Book Review V: The Air Transport Industry in Africa: A Legal Analysis of the Single African Air Transport Market (Routledge, 2025) — Air Transport Development, Liberalisation and Growth in Africa

By:

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1. General Introduction

This book presents a comprehensive examination of the African air transport industry, widely and comprehensively combining historical insight, policy analysis, legal frameworks, and strategic recommendations to outline the trajectory of aviation development in Africa. It positions the aviation sector not simply as an economic driver but as a strategic enabler of continental integration, trade, and socio-economic transformation, an aspiration shared

globally. At a time when Africa's aviation industry is rebuilding after the unprecedented impact of COVID-19 and navigating challenging liberalisation initiatives such as the Yamoussoukro Decision (YD) and the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM), the book offers a timely and relevant contribution to policy discourse.

The author argues that Africa's geographical position and characteristics including vast distances, landlocked regions, and poor and uneven infrastructure, makes aviation indispensable for connectivity, social integration and economic inclusion. The prologue situates air transport within broader economic and demographic realities, highlighting infrastructure deficits, limited purchasing power, and the continent's growth potential. The text convincingly demonstrates that aviation bridges geographic and economic divides and can accelerate integration and trade across Africa, while highlighting the challenges of pandemics, geopolitics and other unprecedented predicaments. Nonetheless, it could have been prudent to also highlight the nagging issues of financial constraints, and weak implementation of continental and national initiatives such as African Continental free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and Freedom of movement protocol which are strongly linked to aviation.

The multidisciplinary nature of the work is noteworthy, as it integrates historical narratives, regulatory analysis, and industry challenges, allowing a deep understanding of aviation evolution through both macroeconomic and institutional lenses. This approach ensures the book speaks not only to academics but also to regulators, airline executives, policymakers, and development practitioners seeking practical guidance.

2. General Summary

The book analyses the African aviation landscape, examines economic indicators, infrastructure gaps, and demographic trends shaping air transport exigency. It emphasises aviation's role as a bridge across geographic barriers and highlights opportunities for growth through regional integration and improved connectivity over the years.

A significant portion of the text is devoted to the historical development of aviation in Africa, tracing the industry from colonial-era aviation expansion through the rise of national carriers and the gradual emergence of liberalisation

frameworks. The historical narrative illustrates how imperial interests shaped early route networks and infrastructure, creating structural imbalances that continue to influence connectivity today.

The book also analyses the legal and institutional frameworks governing African aviation, including ICAO provisions, bilateral air service agreements, and regional initiatives such as SAATM. The discussion highlights the complexities of balancing liberalisation with safety oversight, security compliance, and regulatory harmonisation. The findings, conclusions and proposed recommendations clearly specify the strengthening of governance, financing infrastructure, and accelerating continental integration. Some key areas that adversely affects aviation such as technical personnel shortages, financial losses and interventions, innovative utilisation of limited infrastructure such as waterways and strengthening of domestic aviation operations and air cargo to stimulate international aviation are some areas that could have augmented the relevance of aviation.

3. Core Arguments and Strengths

A central argument of aviation growth in Africa is viewed through a holistic lens that incorporates economic, political, historical, and institutional realities. The author demonstrates that aviation challenges are deeply rooted in structural issues such as fragmented markets, institutional weaknesses, and historical legacies rather than merely operational inefficiencies.

A major strength is the detailed historical narrative, which provides context for contemporary policy debates, analysing colonial aviation development and geopolitical competition over routes, explaining why intra-African connectivity remains limited despite decades of policy reform. Some States mentioned as having potential for growth have since slipped such as Lesotho and Madagascar.

The extensive use of empirical data further enhances credibility. Traffic growth statistics, fleet comparisons, and connectivity indicators support the argument that Africa remains one of the last frontiers of aviation growth despite rapid population expansion.

