

The Quality of CAMAIR-Co services in the Central African Sub-region: repercussions for Cameroon economic growth

Of the many topics likely to cause turmoil within a Cameroonian social gathering – the creation of Camair-Co and the quality of its services is the most sickening. Cameroonians are conversant with an aviation history replete with mismanagement scandals dating back to the 1970s and the first state-owned airlines. Inept management and subsequent unsuccessful privatization of the erstwhile carrier, Cameroon Airlines, negates any positive expectation for its current replacement, Camair-Co. Current public opinion in Cameroon and the Central African sub-regions suggests that Cameroon Airlines Corporation is little more than a cosmetic improvement of the so-called defunct Cameroon Airlines. Camair-Co is yet to prove Cameroonians wrong.

Without a doubt, Cameroon is the economic powerhouse of the Central Africa sub-region. It is logical that, in a competitive and ever-growing aviation market, Camair-Co should own a greater market share and provide topnotch services to its clientele. However, the company has fallen far below expectations there by calling for a huge change in strategy. Created in 2006 by presidential decree Camair-Co went operational on March 28th 2011, with a fleet of three aircraft and enormous enthusiasm. Now, with five years of operations serving four destinations (N'djamena, Libreville, Brazzaville and Kinshasa) in Central Africa, three (Cotonou, Ikeja and Abidjan) in West Africa and one (Paris) in Europe, this lone state-owned airline company can boast only a fleet of five airplanes. It has been unable to break-even and the quality of its services is subject to a multiplicity of negative reviews from its clientele – the majority of whom are in the Central Africa sub-region.

The vision and hope for a more reliable carrier is gradually transmuting into an illusion. Scheduled flights are subject to frequent delays and cancellations (without prior notification to the passengers) due to technical issues reported the Centre for Aviation's 2012 report. What greater deterrent for potential passengers than the fact that Cameroonian authorities use alternative carriers for both regional and international travel? Even more revealing is the disappointing and insignificant increase from 124,200 to 125,316 in the annual number of passengers transported internationally by the airlines between 2013 and 2014 despite an 8.8% increase in seat availability. Further, a 7.7% drop in the client-based domestic travel calls to question the quality of Camair-Co services not only in Cameroon but within the region as a whole. According to airlinesratings.com, Camair-Co performs badly with a safety rating of 3/7 and beating the global average only in 4 out of 8 International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) parameters for airline safety and effective implementation (EI). With a pass in licensing, operations, airworthiness and air navigation services, the ICAO parameters indicate that the lackluster service performance of the airline is due to below-average effort in aerodrome maintenance,

accident investigation and more importantly legislation and organization. In fact, one would have thought that contracts with aviation-industry powerhouses such as Servair and Lufthansa, the legislation and organization of the service would be efficient and high quality.

Repercussions for Cameroon Economic Growth

Given that air transport is the fastest growing means of transportation in the world with a total contribution of \$2.4 trillion in global gross domestic product, as well as providing (directly and indirectly) approximately 58 million jobs worldwide, the air transport industry is unequivocally a driver of economic growth. Air transport supports 6.9 million jobs in Africa and accounts for \$80.5 billion in African GDP. With a total of 69.8 million passengers and 245 airline companies in Africa, competition within the industry is high. Therefore, the actions and services of individual airline companies have a significant impact on the economic growth of their respective countries. With a status as the breadbasket of the Central Africa sub-region coupled with its vision2035 aimed at economic emergence, the performance of Cameroon's lone airline company - Camair-Co -will have either advantageous or catastrophic ramifications on the economic growth of Cameroon. This, in essence, implies that airline operations and quality of service are integral components in both the short and long term economic growth objectives of the nation. Hence, the less-than-acceptable quality of service has had a negative effect on the economic growth objective of the country.

Though Cameroon is the fifth largest producer of oil in the region, agriculture still remains the backbone of its economy; constituting 54% of the total export structure (UNCTADSTATS, 2014) and employing over 70% of the total work force. With a commitment to improved agricultural methods to meet rising demands of the region, agricultural output is expected to grow, thereby creating the need for quick and reliable airline services. The increase in foreign direct investment within the region as well as the rising number of international non-governmental organizations conducting programs in Africa as a whole and specifically within the Central Africa sub-region also provides a huge market for aviation services and an opportunity for Camair-Co to increase operations and boost the economic growth figures of the country.

In five years of operations, Camair-Co has been unable to take advantage of this growing need for airline services, most specifically due to its inability to continuously improve service quality. The Company's failure has been a major contributor to the disappointing economic growth of the- keeping it below the 5.5% target growth rate stipulated in the Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (GESP).The gap in service quality created by Camair-Co has prompted a scramble by different airlines such as Turkish Airlines, Rwandair, Senegal Airlines and Ivorian Airlines to take advantage of the growing market. If this trend continues, the Cameroon will be losing enormous monies yearly. Coupled with the fact that Camair-Co receives state subventions, the repercussions on Cameroon's 2035 economic growth plan will be even more devastating; our vision of an emerging economy will remain just that...a vision. This is a clarion call for the authorities-that-be to conduct an in-depth investigation of the problems plaguing the Camair-Co, and to take necessary action to fix the problems. As stated by the world-class award-winning speaker and singer, bestselling author and media personality, [Dr. Willie Jolly](#) "[A Vision without an Action is an Illusion](#). And an Action without a Vision is Confusion". We have a vision, therefore we must take action and this action should be

The way forward

«In every problem is found the wherewithal to its solution,» so says Napoleon Hill in his book *Think and Grow Rich*. Camair-Co cannot be indifferent.

The high turnover of CEOs and additional top management, usually expatriates receiving huge financial bene-

fits, should be addresses immediately.

Punctuality, undercapitalization and outdated equipment (planes, etc.) need to be addressed. The capital base should be strengthened through private strategic partnerships and public-private partnerships.

In this fast paced and highly competitive business environment, a privatized company is generally more efficient than a 100% state-owned and subsidized company. Camair-Co would likely see improvements when placed in private hands.

Develop a strong human resource base through investment in human capital, participation in international conferences and drawing inspiration and lessons from the successes of other airlines that operate within the continent.

Besides servicing the aircrafts of the airlines, Camair-Co can also create a service structure whereby maintenance is provided to aircrafts of different airlines.

Finally, the development of the necessary infrastructure in Cameroon will go a long way to reverse this downward spiraling situation, improve Camair-Co services within the region and positively impact the economic growth of Cameroon.

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