there, you're paying rent, you're paying taxes, you're paying all your support staff, you're paying the spare part vendors. At 7Star, we have found a way to ensure efficiency and speed. If you're taking your aircraft to America or Europe, and it's going to spend 3 months there, 7Star will do it in half of the time because we will come to work on Saturdays. Our staff are so hardworking and the level of productivity at 7Star is quite high. Our staff don't have the civil service mentality. Sometimes, they even work on weekends and public holidays just to make sure that our clients maintain excellent schedule reliability. And that is the main reason why the airlines always come back to us.

AA: Do you think Africa has enough MRO facilities?

IB: Africa does not have enough MRO facilities. In fact, if we tripple what 7Star Global Hangar has today, and put it together with what Aero Contractors has, we will still not be able to meet up 50% of the industry demand. That is true. The demand is huge. As I speak to you, Air Peace alone has about 6 aircraft waiting for maintenance. But we need to finish one before pushing in another one. So, Africa needs more MRO facilities and we need more investors to come into this sector. There's enough space for everybody. And of course, 7Star is also trying to expand.

AA: 7Star Global Hangar has huge potentials. What's your future projection? Where do you see 7Star in the next 5-10 years?

IB: In the next 5 to 10 years, we are going to be not just in the Nigerian Stock Exchange, but also in the UK and the US. In the next 5 to 10 years, we will have grown so big that we should be carrying out minimum aircraft assembly for certain kinds of aircraft. We don't intend to remain at this level forever. We believe that Africa has grown, we believe that we can't just be a dumping ground for the whole world. We must get to a point where we can design, build, and also sell to the world. And today we've already put the team together. And we have a couple of designs, depending the kind of leadership Nigeria has in the next couple of years. A lot is actually in the pipeline for the 7Star Group.

AA: Are there plans to expand outside Lagos and Nigeria?

IB: Yes, we have already expanded outside Lagos. And we have invitation from 3 African countries. But we don't want to be overzealous and greedy. We also need to consolidate at home first and take care of the local market before we can go outside. But in the next 24 months, we should be out there in other countries. But for now, we just want to expand within Nigeria first of all, before we can go to other African countries.

AA: What is your general impression about the Nigerian Aviation Industry?

IB: My impression about the aviation industry in Nigeria is good, in terms of safety. For me, it is safety first no matter what happens. The NCAA that we have today is different from what we used to have in the past. I can categorically tell you that, except for human factor or unavoidable errors, we're doing very well. So far, so good. However, there's room for growth, we can do better, but we're not doing badly in terms of safety. I just hope that the government in charge of this country will make sure that they prioritise employment in the civil aviation and staff welfare. In the Nigeria aviation industry, private organisations employ personnel from the civil aviation and pay them better. Today, people are leaving the NCAA to come and work in the private sector. It shouldn't be so. Aviation is key to the growth of this country. However, I don't think that the government has paid enough attention to and prioritised the welfare of personnel in the Civil Aviation Authority to attract the best brains from overseas and from within. The welfare of government workers at the NCAA is extremely poor. My desire and my only concern is for the government to look into it immediately.

AA: Recently, 7Star Global Airlines received its AOC to commence flight operations. Tell us about it.

IB: Yes, we intend to go into airline operations. We have our AOC on the Augusta 139 Helicopter. We have our partners from Belgium, and they are based in Belgium, UK, and two other continents, and they're doing very well. They are known as NHV and they put in tickets in oil and gas and rescue operations. Working with them as our technical partners, 7Star Global Airlines hopes to offer premium services to the oil and gas sector, VIP movements, and also private jet operations. We just got the AOC this year, and we're not doing badly. We even have some jobs now outside Nigeria. One of our aircraft is currently outside Nigeria to commence operations.

AA: Is it going to be a scheduled or charter airline?

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For 3 years, I carried all sorts of aircraft manuals in the boot of one of my cars. Each time I opened the boot to drop or pick something, I was reminded of my vision. And gradually, we got an office space and a hangar.
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IB: For now, it will be a chatter airline. Whether we'll go into schedule operations in the future is a function of what the board wants.

AA: In the aviation industry, capacity building is one of the major challenges across the world. And according to OEMs, there will be skill gap in the next 10 to 20 years. Tell us how 7Star Global Hangar plans to tackle capacity building for the next generation of aviators in Nigeria and Africa?

IB: In aviation, capacity building is very important. I can remember, Aero Contractors spent almost \$100,000 for a program I did in the US for just two months. That was capacity building. The only way we can bridge the skill gap in the aviation industry is to look into capacity building, and to venture into the academia. This is not to let the cat out of the bag, but I might as well say it here since it's going to be out in the next couple of days anyways. We are set to roll out the Isaac Balami University of Aeronautics and Leadership (IBUA) in the next couple of weeks or months. We are only waiting for the Nigerian University Commission (NUC) to officially announce it before we start marketing. We've already met the requirements to some reasonable degree, including having 30 air-conditioned

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classrooms. In terms of capacity building, I have passion for aviation, and nation building and that is why the university will focus on aeronautics and leadership. We are bringing something that you can't get anywhere else in the world to the Isaac Balami University of Aeronautics and Leadership. In IBUA, we are hoping that what took me about 15 to 18 years to get will be achieved by our students in just a maximum of 5 years.

In IBUA, students will graduate with a degree in Aerospace Engineering and finish with an NCAA licence and a European licence, which we are already doing in our facility here in Lagos. You just plug in and write the exams from the University here in Lagos. Then you also finish with 1,000 hours of practical hands-on on a live aircraft. Practicality is key. So, every weekend, we fly around the country, you sit down and you touch the aircraft, you work with Aircraft Engineers. At the end of your 5-year program, you are also graduating with a type course from an aircraft manufacturer recognised by Europe and the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority. I tell you this with all sense of humility, you can't get this anywhere in the world, not from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, and not from Cranfield University.

AA: At the moment, general aviation is lacking in Nigeria. And that means that newly qualified pilots don't have

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So, in establishing 7Star Global Hangar, we set out to bring 7-star procedures to maintenance and 7-star procedures to operations. Our target is to achieve zero incident and zero accident.

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ways of building hours, making it difficult for them to get a job. Do you have any plans to boost general aviation in Nigeria?

IB: It is unfortunate that Nigeria, the giant of Africa and the biggest economy in Africa, is not living up to expectations when it comes to aviation development. Elsewhere, people can belong to a flying club and build hours there. Flying is a hobby, it's something people should love to do. And I wonder why Nigeria doesn't have such foundation. But part of our plan at 7Star is also to build general aviation. Today, you see a pilot with commercial licence, multi engine rating, instrument, and even ATPPL going to work in Europe or America, and they say sorry, you don't have the required hours. Pilots graduate with about 200 flight hours, but the airlines want them to have 500 flight hours before they can be employed. We're working on a program that will allow low-hour pilots to build their hours. At 7Star Global Hangar, we have already allocated a space for the general aviation lounge. So, we are not just complaining. We are doing something about it.

AA: Let's go back to your Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program. How does 7Star Global Hangar give back to the community?

IB: Growing up as a young boy, I used to stand by the roadside with my digger and hoe on my shoulder, praying to be hired by either construction workers or farmers who wanted labourers. Sometimes, we stood by the roadside for the whole day and even a week without being hired by anyone. For me, that meant no job and no food. Now, I can relate when I see people on the street begging, trying to make ends meet by doing some menial jobs.

When I was in the aviation college, at the end of my 3rd year, going into the 4th year where I will be wrapping up my studies, I went into a covenant with God. At the NCAA then, the pass mark was quite high and I needed to focus on my studies. So, I said to God, if you can help me get a scholarship, so that I can stop doing business and focus on my

studies and graduate, as soon as I'm back from Canada or the US with my type course, I'll give half of my income to the less privileged.

For 18 years now, we have taken care of less privileged people, including over 500 children for whom we provide free shelters today. They have free schools where they attend, from primary one to six, and we pay the teachers every month. I've even gone beyond giving half of my income to giving as much as 90% because 10% is enough for me and my family. Basically, what I do is focus on these children across the country, and we're expanding now. It is my belief that by the time we open up to stakeholders, they will buy into it. And I hope that companies and individuals will key into the vision so we can achieve more. I am proud of myself and my team. And I believe we can do better with support from the public.

AA: You have been a progenitor of nation building ideas, including the Isaac Balami Foundation. What led to the forming of the Nigerian Rebirth Foundation?

IB: The Nigerian Rebirth Foundation was created out of sheer passion and love for Nigeria and mankind. When I was schooling in the US, doing my type course in Wichita Kansas, I saw how Africans, not just Nigerians, were being rated and perceived. So I told myself that when I get the opportunity, I will start an NGO that will rebrand the entire country. I got all the push from the past administration under President Muhammadu Buhari and his wife. In fact, his wife is still officially our grand patroness.

We launched the vision with 66 Ambassadors from across the globe, 18 Governors' wives, serving Ministers, and past Governors in attendance. People came together because the vision for the rebirth of a new Nigeria was to see how we could instil a new DNA in our children. By DNA, I mean new desires, needs and aspirations.

At the launch, about 500 children were honoured as Nigerian Rebirth

“When I finished my training in the US, I could have stayed back to work there, but I decided to come back to set up 7Star Global Hangar because I believed in Nigeria. And I can assure you that our training arm of the business will continue to train people.”

