

## A STUDY INTO THE CAUSES OF DECLINE IN THE NUMBER OF FOREIGN FLIGHTS IN ZIMBABWEAN'S AVIATION INDUSTRY

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### **Abstract**

The researcher seeks to investigate the causes of decline of foreign flights to Zimbabwe. The civil aviation authority of Zimbabwe owns all the airports in Zimbabwe and it has experienced a heavy decline of airlines coming to its airports and this has led to a drastic decline in revenue that has negatively affected the economy of Zimbabwe.

The main research objectives are to identify the causes of this decline, to assess the impact of this decline to the performance of civil aviation authority of Zimbabwe, and to the economy. The study further tries to establish the strategies that can be used address the causes of the decline.

Primary data and secondary data were used to extract information that is relevant. Questionnaires, interviews, and participatory observation were used as research instruments in order to gather relevant information related to this research.

Data was collected through questionnaires that were sent to airline representatives and air travellers. Out of 24 questionnaires distributed 18 were returned. Interviews were also used to extract information from directors, managers and staff of CAAZ. A total of 16 CAAZ members were interviewed. Observations at Joshua Mqabuko and Harare international airports were also done by the researcher.

Findings from the study embarked on revealed that it is not only political reasons that have led to the decline as it is widely argued by the responsible authorities. Competition, service quality, economic environment, social environment and technology among others have played a part.

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Lack of international marketing strategies also contributed to the poor performance of civil aviation authority of Zimbabwe.

**Key words: civil aviation authority, foreign flights, airlines, travellers, technology and infrastructure, tourist, techno parks and industrial clusters, Z.T.A, Z,R.A**

### **Introduction / background**

Civil Aviation Authority of Zimbabwe was under the control of the Department of Civil Aviation (DCA), in the Ministry of Transport and Energy. The Civil Aviation Authority of Zimbabwe (CAAZ) took over and was mandated to commercialise the activities of the former. The government of Zimbabwe wholly owns CAAZ. The organisation was mandated to promote, develop and regulate civil aviation in Zimbabwe. It operates in a globalised industry and its revenue is mainly derived from airlines, cargo and passenger handling business, which is deemed as cash cows of the civil aviation business.

The study will pay particular attention to the causes of decline in the number of foreign flights in Zimbabwe's aviation industry.

In 1993 foreign flights to Zimbabwe were at 13666 and there was a significant growth up 19176 in 1999. A sharp decrease to 16405 was experienced in 2000. Furthermore, the figures continued to decline sharply as the nation approached the 2008 harmonized elections.

Despite the 2010 world cup played in South Africa and the signing of the global agreement between the two major political parties still the environment at CAAZ did not improve.

The marketing and business development department's focus is governed by the detects of the prevailing macro-economic environment, the dwindling passenger and aircraft movement, the shrinking revenue base and the declining in cargo throughput. The immediate situation calls for survival strategies that can be initiated and implemented in order to keep few airlines that are currently flying to Zimbabwe and to attract more new players. It is pertinent to identify critical problem areas that are negatively affecting the airlines. There is a co-relationship between aircraft movement and passenger movement, both declines with similar rates. Destination attractiveness also decline proportionately, therefore there is a co-relationship between destination attractiveness and passenger aircraft movement. Cargo movement levels declined as well, due to decline in agricultural output, and other cargo airlines withdrew and those remained

reduced their frequency. Passenger airline marketing is very crucial because presently only 10 airline are landing in Zimbabwe.

### List of some airlines that withdrew

#### International airlines

KLM Royal Swazi

Qantas

Lufthansa

Austrian

Air Astral

Air France

Balkam

Alitalia

Swiss air

#### Regional airlines

Ghana

air Mauritius

Reunion

air Tanzania

Cameroon

Cargolux

Das air cargo

### Research Objectives

- Identify the causes of decline in the number of foreign flights in Zimbabwe's aviation industry.
- Assess the impact of decline in the number of foreign flights to the performance of CAAZ and the country's economy
- Establish strategies that can help to address the causes of decline in the number of foreign flights in the country's aviation industry.