Another key strength is the emphasis on air cargo development and hub strategies. The book highlights Africa's strategic geographic location between Asia, Europe, and the Americas and argues that cargo infrastructure could become a cornerstone of future aviation growth, particularly within the context of AfCFTA and global supply chain transformation. The recognition of the aviation sector's resilience during and after COVID-19 also strengthens the narrative, balancing optimism with realism by acknowledging both the recovery trajectory and structural vulnerabilities affecting African airlines.

4. Counterarguments and Challenges

While the book advocates strongly for liberalisation and integration, it also highlights several challenges that complicate implementation. A key counterargument concerns national sovereignty and the reluctance of some states to fully embrace open-skies policies. Protectionist tendencies, particularly among countries with dominant national carriers, continue to slow the pace of integration.

Economic disparities among African states pose significant obstacles. Limited purchasing power, high taxes and charges, and uneven infrastructure development challenge the assumption that liberalisation alone will drive growth.

Technological disparities present another challenge. Despite the emphasis on innovation and digitalisation, many African aviation systems lack the resources to adopt advanced technologies quickly, creating uneven development between major and emerging hubs and diverse markets.

Leadership and governance issues further complicate the landscape. Weak institutional capacity, inconsistent regulatory enforcement, and political interference remain persistent concerns that could undermine even well-designed policy frameworks.

5. Structural Observations and Considerations — Positive and Critical Perspectives

The book offers several structural observations that are both constructive and open to critical reflection, particularly regarding prioritisation, detail, and

practical application.

On the positive side, the author provides a clear vision for harmonised regulatory frameworks across Africa. Aligning national policies with continental initiatives such as SAATM reflects a pragmatic understanding of the need for consistency in safety oversight, market access, and operational standards. The emphasis on ICAO compliance highlights the importance of strong Civil Aviation Authorities (CAAs) as pillars of aviation governance.

Equally commendable is the focus on human capital development. The book underscores the importance of investing in training, technical expertise, and Next Generation of Aviation Professionals (NGAP) initiatives to address workforce shortages, an area strongly aligned with ICAO’s global safety and capacity-building priorities.

However, from a critical standpoint, the prioritisation of certain policy themes occasionally appears broad rather than deeply operationalised. While the book advocates harmonisation and integration, it provides limited detail on sequencing reforms or the mechanisms through which states with varying capacities can achieve alignment. For example, cargo hub development is presented as a strategic opportunity but could benefit from more detailed implementation pathways, financing models, and governance frameworks.

Similarly, the emphasis on technological innovation may appear aspirational without clearer guidance on cost implications, phased adoption strategies, or regional collaboration models tailored to Africa’s diverse economic realities.

The treatment of domestic aviation markets, including high-volume operations such as Nigeria, is valuable but could more explicitly connect domestic network strengthening to continental integration strategies. Greater clarity on how national reforms translate into regional competitiveness would enhance structural coherence.

Another critical observation relates to governance and leadership priorities. While the book correctly identifies weak leadership and management as barriers, deeper discussion on institutional reform benchmarks, performance measurement, and accountability mechanisms would strengthen practical application.

6. Conclusions and Overall Assessment

Overall, the book stands as a substantial and relevant contribution to the discourse on African aviation development. Its integration of historical context, legal frameworks, and strategic recommendations offers a comprehensive understanding of the industry's evolution and future prospects.

The author's call for investment in technology, cargo infrastructure, and human capital aligns strongly with global aviation trends and continental policy frameworks such as Agenda 2063 and PIDA. The emphasis on NGAP implementation, profitability aspirations, strengthened domestic aviation, and professional governance within CAAs and airlines provides a practical roadmap for policymakers and industry stakeholders.

Importantly, the book balances optimism with realism. It recognises the remarkable recovery of aviation after COVID-19 while acknowledging persistent challenges such as high operating costs, regulatory fragmentation, and institutional capacity gaps.

In conclusion, this work succeeds in bridging history, policy, and future strategy, presenting a thoughtful and nuanced vision for African aviation. Its detailed narrative, strong analytical foundation, and forward-looking recommendations make it a valuable reference for regulators, academics, and aviation leaders seeking to shape a more integrated, resilient, and competitive air transport ecosystem across the continent.

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