Ambassadors. The idea was to raise about 1 million children between the ages of 3 and 15. We had a 20-year plan to, in 20 years' time, raise 1 million Nigerians that will think differently and become better ambassadors of this country. But unfortunately, the past administration lost interest in such a beautiful vision. Even though the wife of the President was meant to be the grand patroness, we never got any support, and everything just went solo. But the vision is still on. We believe that someday there will be a government that will work with us, not because of our tribe, our religion, our class, or whether our parents are former Ministers or Governors, but because it is a good idea for the country. And I believe that someday we'll get there. And that is why we're pushing forward.

AA: You made allusion to having a covenant with God. And you literally took some of your staff from the streets. Today, some of them are Aircraft Technicians and Aircraft Engineers. Do you see them as the next Isaac Balami?

IB: I always tell people, not just my own children, but also the ones I have adopted and my staff, that it is limiting to say you want to be like Isaac Balami.



If I have my way today to recreate another Balami, I will do something better. I struggled to go to both primary and secondary schools. I had a bleak future while growing up. I had to write WAEC and NECO about 3 times to pass. I feel people can do better than me, because today, we are in a global world where everything is at your fingertips. With Google and ChatGPT now, you can run the whole world. So, I don't just want them to be like me, I want them to be better than me. And that is my prayers for them.

AA: You are a philanthropist and the founder of the Isaac Balami Foundation. You have hundreds of kids, orphans, and widows under your care. What plans do you have for the kids?

IB: If with my family and a few friends we could empower over 500 children in the last couple of years, it means we can achieve much more if we have support from more people.

The Bible says one can chase a thousand and two can chase 10,000. So, I think I'm going to be opening up for the first time and I've realised that the vision is good. We're doing so well. We feed those kids and there are air conditioners where they live and also in their classrooms. We even employ graduates and qualified people to teach them. Their care givers and the nurses are also qualified professionals. And we are registered by law. We started as far back 18 years ago, but we registered officially in 2012. Today, we have a licence to run the shelter and the orphanage. So, we are legal. And we need help now.

My team and I have given our all to support these children. So, you can trust us with your N10,000, N20,000, N100,000 or more on a monthly basis. But it's not all about money. You can support us in kind, for instance, with books or with paying the teachers every month. You can also support us by providing medical support on a monthly basis. You can also support us by becoming a music instructor, Maths teacher, or English teacher; there are so many ways you can support us. But be

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Focus on building yourself and your skills. And the moment you can solve problems, you're adding value to the system and to yourself, and things will fall in place for you.
 ”

rest assured that we will account for every money given to us.

AA: You are a prominent Nigerian youth, and a whole lot of people are looking up to you. Do you have any words of encouragement or advice for the typical African youth out there.

IB: My advice to Nigerian youths or any youth across the world is don't go for the money. I see a lot of young people, fresh graduates, who want to drive expensive cars and live at the heart of town. I don't think it's the best way to go. Focus on building yourself and your skills. And the moment you can solve problems, you're adding value to the system and to yourself, and things will fall in place for you. There was a time I worked for an organisation for a year and I wasn't even on salary, but I was willing to work and learn. Today, I own my own airline, aircraft maintenance hangar, and a university which is starting very soon, all purely due to sheer hard work and teamwork. So basically, my advice to young people out there, is to have ambition and be realistic. They should be humble and create more time to learn, learn and learn. And the moment you can solve problems, and you're adding value, the whole world will embrace you.

AA: During the recent electioneering campaigns, you were appointed the Deputy National Campaign Manager

of the Obi-Datti Presidential Campaign. Should we be expecting more political appointments for you in the future?

IB: I have always been an activist. When I was in primary 5, I was assistant head boy, in primary 6, I was head boy. In secondary school, I was head boy and in FCS, I was the President. In my church, I was the music Director and one-time Bible study secretary. When an opportunity came from the Obi-Datti Presidential Campaign Council to nominate somebody from the middle belt, the middle belt leadership nominated me and I saw it as a privilege because I have so much passion for this country. A lot of people were not happy with me because I left my business and took some money out of it to focus on the campaign. But I'm proud of what I did.

I didn't leave APC because they didn't deliver on all their promises to me or my people. I left APC because I felt there was a higher calling. And I didn't think that APC or PDP would make me the third in command in a whole campaign structure of such magnitude. It was a privilege to be the youngest person on the leadership of the Obi-Datti Campaign Council. And it was a privilege to travel to about 28 states to participate in and manage a campaign of such magnitude. I'm happy and proud that in 6 months, we could pull such crowds and made the kind of impact that Nigeria and Africa had never witnessed before.

AA: In the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, there were 3 major presidential candidates with different ideologies. But you moved from APC, the ruling party to LP, a party that was relatively unknown back then. Why did you make that move? And what endeared Mr Peter Obi to you?

IB: I made that move because I wanted a new Nigeria. I wanted a change. Today if you ask people in APC, they will tell you that APC has made a lot of mistakes that have put us in this mess we are in today.



PHOTO SPEAKS: 7STAR GLOBAL HANGAR





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Dr. Nneka EBRU OKPE

It's not often that you come across young women who combine allure and business acumen as beautifully as Dr. Nneka Ebru Okpe.

Armed with passion and a doctorate degree, Nneka connects cultures and fosters high standards in corporate businesses. Nneka cuts a dash but that takes nothing away from her intelligence.

Aviators Africa's Chidozie Uzoezie had a chat with her and she spoke on her background, work environment and role as the Chief Operating Officer (COO) of 7Star Group.

AA: Tell us a little about yourself and your designation at 7Star Group.

NEO: My name is Dr. NNEKA EBRU OKPE. I am the Chief Operating Officer (COO) of 7Star Group. My background is in business development and investment consultancy in emerging nations. I have been merging businesses, bridging cultures, and facilitating economic growth precisely between Turkey and Nigeria over the years. Many say I am good with people relations, creating efficiency and of course, seeing

the gaps in businesses to fill them in the best way possible. As you understand from my name, I'm proudly half Turkish and half Nigerian. I am passionate about using business as a tool to bridge countries and encourage development and growth in the national and global economy.

AA: As the Chief Operating Officer, what are your tasks at 7Star Group?

NEO: As the COO, I am responsible for coordinating, managing, and

overseeing all operations within the group. Basically, I keep the harmony and efficiency overall. As you know in emerging nations, the biggest challenge within an organization is communication and aligning strategies within departments. In 7Star Group, we work together by carrying everyone along, this way everyone feels motivated because they are up-to-date on developing situations on the ground. Every one of our departments is filled with trained and experienced personnel. They are all experts in what they do. I come on

board to harmonize their best sets of skills to create profitability and efficiency in the hangar while we create a legacy in West Africa. With the changing dynamics, I also look at our short and long-term visions and adjust them to current market conditions.

AA: Being a COO can be daunting. What are the challenges that come with your job?

NEO: Trust me, the ease of doing business in Nigeria can be extremely difficult not because of the people or businesses but because of the general instability in the environment such as power, logistics, access to financing, etc. These few factors affect daily costs and efficiency drastically. However, you can reduce the occurrence of these challenges by establishing contingency plans and of course effective communication. My keywords for these difficult situations are teamwork, effectiveness, and timely planning. You have to be on top of everything and everybody while you think ahead. The totality of this great vision and best practice brings to mind a not-so-daunting workspace.

AA: As the COO, you interface with high-profile clients. What are the major factors they consider before choosing an MRO in Nigeria?

NEO: One of the most important factors is technical experience. At 7Star, we pride ourselves on the largest number of years of total experience within our technical team. Customer Care, Continuous Reporting Systems, and Compliance are some of the other factors our clients look at before making decisions on their choices. Also, the size of the facility for big airlines is a key factor. At 7Star Global Hangar, we have huge facilities across the nation, for example, our hangar in Lagos can accommodate a Boeing 777. These attributes have played a huge role in our client's preference for 7Star in Nigeria.

AA: Despite headwinds, 7Star Global Hangar has successfully carried out heavy maintenance for major Nigerian airlines. Have these

successes given 7Star any competitive advantage over other MRO facilities across Africa?

NEO: The current achievements have definitely pushed us above our competitors, especially in Nigeria. Firstly, we have a big facility, the latest tools and technology, and foreign expertise as well as the human capital to deliver high-quality maintenance. Our clients know our capacity and this assures them that they are in very capable hands. Working for major local airlines, we know and comply with Nigerian quality and safety standards which is a top priority for us. Moreover, we have a customer-oriented approach, which is one of the most important things that makes our clients trust us. Lastly, I must say that having a reputable track record has been our greatest marketing strategy and the greatest competitive advantage over other MRO facilities.

AA: Currently, the business environment in Nigeria is not very conducive. Is there anything you think the government can do to help 7Star Hangar operate more efficiently and more profitably?

NEO: Of course, for every business, there are common challenges in all emerging nations. However, some easy regulatory changes can make massive developments in the industry. For instance, increasing the trained workforce by encouraging a cadet program from an early age about career possibilities in this industry can change the future of this business. This would also include gender inclusion programs focused on young girls in this industry. Also, creating local content laws that reward businesses with financial incentives would play a pivotal role to the development of this industry. With the help of the NCAA, making hangers like 7 Star regional and global hubs, not only for local but international airlines, will definitely create high standards for our company as well as the country. Yes, we will have more competition, but that makes the business more exciting.

According to the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN), in 2021

Nigeria lost a minimum of \$2.5 billion to other African countries on aircraft maintenance. This is a big loss in the country's revenue. If we can reduce this number to half by developing the aviation business infrastructure in Nigeria, this money will stay at home. The fast development of the industry will be inevitable.

AA: The Africa Aviation MRO Market size is expected to grow from \$1.45 billion in 2023 to \$1.67 billion by 2028. Is 7Star Global Hangar strategically positioned for this growth?

NEO: In 2015, Nigeria was the 3rd fastest-growing economy. Today, Nigeria is the 6th most populated country in the world. Despite the instability, with these figures growth is bound to happen. 7Star has the capacity, assets, tools, facility, experience, and every other thing a company needs in its possession. We don't only aim to grow but be the market leader in our region in the near future.

AA: You are a global woman, and you've already done very well for yourself. Does 7Star give equal opportunities to both male and female professionals? Would you like to see more African women venture into aircraft maintenance engineering?

NEO: Thank you for your kind words. 7Star gives high importance to gender equality and we pride ourselves on creating that balance from top to bottom in the organization. African women are very unique in many ways and you will see that we have excelled in every sector and industry across the world. There is a huge number of female engineers coming up. I believe, even though the sector is male-dominated their unique set of skills must be appreciated more and we need to create more job opportunities for them to encourage them. Currently, we are getting ready to start our university. We already planned on establishing scholarship programs to encourage diversity in the industry.

AA: You have vast experience in business consulting and training, especially in West Africa. You have worked with several companies in different capacities. Is being the Group COO of 7Star Global Hangar the most challenging?

NEO: Definitely not, because in 7Star Group everybody is part of the company and everybody has a say. You will see that everybody sees 7Star as their family. Everybody has a personal relationship, especially with Eng Balami. His unique and uncommon connection has played a huge role in the company's existence, growth, and development over the years. Coordinating different companies under the group has its challenges, but it is also very interesting. As a result of this, we all work towards a common goal. This helps us achieve our objectives faster and working with a wide range of people makes you see their views from a different angle. Sometimes I come across some complex situations where I have to be decisive and use my initiative. This is where my experience working with multinationals becomes handy as a result of the job skills needed in such countries.

AA: How long have you known Engr. Isaac Balami? What can you tell us about him?

NEO: I met Engineer Balami at the beginning of the year during the electioneering campaign. I can tell you that his drive, his commitment to everything he does, his compassion for people around him, and of course his country shows that he is a true leader. He has a high level of emotional intelligence, which is not so common. He's a great family man, he works well with the team, and sees the gem in everyone. Isaac Balami is very objective and positive.

AA: Isaac will be celebrating his birthday this August. What are your prayers and wishes for him?

NEO: As I always say, this is just the beginning. I congratulate him on his new age and I pray for God's continued blessings over him and his beautiful family. Keep shining, Sir.

7Star has the capacity, assets, tools, facility, experience, and every other thing a company needs in its possession. We don't only aim to grow but be the market leader in our region in the near future.

Engineer Rowland AHMED

Rowland Ahmed is a seasoned Aircraft Maintenance Engineer with about 20 years of experience. He has spent quite a considerable amount of time with the tool box. He knows them in and out. In this exclusive interview with Aviators Africa's editorial crew, Rowland spoke about his role as the Managing Director of 7Star Global Hangar and the challenges that come with it. He also touched on other topical issues, including harsh business environment and the general state of the Nigerian Aviation Industry.

AA: Please tell us a little about yourself and your official designation at 7Star Global Hangar.

RA: My name is Engineer Roland M Ahmed. I am an Aircraft Maintenance Engineer with about 20 years of experience, most of it on the Boeing 737 Classic and Next Gen. And 7 out of those 20 years have been in a management role. Currently, I oversee the 7Star Global Hangar's AOC and AMO as the Managing Director.

AA: What is your professional background and your role at 7Star Global Hangar?

RA: I am a Mechanical Engineer by training. I had a stint in the oil & gas after my National Youth Service in Port Harcourt, where I worked in an oil servicing firm. Due to my love for Aviation, when the opportunity came, I grabbed it and I started my Aviation career as an Instructor at the Nigerian College of Aviation Technology (NCAT) Zaria.

I am a licensed Aircraft Maintenance Engineer rated on the Boeing 737CL, Boeing 737NG, Dash8, Challenger 601/604/605 and other aircraft. I also manage the Leadstream Aviation Training Organisation, which has the biggest training capability in sub-Saharan Africa.

My role in 7Star Global is managing the day-to-day activities in both the AOC and the AMO with my capable, highly skilled, and very professional management team.



AVIO COVER

AA: From a technical point of view, what are the challenges that come with your job?

RA: The challenges are numerous, ranging from hash business environment, to inconsistent government policies in the support of local operators. Others are instability and high cost of foreign exchange, which is a vital component of our business due to its nature as a global business. Aviation is highly dollarised. The lack of understanding and corporation of government agencies with respect to aviation business is also an issue. Instead of promoting it, they are destroying it, largely due to ignorance and some, due to our attitude as Nigerians and lack of patriotism to the nation.

AA: 7Star Global Hangar is the biggest independent MRO in sub-Saharan Africa. What range of aircraft are you licensed to overhaul?

RA: Yes, we are the biggest independent AMO/MRO in sub-Saharan Africa in terms of maintenance capability. Our MRO capabilities include Boeing 737, Embraer 135/145, MD-80 Series, Agusta AW139, Bombardier Challenger 600, Learjet 45, DHC-8, Hawker 125-850/900XP, Bell 429, Cessna 152/172, 180/182, Airbus Helicopter, Sikorsky S76C/C++, and others. We also have capability for non-destructive testing.

AA: How many aircraft types have you actually overhauled?

RA: So far, we have carried out heavy maintenance successfully on the MD-80 series aircraft. We are currently inducting one of Dana Air's MD for an 8C check, which is equivalent to a D-Check. We have provided support for Dana Air operations and due to the partnership and collaboration we have with them, we provide support for their entire fleet. We have done D-Check on the Learjet45, and also carried out maintenance on the Challenger 605, HS125, ERJ145, and S76 Helicopter. And worthy of note, we have carried out 8 years annual heavy maintenance check on the AW139, which is the first in the country and in the entire Africa. This was achieved with

the support of our technical partners, NHV and also the CAA who believed in us and our local expertise. Also, we are about to induct two Boeing 737CL for a teardown for a client in Nigeria. We are also inducting another two ERJ145 for the same customer. As we speak, two operators from Congo are talking with us for the maintenance of their MD-80 series aircraft, this is due to our success story. We are in the process of getting the approval for the heavy maintenance of the Boeing 737NG for another new operator in the country and other foreign operators.

AA: Has the journey been all rosy? How has the harsh economic reality in Nigeria affected your operations?

RA: In all honesty, it's been a journey of determination and deliberate effort to succeed. The business environment is hash, especially this time when accessing forex is very difficult, and the business is largely dependent on foreign exchange. We don't manufacture anything in Nigeria, virtually everything is imported to the smallest item like screws. But in all, we give glory to God Almighty for the grace and strength to continue till this day. It hasn't been easy, but again for the result of the effort, we keep going on, hoping that some day the business environment will be better and more encouraging, especially for young entrepreneurs that are having the desire to do what we are doing today and even better.

The bad economy has affected our business in terms of non-availability of forex to purchase spare parts and other consumables needed for our maintenance. It has made business slow due to delays in spare parts procurement, either by the customers or third party and there by increasing the turn around time (TAT) for our maintenance. Due to these delays, aircraft are on ground longer than necessary. This is not good for both the operator and the maintenance organisation. We are all losing money.

AA: In terms of capacity building, does 7Star Global Hangar have any program that promotes local contents?

“ We have provided support for Dana Air operations and due to the partnership and collaboration we have with them, we provide support for their entire fleet. ”

RA: In terms of local capacity building, 7Star Global is doing very great. This, we have been able to achieve with the help of our sister organisation, the Leadstream Aviation Training and other training institutions. We have continuously trained our technical personnel on all our approved aircraft types, both for initial and recurrent. We have the largest number of industrial training (IT), on the job (OJT), NYSC and others acquiring knowledge and experience in our various facilities today. And this is because of our belief and the need for local capacity development and improving local content. If others will join us in local capacity building, the airlines will have no reason to carry out maintenance outside the country. And that will definitely help save capital flight and strengthen our Naira.

AA: What's your general impression about the Nigerian Aviation Industry?

RA: My impression is that we are still far behind in our attitudes and the way we do business. Aviation is a global business, so we need to step up and move fast to catch up with the rest of the world. Our infrastructures are outdated and some of the personnel in the aviation industry are not properly trained. Our leaders are not patriotic, everyone is seeking for self aggrandisement. The industry can't make meaningful progress. The most annoying is that we know what to do,



but we talk too much and end up doing nothing. But we at 7Star Global Hangar believe in talking less and doing more.

AA: How long have you known Engr. Isaac Balami? What can you tell us about him?

RA: I have known Engr. Chief Isaac David Balami for almost 20 years. We met at the Nigerian College of Aviation Technology (NCAT) Zaria. While he was in AP24, I was an Instructor in the ATE School at NCAT. Chief Balami is a person with so many parts. You can't describe Balami enough, you can only try.

Chief Balami is a gifted individual, born with extra ordinary abilities that distinguish him amongst his peers. He is a visionary leader that is diligent and consciously deliberate about what he does and how he does it. He never leaves any stone unturned in the pursuit of his dreams and ambitions. He is a people's person, gifted with an oratory

“ We have the largest number of industrial training (IT), on the job (OJT), NYSC and others acquiring knowledge and experience in our various facilities today. And this is because of our belief and the need for local capacity development and improving local content. ”

ability. He knows what to say, when to say it, and how to say it. He is a very compassionate man, hence the founding of The Isaac Balami Foundation. We can write a book about him, which I believe will happen some day if God keeps us alive. Balami is a friend that sticks closer than a brother. Lastly, he is one person that threads where angels fear to thread.

AA: Any words of prayers and felicitation for him as he celebrates his birthday this August?

RA: Mazaa, like we fondly call ourselves, fate and necessity have laid it on us as 'brothers' and we have come to accept it, even down to our families. From my heart, I pray the Lord to bless him more, keep and preserve him and make His face to shine upon him in all he does and desires to do. This birthday will not be the last, we shall celebrate him when he is 80 years old and more, in the name of Jesus. Amen!

What Team Members Are Saying

Engineer

Abdulasisi IYEMIFOKHAE

(Maintenance Manager, 7Star Global Hangar)

My name is Abdulasisi Iyemifokhae. I am currently the Maintenance Manager at 7Star Global Hangar. As the Maintenance Manager, my job involves carrying all processes and procedures on any maintenance on aircraft and any other components such as wheels and brakes. I ensure

I got to know Engr Isaac Balami when he joined us at Aero Contractor as a young Engineer. Then I was working with Aero Contractors. He is an

excellent and a very kind person with an outstanding and likable personality. He is very generous and has human feelings. I remember when we travelled together to the United States of America for a course. When we finished our course in the US, something happened the day we were to return to Nigeria. The guide who was taking us round during our stay in the US, took us to the airport. But unfortunately, we had exhausted our money and didn't have anything to give him. I was surprised when Balami removed his wrist watch and gave it to

the young man. I will never forget that incident. Balami has a positive attitude and never says it is not possible.

Having know him for over 20 years, I can say that his trust in God never fails him. My prayer has been for more greatness and God's protection over him and his family. For his birthday celebration, I wish him more growth and prosperity with good health for many years ahead.



What Team Members Are Saying

Engineer Ibrahim NOCK

(Quality and Safety Manager, 7Star Global Hangar)

My name is Engineer Ibrahim Nock. I am the Quality and Safety Manager of 7Star Global Hangar, now 7Star Global Group. I got into the aviation industry through the Nigerian College of Aviation Technology (NCAT) Zaria in 1983 and graduated in 1985. I also trained and worked in the UK. Before I joined 7Star, I had worked with many organisations and airlines in various capacities. They include Nigeria Airways, Bristow Helicopters, Aviation Resource Services, Trans Sahara Airlines, Caverton Helicopters, Virgin Nigeria, Topbrass Aviation, Albarka, and Dana Air from where I joined 7Star Global Hangar.

I've known Engineer Isaac Balami right from when he was in school. I had been in the industry for about 25 years before

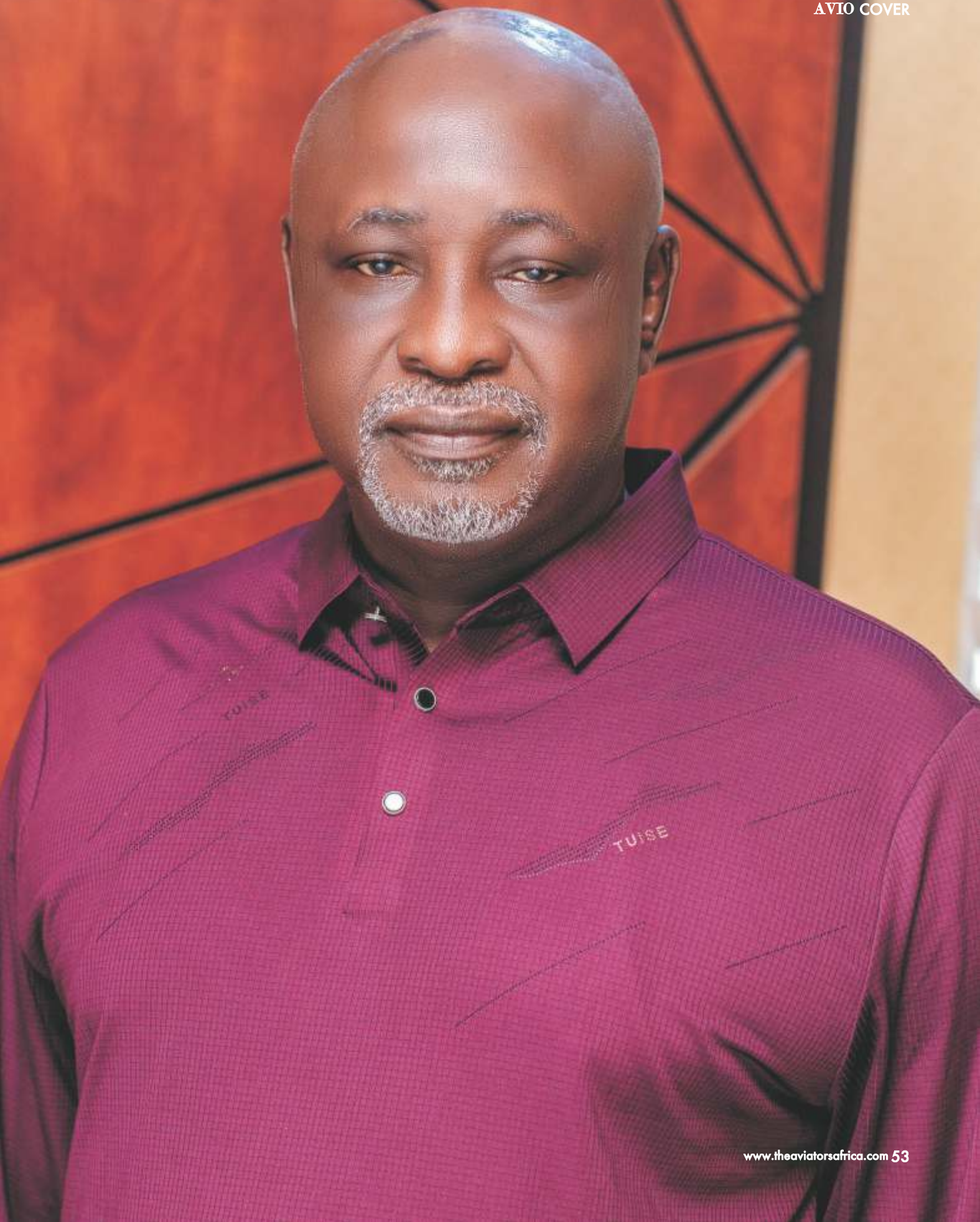
he came in, but he came in with a lot of dynamism, probably because of his youthful age. But he was very passionate when he started and he's still showing that passionate today about aviation. We were unionists together when he was the National President of the National Association of Aircraft Pilots and Engineers (NAAPE) in Nigeria.

It was obvious that he loves Nigeria and aviation, it was clear from his actions. Balami would go the extra mile to fight for people in industry, including pilots, engineers and virtually everybody in the industry. I worked with him and I went with him to ministries and so on and so forth. His passion to fight for the people in industry is commendable.

Isaac's passion for the aviation industry,

his leadership qualities and his capacity to easily mix up with people interact with them have endeared him to me. He is a born diplomat and knows how to smoothen things out when things get intense. He knows when to play and when not to play. He behaves the same way to everybody, whether it is management staff or non management staff and even cleaners. Balami doesn't look down on people. In fact, he is a very good boss.

Isaac is a very prayerful person and very pious. My prayer for him on his birthday is that God will continue to look after him and his family. God will continue to be behind him with everything he does and that he will rise to higher heights and better calling. We hope to be with him as he grows in the aviation industry.





From Happy Clients and Industry Colleagues

Sukh MANN

Managing Partner, Dre Aviation, London

My name is Sukh Mann. I am a Managing Partner at Dre Aviation, London. Dre aviation is Africa's leading airline consultancy and advisory firm. We believe in integrity and commitment to our clients. We share best practice and challenge the boundaries to ensure that our clients have a competitive edge in every area of their operations.

I have had the pleasure of being part of Isaac's journey for the last 7 years. Although younger than me, Isaac is an absolute inspiration. He is a visionary, not just in the aviation sector but also

via his philanthropic and political activities. Isaac has integrity, he is loyal, and demonstrates humility. He is a visionary and a passionate leader. He makes me proud, and I am convinced that one day he will make Nigeria proud.

Isaac and I made history when we planned and delivered the first Dana Air MD aircraft to the 7Star Hangar for a C-Check. This was the first time with this aircraft type in Nigeria and that endorsed 7Star Global Hangar as a force to be reckoned with on the African continent for its MRO services. We also demonstrated that Nigerian Engineers

are capable of competing with international MROs and protected the capital flight of funds from Nigeria to international markets. Since that time, I am so pleased that they have continued to grow, and I wish them further success going forward. I would like to see 7Star expand its physical presence into other African markets, and I will do whatever I can to support them in this endeavour.

Personally, I am blessed to have Isaac in my life. For his birthday, I wish him health, happiness, and more success. May he continue to be blessed.



From Happy Clients and Industry Colleagues

Captain Ado SANUSI

Aviators Africa's Crew also caught up with Captain Ado Sanusi, the MD/CEO of Aero Contractors Airline. And we had a little chat with him.

AA: Tell us a little about yourself.

AS: My name is Captain Ado Sanusi. I was born in Kano State. I attended St. Bartholomew Primary School, Zaria in Kaduna State, where I developed interest in flying. For my pilot training, I went to the Nigerian College of Aviation Technology (NCAT) Zaria, where I obtained my PPL and CPL. I also studied in the United States of America.

AA: You're the Managing Director and CEO of Nigeria's oldest airline. What has been Aero Contractors' sustaining power?

AS: The most important aspect of Aero Contractors is a dedicated workforce. They have well trained, well experienced, and dedicated staff who ensure safe and reliable operations. Among other things, dedicated staff are the major strengths of Aero Contractors. Secondly, Aero Contractors has a very good structure

that was built on a very solid foundation. And that is part of the successes of the airline. Aero Contractors also has very good maintenance facilities, which helped them to make a real comeback.

AA: Aero Contractors also has an MRO arm. Do you see 7Star Global Hangar as a competitor or a collaborator?

AS: The market in Nigeria and Africa is huge. I do not see anybody as a competitor, but I see all as partners in developing the aviation industry. Aero Contractors established the first Maintenance Repair and Overhaul (MRO) in West Africa. We actually carried out the first heavy maintenance on the Boeing 737 classic in Central and West Africa. Yes, Aero Contractors prides itself on that achievement. But we didn't achieve it alone. We achieved it with the support of other organizations in the aviation industry, including 7Star Global Hangar. That's why I said it's a collaborative effort. The aviation industry in Nigeria is a growing industry, it's in its infancy. So, we shouldn't be looking at each other as competitors, but as partners to grow the aviation industry.

AA: How long have you known Engr. Isaac Balami? And what can you tell us about his personality?

AS: I met Engineer Isaac Balami in the early 2000s when I was the MD of Nigerian Airspace Management Agency (NAMA). He was a very young engineer at that time, and he came to pay a courtesy visit to me. And that was the first time I met him.

Isaac is young, very energetic, and ambitious. He pioneered the reforms in the National Association of Aircraft Pilots and Engineers (NAAPE) in Nigeria. He brought the association out, making people see it in a different light.

AA: Isaac will be celebrating his birthday this August. What are your prayers and wishes for him?

AS: Engineer Isaac is an entrepreneur, and he has achieved a lot. I wish him all the best as he celebrates his birthday. I wish him and his family a good life and good health. Most importantly, I pray that God will make all his dreams come true.



Faith Meets Humanity: Inside The Isaac Balami Foundation

“We need to invariably strive to give succour to humanity, because, at some point when we are gone from this terrestrial ball, posterity will outlive us and it will either commend our actions or inactions.” — Isaac Balami

By Chidozie Uzoezie

There's no better way to touch lives than to find a need and feel it. Isaac Balami can tell more about this. Growing up in Borno State in Northern Nigeria, Isaac had more than a fair share of struggles and deprivations. His childhood and early adulthood were filled with challenges which almost stood between him and his dreams. But he exercised faith and struck a deal with God. And God honoured him. The Isaac Balami Foundation (IBF) is one of the many ways Isaac Balami is keeping his own side of the covenant with God.

For the past 18 years, the Isaac Balami Foundation has been touching and changing lives in more ways than one. From empowerment to capacity building

and everything in-between, the Isaac Balami Foundation has provided succour to a large number of underprivileged Nigerians, including over 500 children who benefit from free shelters, free feeding, free education, and free medical care. The impact has been massive.

IBF FOCUS AREAS

The Isaac Balami Foundation has adopted a four-pronged strategy which are preventive and rehabilitative charity approaches to give hope to children, orphans, youths, the aged as well as communities across Nigeria. The four approaches are the IBF Orphanage Initiative (IOI), the IBF Free Education Scheme (iFES).

IBF ORPHANAGE INITIATIVE (IOI)

The Isaac Balami Foundation runs IBF Orphanage Initiative (IOI) through which they provide shelters for orphans and take care of their feeding, clothing, medical needs, and education. Through IBF Orphanage Initiative, the Isaac Balami Foundation is committed to giving orphans a brighter future.

The IBF Orphanage Initiative shelter is located in Lokogoma, Abuja in the FCT with over 50 orphans catered for since inception in 2021. With the provision of free shelter, healthcare, feeding, clothing and education, the Isaac Balami Foundation has changed the lives of



these orphaned children through this initiative. Some of the children have been adopted by reputable families with routine follow-up checks on the children to ensure their well-being in their new homes.

IBF FREE EDUCATION SCHEME (iFES)

The Isaac Balami Foundation has engaged in various projects on educational interventions. Through the IBF Free Education Scheme (iFES), one thousand and sixteen (1,016) children have graduated from renowned schools funded by the IBF to enable them achieve their dreams. Beyond education, these children are also treated with dignity and respect, making them feel loved with a sense of belonging.

iFES has engaged in projects on educational interventions such as setting up IBF Shaffa Computer Centre in Hawul LGA with a branch in Shani LGA, both in Bornu State Nigeria. Over 270 people have already graduated from the IBF Shaffa Computer Centre. Other educational interventions are Bajju Development Association (BADA) Computer Centre in Kaduna State with

549 beneficiaries. IFES has also offered scholarship to over one thousand (1,000) school children in various locations in the Northeast and Abuja.

Currently, the foundation has a school in Abuja under the iFES project to cater for the orphans under the IOI project in the scholarship program. The school is open to the general public and currently has 63 pupils. The foundation established a nursery and a primary school in Shaffa community in 2021. There's also an ongoing school building reconstruction project at an old government school. Both communities are in Bornu State.

IBF Community Outreach Programme (iCOP)

Under the IBF Community Outreach Programme (iCOP), the Isaac Balami Foundation has provided interventions in 3 communities in Bornu State. The interventions included the provision of portable drinking water with the sinking of boreholes in these communities.

Still under the iCOP initiative, the Isaac Balami Foundation carries out periodic medical outreaches, especially in the

Northeast, during which they conduct medical check-ups and give medications where necessary. During the medical outreaches, food supplements, wheelchairs, and crutches are also distributed.

Under the iCOP initiative, the Isaac Balami Foundation has also been involved in emergency interventions: During the peek of the violence by Boko Haram attack in 2014 and 2018 in Adamawa and Southern Bornu States, IBF provided emergency rescue interventions by evacuating over 500 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Until all the IDPs were able to return home, the foundation provided free shelter, food and other items for them in a camp in Abuja.

IBF Youth Empowerment Scheme (iYES)

Youth empowerment and capacity building is at the heart of IBF. Under the IBF Youth Empowerment Scheme (iYES) initiative, the Isaac Balami Foundation partnered with Nigerian Rebirth Foundation to organise a TV Reality Show.



AVIO COVER





During the Covid-19 pandemic recovery period, the iYES scheme, in partnership with Save Africa's Future Leaders Initiative (SAFFLI), sponsored 16 less privileged students living in Agege, Lagos State to an excursion to 7Star Hangar. The foundation also donated tablets to the students to aid their e-learning activities.

A CLARION CALL

Through the Isaac Balami Foundation, Isaac Balami has given succour to numerous underprivileged Nigerians, including orphaned children, jobless youth, and vulnerable women. He has given the homeless homes, he has given the hungry food, and he has clothed the naked. In fact, Isaac Balami has given hope to the hopeless. He has transformed lives.

The Isaac Balami Foundation projects

have been self-funded. And the number of the needy Nigerians keeps increasing. The plight of the less privileged in our society has become so deplorable and a major source of concern. It has become necessary to have more hands on deck in order to touch more lives. The foundation is, therefore, seeking for partners to pool resources together to build modern facilities with hundreds of homes for the orphans even as they hope to take in more orphans in the future.

Through iFES, the Isaac Balami Foundation adopts schools and students and place them on scholarship. And this is in addition to the orphans and youths on the IBF scholarship across Nigeria. You can actually join the Isaac Balami Foundation to touch a life or two by adopting a child that you could commit to, paying his or her tuition fee for

period of time. You can also adopt a school for one-off rehabilitation on IBF behalf.

The Isaac Balami Foundation has already done a lot. However, there's a lot more to be done. There are many more children to take back to school. There are many more beggars and destitutes to take off the streets. There are many more area boys and drug addicts to rehabilitate. There are many more widows to empower. And there are many more communities to transform. Let us all give a helping hand and support the Isaac Balami Foundation. We can achieve more together.

For more information and to be a part of this noble cause, kindly visit www.isaacbalamifoundation.org.



Owning Your Office Space: Why it makes Business Sense in the long run

By Neil Bernberg

In the world of business, decisions should be driven by both short-term gains and long-term sustainability. When it comes to choosing a workspace, business owners are increasingly recognising the financial and strategic advantages of owning their office space. Investing in your own business premises, such as the office spaces available at The Pinnacle (part of the Investicore portfolio) in Cape Town's City Bowl, not only reduces monthly overheads but also provides a range of benefits that can contribute to your financial future and overall success.

It just makes financial sense

One way to own office space is the concept of sectional title office property. By purchasing your own office space, you are building equity which could be an opportunity to invest in your retirement as a business owner. Unlike renting, where your monthly payment is essentially an expense, owning property allows you to allocate your funds towards an asset that will appreciate over

time. The value of your investment will likely increase, providing a financial cushion for your future.

While rent is subject to increases, purchasing office space ensures that your monthly instalment remains constant. As landlords often raise rental costs over time, owning your office space provides stability and control over your business environment.

Traditionally skyscrapers are owned by listed funds and investors. The sale of floors at The Pinnacle allows individual investors and owner occupiers an opportunity to partake in this typically exclusive market. The Pinnacle also offers the unique opportunity for potential income generation. With large floor plates ranging from 400m² to 800m², you can choose to subdivide and rent out any unused space. This additional income stream can further contribute to the growth and success of your business.

Brass tacks and better tax

From a tax perspective, you can claim an income tax deduction on your monthly bond interest payments. When renting, you would claim the monthly rental amount. While claiming the whole rent may be a larger amount than the interest portion of your bond, you can usually customise an office space you own far better than a rental property, and get better value from the same, or less, floor area. When making improvements to your property, such as custom meeting rooms, call pods, recreational and work areas, these improvements can be capitalised and provide an additional annual deduction, at 5% of the value of the improvements, and possible further reductions in tax if you sell depending how much has already been claimed. When renting, however, even if your landlord does allow the construction as part of the lease, the improvements themselves are harder to claim, falling under "leasehold improvements" which is a more nuanced area of tax law to apply.

Making the move

Another factor that makes owning office space at The Pinnacle an attractive proposition is the phenomenon of semigration to Cape Town from other parts of South Africa. The Western Cape's governance and lifestyle factors have set it on a different trajectory than the rest of the country making relocating a particularly attractive option to business owners. As more businesses and professionals migrate to Cape Town, a trend which is set to continue for the foreseeable future, demand for office space is on the increase meaning that the capital appreciation of your asset is assured. Owning an office space in this flourishing region positions you at the forefront of economic opportunities and growth by making a sound property investment.

Location, location, location

As cliché as this may sound, location really has a meaningful impact on any business from an accessibility perspective. The Pinnacle's prime location is a standout feature that cannot be overstated. Situated on the hospital grid, the office spaces at The Pinnacle benefit from uninterrupted power supply. With no loadshedding, your business can operate seamlessly without

the disruptions faced by many others who are grappling with the staggering costs associated with keeping their business operational during the daily planned power shutdowns. This reliability is crucial for maintaining productivity and client satisfaction – and can also positively impact staff morale.

The Pinnacle's proximity to key institutions such as the Courts, the Masters' Office (which is located in the adjacent building), and the Deeds Office (a 5-minute drive or 10-minute walk) provides unparalleled convenience. Being within a few minutes of the High Court, Labour Court, and Magistrates Court, streamlines administrative processes and saves valuable time for legal practices. The location is further enhanced by its accessibility to Cape Town station (a 4-minute walk away) and just 6-minutes on foot to the nearest myCiti Bus stop, making it an ideal choice for businesses reliant on efficient transportation such as call centres.

Owning office space at The Pinnacle offers freedom and flexibility to personalise it according to your brand and identity. This not only enhances your company's image but also provides a sense of ownership and pride for

employees to work in an environment that reflects the company culture.

The Pinnacle prioritizes security and access control, providing a safe and protected environment for your business. With 24/7 security, you can have peace of mind knowing that your assets are safeguarded.

In addition to office spaces, The Pinnacle also offers on-site storage space that can be purchased. This convenient feature allows you to optimize your space utilization and store essential business items without the need for external storage solutions.

Owning office space at The Pinnacle is a strategic decision that provides long-term benefits for your business. From financial advantages and the potential for additional income generation to the unique location advantages and freedom of personalisation, the advantages of ownership are numerous. Take the leap towards stability, control, and future growth by investing in your own office space at The Pinnacle. Discover the power of owning your business environment and unlock your potential for success.





An Essential Guide: What a young CEO must consider before owning a private jet

By Kenekukwu Nwosu

Regardless of the high value of their businesses and the prestige of owning a private jet, young CEOs should analyze the financial implications of aircraft ownership. They should decide whether outright ownership is the best option or chartering, leasing or fractional ownership may better suit your needs. This can be achieved through a cost-benefit analysis and needs assessment, which should be done before making a final decision.

While thinking of buying a private jet, it is advisable for young CEOs to consult with experts and professionals who specialize in aircraft acquisition and management to assist in the purchasing process, in selecting the best aircraft for your specific needs, and provide valuable insights into the market. These are some of the things that should be considered:

Purpose and Frequency of Use

Understanding the purpose and frequency of your travel is crucial in determining the most suitable private jet. Consider whether you'll primarily use the aircraft for short domestic flights or also for longer international trips. If your focus is mainly on short-distance travel within Africa, opting for a jet with shorter-range capabilities may be more cost-effective and practical.

Range and Performance

Evaluate the range of different aircraft models to ensure they can efficiently cover the distances required for your business travel within Africa. Short-distance travel usually implies flights within a few hundred to a few thousand kilometers. Look for private jets with appropriate range capabilities, as excessive range could lead to unnecessary fuel consumption and maintenance costs.

Size and Capacity

Consider the number of passengers you anticipate traveling with regularly. If your trips are typically solo or involve a small team, a light or midsize jet may suffice. However, if you often need to accommodate larger groups or carry additional cargo, a larger jet with greater seating capacity and cargo space may be necessary.

Runway Performance

The diverse African landscape includes airports with varying runway lengths and surface conditions. Ensure the private jet you choose has suitable takeoff and landing capabilities for the airports you plan to frequent. Short-field performance and the ability to operate from unpaved or challenging runways may be essential in reaching certain remote locations.



during flights.

Support and Service Network

A strong support and service network is crucial for maintaining the airworthiness of your private jet. Investigate the availability of maintenance facilities, spare parts, and qualified technicians within Africa. Choosing an aircraft model with a reputable manufacturer and a well-established service network can help ensure smooth operations and minimize potential downtime.

Resale Value

Although buying a private jet is a significant investment, it is essential to consider the potential resale value. Market conditions can fluctuate, and your business needs may evolve over time. Opting for a popular and reliable aircraft model with a strong resale market can provide you with greater flexibility and financial security in the long run.

Safety and Security

Prioritize safety when selecting a private jet. Look for aircraft with a strong safety record and advanced safety features. Research the manufacturer's reputation for reliability and maintenance practices. Additionally, consider security features such as secure communication systems, advanced access controls, and privacy considerations to safeguard confidential business information.

Environmental Impact

Environmental sustainability is an increasingly important factor to consider. Evaluate the jet's fuel efficiency, carbon emissions, and noise levels. Opting for newer aircraft models with advanced technology can help reduce the environmental footprint of your business travel.

Pilot and Crew Requirements

Assess the training and certification requirements for pilots and crew members associated with the chosen private jet. Verify that the necessary training programs and experienced personnel are available to meet your operational needs. Skilled and reliable pilots and crew members are essential for safe and comfortable travel.

Insurance Coverage

Adequate insurance coverage is crucial when owning a private jet. Consult with aviation insurance specialists to understand the coverage options available and ensure you have comprehensive protection for your aircraft, passengers, and liabilities associated with aviation operations.

Budget and Financing

Determine your budget and explore financing options if necessary. Buying a private jet involves significant upfront costs, and it is important to establish a realistic budget that encompasses the purchase price, operating costs, and potential financing expenses.

Networking and Connectivity

Consider the availability of reliable internet connectivity and communication systems onboard the private jet. Seamless connectivity allows you to stay connected with your team, access real-time information, and conduct business while in the air.

Cultural Sensitivity

Africa is a diverse continent with various cultures, languages, and customs. Young CEOs should be mindful of cultural nuances and adapt their approach when conducting business across African countries. This cultural sensitivity can contribute to building stronger relationships and successful business ventures.

In conclusion, acquiring a private jet for short-distance business travel within Africa can be a game-changer for young CEOs. By considering the factors mentioned above and conducting thorough research, they can make an informed decision that aligns with their specific needs, enhances their business efficiency, and facilitates their growth in the dynamic African market. Remember to seek professional advice, conduct due diligence, and ensure your decision aligns with your business objectives and ethical considerations. With careful planning and consideration, a private jet can become an invaluable tool for success in the African business landscape.

Operating Costs and Maintenance

Owning a private jet entails not just the purchase price but also ongoing expenses. Consider the operational costs, such as fuel, crew salaries, maintenance, insurance, hangar fees, and regulatory compliance. Opting for newer models with advanced avionics and fuel-efficient engines can help minimize operating costs and maximize reliability.

Cabin Amenities and Comfort

The interior of the private jet should reflect your personal preferences and provide a comfortable and productive environment for business travel. Consider the cabin layout, seating arrangements, connectivity options, entertainment systems, and additional amenities such as a conference area or sleeping quarters. Ensuring a luxurious and comfortable experience for yourself and your team can enhance productivity



Maximizing Flexibility: The Innovative Transformation of Airline Payments

By OAG

This marks the sixth and final article in our content series exploring the transformative technology transitions reshaping the airline industry. Today's focus turns to the evolution of payment methods in air travel, arguably one of the most consequential shifts in this sector from a customer-facing perspective.

As the digital revolution continues to reshape the airline industry, new payment methodologies have emerged to cater to changing consumer behaviors and technological advancements.

This shift, much like the transformations brought about by next-gen Revenue Management, New Distribution Capability (NDC), Ancillaries, and Virtual Interlining, is propelled by the dual engines of innovative technology and evolving consumer needs for more flexibility and convenience in booking air travel.

Today's air travelers are increasingly seeking the ease and immediacy of e-commerce experiences like Amazon when booking flights. To meet these expectations, airlines and travel-tech providers are eagerly innovating to deliver smooth, seamless, and flexible payment experiences.

In this article, we aim to explore the fascinating intersection of travel and fintech, a melding of disciplines that are redefining payment methods in the airline industry.

Before diving into the specific innovative mechanisms, we first seek to provide a broad understanding of the importance and relevance of the payment sector within the context of airlines. This overview sets the stage for appreciating the magnitude and implications of the shift that's currently underway.

With the foundations laid, we will subsequently delve into three transformative approaches, each with unique benefits and challenges, contributing to the exciting evolution of the air travel payment landscape:

- Air ticket price freezes
- Subscription plans
- Buy-now-pay-later or installment schemes

The Hidden Value in Airline Payments

Examining the airline industry through the lens of payment methods, it may initially seem as though this area lacks significant pain points for travelers and, thus, commercial importance for airlines. However, such a view tends to underestimate the enormous impact even slight improvements can have on an airline's bottom line.

Consider the vast scale of payment transactions in this context: every year, approximately 2.9 billion payment transactions for airline bookings occur globally, according to McKinsey, representing a value of around \$803 billion USD in 2023, as projected by IATA.

Such immense volumes of business transactions come with a hefty price tag. The airline industry shells out over \$20 billion USD annually on payment costs alone, as reported by the aforementioned McKinsey study. This equates to 2.5% of airlines' total revenue, and, even more astonishingly, more than 2x the industry's expected net profit in 2023.

A significant chunk of these expenses can be attributed to the extensive use of credit cards, which account for around 70% of retail transactions. While undeniably convenient for customers, credit card payments impose considerable costs on airlines. However, it's worth noting that this is not universally the case. For certain airlines, having their own branded credit cards via strategic partnerships can be extremely profitable. These cards, often offering rewards and travel benefits, can generate significant revenue, offsetting the cost of transactions and creating a strong customer retention tool. Nonetheless, the broader issue of payment costs in the industry persists and necessitates innovative solutions.

But the implications of payment methods within the airline industry extend beyond the realm of cost reduction. Indeed, the evolution of payment methods offers new opportunities for airlines. By diversifying payment options and enhancing flexibility, airlines can sell a range of modular protections for flights, hotels, car rentals, and even alternative accommodations—a subject closely related to our deep dive into Ancillaries.

Above all, it's about delivering more flexibility in travel bookings. By providing an array of payment options, airlines could potentially expand their market reach and attract new customer segments. McKinsey projects that through strategic advancements in payment methods, airlines could generate an additional \$14 billion USD in value by 2030. This prediction underscores the fundamental role payment innovations will play in shaping the future of the airline industry.

The Under-Explored Terrain: Airline Payments

Despite the significant value at stake, payments remain an oftentimes under-addressed strategic topic within the airline industry. Given its pivotal role as the connector between airlines and customers, payments form an essential part of future retailing strategies.

Surprisingly, the sector often lacks the requisite transparency and engagement. Airlines frequently overlook the

importance of monitoring payment and transaction data. KPIs such as payment success rate, cost per transaction, chargeback rate, payment method mix, and customer retention rate through branded credit cards are often underutilized. The creation of dedicated roles to focus on these metrics could lead to substantial improvements in efficiency and profitability.

The inability to capitalize on the link between payments and customer experience is another shortfall, with these domains typically managed as separate entities within an airline organization. This segregation may contribute to the high shopping cart abandonment rates seen on airline websites, which can soar up to 90%.

However, payments are not just about financial transactions – they play an integral role in the customer journey, with each touchpoint presenting potential revenue-generating opportunities. According to McKinsey, there are up to ten payment-related touchpoints along the typical customer journey.

Thus, airlines are poised to enhance the retail customer payment experience, especially in direct channels, to reduce dropouts and unlock considerable value.

The Melding of Travel and Fintech

In recent years, the travel industry has made strides in the innovation of payments, recognizing the immense value inherent in this sphere.

According to the Amadeus Travel Fintech Research Report, the majority of travel businesses consider fintech and payments as a priority, with more than 80% intending to maintain or increase their pre-pandemic investment levels.

This has propelled intermediaries, including online booking platforms and travel agencies, to earmark payments as a key differentiation opportunity, with larger entities investing in fintech solutions to streamline the end-to-end payment journey.



AVIO FEATURE

A discernible trend is the convergence of travel and fintech sectors, a phenomenon that gained momentum in the post-pandemic landscape, as PhocusWire concludes.

The race to provide an integrated travel, payment, and tech platform to capture the traveler's journey has stimulated this development. Intriguingly, this convergence manifests bidirectionally: while financial behemoths and fintech providers venture into the travel domain, travel providers reciprocate by building or incorporating fintech offerings.

- Some noteworthy examples include banking giants like Citi (in collaboration with Booking) and Capital One (with the help of Hopper) launching travel platforms, while JP Morgan is spearheading a full-service travel business initiative.

- On the flip side, travel companies like Booking Holdings and Amadeus have created dedicated fintech units or separate payments businesses.

A standout case is Hopper, which significantly expanded its fintech product suite in 2019, leading to these products constituting about 40% of its total revenue in 2022, as reported by Skift. This underscores Hopper's early identification and successful capitalization on this strategic area.

As we traverse the evolving landscape of travel booking and payment methods, the digital transformation journey promises to alleviate payment friction, adding another layer of convenience for travelers.

To shed light on the tangible benefits of this trend for travelers, we will now delve into the three areas we mentioned earlier: air ticket price freezes, subscription plans, and buy-now-pay-later schemes.

Price Freezes: Taming the Flux in Airfares

One of the enduring pain points for travelers has been the frustrating fluctuations in air ticket fares. This

irritation has become increasingly relevant due to the airlines' shift towards dynamic and even continuous pricing.

While these pricing techniques help airlines maximize revenue and load factor, they often lead to customers second-guessing their purchase decisions, wondering if they might secure a better deal later. This uncertainty likely contributes to the above-average shopping cart abandonment rates we discussed earlier.

Travel tech company Hopper was among the first travel booking platforms to address this concern by introducing so-called "Price Freezes." With this feature, customers can freeze a quoted price for a small surcharge, securing that price for up to 21 days while they finalize their plans. If the cost of the booking rises during this period, Hopper covers the difference up to \$100 USD. Conversely, if the price drops, the customer pays the lower rate. The average cost of a Price Freeze policy is around \$30 USD, but according to Hopper, travelers using this option have saved an average of \$80 USD on their tickets, with average savings rising to \$200 USD for flights booked during holiday times.

Although Hopper is a well-known pioneer of the price freeze feature, it is not alone in offering this service. Our research has identified more than 30 booking platforms that offer similar options under various names such as "Secure Price," "Hold Price," and "Keep Fare."

Interestingly, WizzAir's "Fare Lock" was introduced as far back as 2017, even before Hopper popularized its Price Freeze. The latter has now been white-labeled and is offered by numerous other travel providers, including Trip.com, Agoda, Amadeus, JetBlue, and MakeMyTrip.

Flight Subscriptions: The Emerging Trend in Aviation

In recent years, the subscription economy has permeated every aspect of our lives. We pay flat fees for streaming

services, expedited deliveries, online storage, and much more.

Interestingly, the airline industry, typically an early adopter of pricing innovations, is only now beginning to fully incorporate subscription models into its services. However, it's worth noting that travel poses a unique challenge when it comes to subscription services. Unlike the frequent usage patterns seen in music streaming, for example, travel tends to be a "low volume, high value" activity. This means that making subscription models work effectively in this context might prove more challenging when compared to services consumed on a more regular basis.

Nonetheless, there are promising initiatives that are exploring and overcoming these challenges in exciting ways. The concept is simple: customers pay a regular flat fee granting them access to specific flight services for a predetermined period.

Here are several promising airline initiatives emerging in recent times:

- WizzAir and Caravelo's partnership introduced the "Flight Pass," allowing subscribers two round trips per month for a monthly fee starting at \$49. The service has been particularly successful among millennials, Generation X, and Gen Z travelers.

- Alaska Airlines also launched a flight subscription program in partnership with Caravelo.

- Frontier Airlines rolled out its GoWild all-you-can-fly pass in May of this year.

- Volaris in Mexico and Air Asia in Malaysia have launched flight subscription products, reportedly with promising results.

As the subscription model continues to transform industries globally, airlines are waking up to the benefits of consistent revenue and customer loyalty these plans can deliver.



It'll be fascinating to see how this trend develops and impacts the future of airline commerce.

The Buy-Now-Pay-Later Wave in Air Travel

Buy-now-pay-later (BNPL), a burgeoning (and heavily debatable) trend in the online retail landscape, is now making its mark in the airline industry. This financial tool lets consumers split retail transactions into smaller, mostly interest-free installments that they can repay over time, making it an attractive option for those who value financial flexibility.

However, it's important to recognize the context within which BNPL schemes are growing. Their uptake is likely linked not just to their availability and convenience, but also to economic circumstances, levels of disposable income, inflation, and other economic factors limiting people's purchasing power. Some observers have raised concerns about these schemes, suggesting they utilize a tougher economic environment and may exploit people's desire to spend beyond their means. While BNPL can provide beneficial financial flexibility, it's crucial to bear in mind the potential risks and drawbacks of overextending financially.

Undoubtedly, the adoption of BNPL has seen a dramatic increase over the past five years. In the United States

alone, it's estimated that nearly a quarter of the population – approximately 59 million people above the age of 14 with internet access – used BNPL at least once in the past year, according to Insider Intelligence. This is in stark contrast to 2018, when less than 2 million people (or 0.6% of Americans) had used this payment method.

This trend is not limited to the United States; the rapid adoption of BNPL is observable in most developed countries. Globally, forecasts on BNPL spending anticipate impressive Compound Annual Growth Rates (CAGR) of between 22% and 26% until 2030, depending on the source.

Traditionally, the travel sector was slower to embrace the BNPL trend.

In 2019, less than 1% of the total travel merchandise value was paid through deferred payments, according to research from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. However, this trend has rapidly evolved. BNPL in travel is now outpacing most other retail categories, demonstrating the vast potential for airlines and travel providers to leverage this increasingly popular payment method.

Yet, it's crucial to consider the underlying economic conditions driving this growth. For many, annual holidays

and travel plans are non-negotiable – a “holy” part of their yearly summer routine. In tougher economic times, consumers may feel compelled to use installment payments to finance these trips. This necessity could be contributing significantly to the rapid adoption of BNPL in travel. Critics, therefore, question whether the rise of BNPL is truly a sign of innovation or if it's more a response to economic necessity.

Regardless of these debates, the trend's momentum in the travel industry is undeniable and suggests an avenue that airlines and travel providers can't afford to ignore.

Current survey data reinforces the huge potential of BNPL within the travel sector going forward.

- According to Amadeus, approximately 40% of travelers would consider using BNPL to book their next summer vacation.
- Even more strikingly, almost 70% of travelers revealed that they would be willing to spend more on a given trip if offered a BNPL payment option.

These attitudes are also reflected in real-world booking behavior.

An iSeatz report found that offering a



BNPL option at checkout can boost conversion rates by 20 to 30% and elevate average ticket sales by 30 to 50%.

Uplift, a leading BNPL provider (recently acquired by Upgrade) that has partnered with more than 30 airlines, including United Airlines, Lufthansa, Air Canada, and AeroMexico, has observed a notable shift in customer behavior due to BNPL options. According to their CEO, consumers who would typically opt for economy seats are now more likely to purchase premium economy or even first-class tickets, demonstrating that BNPL empowers consumers to splurge on superior services.

Thus, BNPL doesn't merely facilitate payments; it actively encourages incremental sales, raises the average order value, and attracts a new customer demographic.

Yet, this potential upside for airlines may also stimulate consumers to overextend their budgets, a responsibility that providers must very carefully manage.

Nevertheless, the commercial benefits have led many airlines to experiment with BNPL features. Travel+Leisure has compiled a list of 16 airlines offering BNPL options, including the latest adopters like Eastern Airways, Iberia, and Jet2. Our own OAG research

indicates that more than 60 airlines are now offering BNPL in one form or another. To facilitate the implementation of BNPL, airlines commonly collaborate with a growing breed of BNPL travel-tech startups like Uplift, FlyNowPayLater, Affirm, Klarna, Pay Later Travel, and Flymble.

With the right implementation and ethical considerations, BNPL can indeed transform how consumers book and pay for their air travel, making it a key component in the digital transformation of the airline industry.

The Strategic Importance of Payment Innovations

In conclusion, as the landscape of airline commerce continues to evolve, the intersection of travel and fintech is not just an exciting opportunity for innovation, but a strategic imperative.

By improving payment methods with approaches like Price Freezes, Subscription Models, and Buy-Now-Pay-Later schemes, airlines can prevent further disintermediation and truly tap into the full value of airline retailing.

These novel payment strategies are not only transforming the way we book and pay for travel. They are also helping to redefine the relationship between airlines and their customers.

The future of airline commerce will be shaped by airlines that embrace these changes, seizing the opportunity to enhance the customer experience and optimize their own revenue streams.

In the visual below, we have gathered ten of the most promising travel-tech startups leading this transformation. These startups, specifically focused on travel, represent the vanguard of this shift, reshaping the future of airline commerce one transaction at a time.

Please note that we have intentionally excluded non-travel-specific BNPL providers like Affirm and Klarna from this list. Additionally, we have included a select few Travel Membership providers, which are especially committed to enabling more affordable airline flight prices, despite the existence of many more in the wider market.

OAG is a leading global travel data provider which has been powering the growth and innovation of the air travel ecosystem since 1929. It has a large network of flight information data, including schedules, flight status, connection times, and industry references such as airport codes. For more information, visit www.oag.com.



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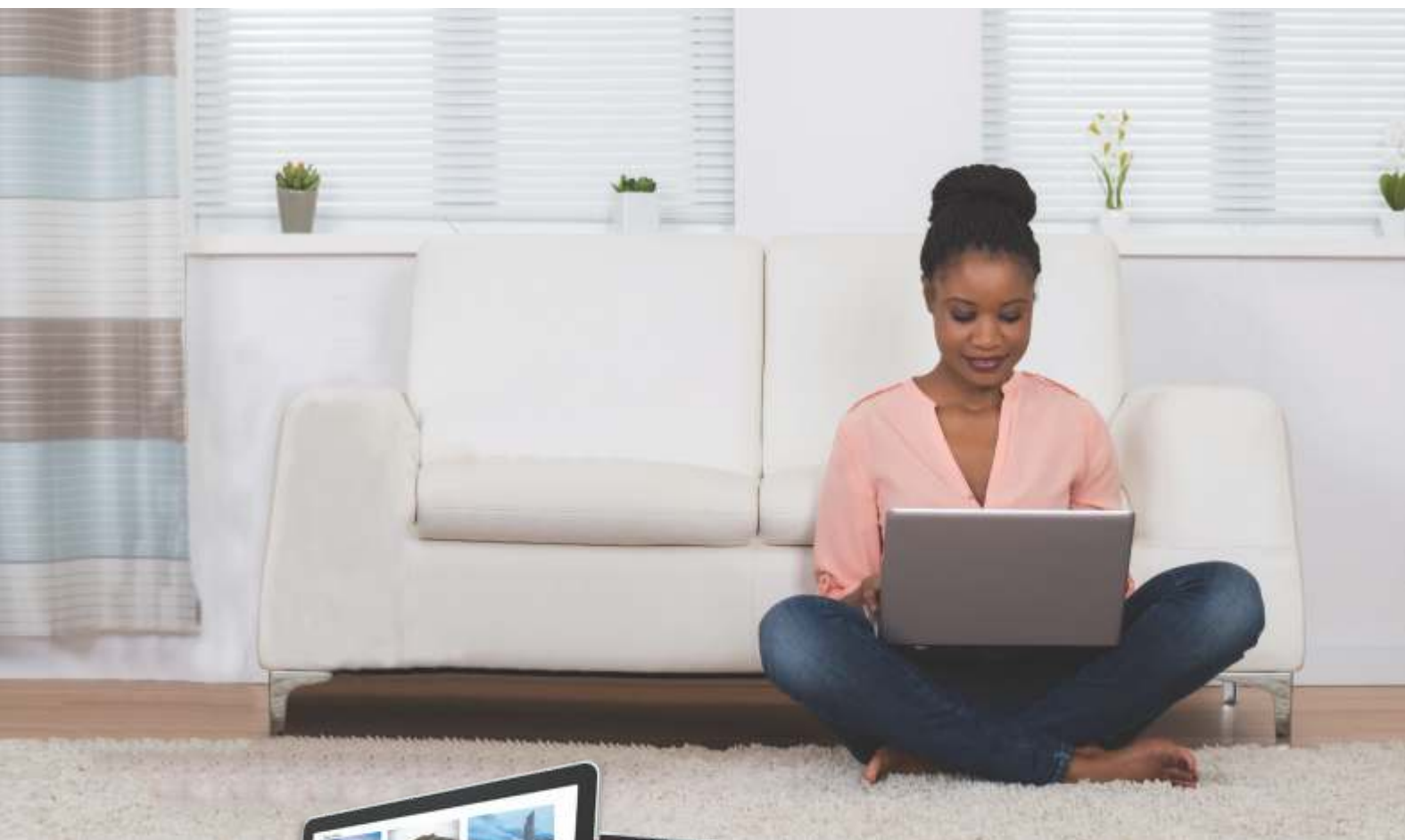
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