### The significance of the study

The research will first and far most contribute significantly in adding value to the already existing knowledge in the industry and country. It will also bring new knowledge in showing the importance for a global perspective and the adoption of international marketing strategies and also to keep in touch with the changes in technology at global level in order to be among the best in the aviation industry. Also will improve in decision making by including the issues of psychic distance in policy formulation, crafting regulatory services and strategy implementation in order to meet the different and ever changing needs for customers who use the company products and services and in return there will be an increase in foreign currency generated and the development of the country and the industry at large.

This will help to fight competition, improve on regulatory and service delivery, lobbying and advocacy and also to request financial resources from the government on capital projects and also on operations where necessary. To a larger extent that will help the industry to design some survival strategies. This also informs the government on how beneficial the industry might be to the economy if well managed since it is one of the key parastatal that has been successfully commercialised.

### **Research methodology**

The author used a descriptive research study in order to fully describe the causes of decline in the number of foreign flights or airlines and their frequency in Zimbabwe's aviation industry, and also add to the limited research on the impact of international marketing strategies in the aviation industry in an attempt to address the current challenges and to ensure long term sustainability of the industry and CAAZ in particular. The author made use of questionnaires, interviews and observation. Also the researchers made use of secondary data sources that constituted the association's information in the form of publications, internet surfing, journals, magazines on which data was sought to describe issues surrounding the poor performance of CAAZ. The researchers employed both closed and open-ended questions in the questionnaires. The questionnaires were distributed to management and employees such that qualitative and quantitative data can be gathered. The qualitative research was widely used in interviews and observations as it allows unstructured questioning or observation techniques where necessary. Leedy and Ormrod (2001:101) argued that qualitative research is used to answer questions about the complex nature of phenomena. It is also referred to as soft data and it was helpful in exploring data especially during interviews. The author used quantitative research in the study to obtain quantitative data on issues such as the rate at which passengers were declining and the number of foreign flights that withdrew. The researcher also used observation in order to find customer's perceptions on service delivery and also find the challenges faced by airlines, air travellers and staff during check-in and arrivals. Emory (1980) stated that observations involve noticing what is going on around the researcher, through systematic observation, recording, description, analysis and interpretation of people's behaviour. This was very useful as customer's emotions were also observed when the quality of service perceived was not met or when they were dissatisfied with the service delivery. A questionnaire allows each participant to respond to the same set of predetermined questions organised in a particular order,(De Vaus 1991). The

researcher made use of questionnaires to get an understanding of the service delivery and reasons respondents were holding about the causes of decline in the number of foreign flights in Zimbabwe's aviation industry. Robson (1993:228) refers to an interview as a situation where one person talks and another listens. Personal, unstructured interviews were used to get information because it provides in-depth knowledge and were focused on crucial aspects relevant to the subject under research and interview guide was used in order to moderate the process and avoid unnecessary issues to be probed. The interviews were flexible because open-ended questions were used in order to get free responses so as to access comprehensive data from the interviews.

For interviews the researcher gained access to 16 respondents, thus the directors, management staff and airlines personnel. The major area of focus was to get the causes of decline in the number of foreign flights and the impact and the way forward in an attempt to address the situation. Those who were interviewed have the knowledge about the operations of foreign airlines. The focus was on that key information because it assured reliability of information provided (Huber, 1985). During interviews probing was widely used to ascertain some unclear responses. Some managers were requested to provide documentary evidence to support responses in interviews.

**Table below depicts the composition of sample space**

**Questionnaires issued**

Airlines	12
Travellers	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>

**Interviews done**

Airlines	4
CAAZ Directors	6
CAAZ Managers	3
CAAZ Staff	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>

**Total sample space**

Questionnaires	24
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Interviews	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>

Wegner,(1999:170) defines sampling as the process of selecting a representative subset of observations from a population to determine the characteristics of the random variable under study. Saunders et al (2003) stated that a sample is an alternative to census. They argued that a sample may be appropriate where it would be impractical to survey the whole population or because of time or budgets constraints.

### Data presentation and analysis

From the questionnaires issued, the following results were obtained:

#### Summary of questionnaire responses

Target population	Questionnaires sent	Questionnaires received	Response rate (%)
Airlines	12	8	67
Travellers	12	10	83
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>75</b>

The average response rate of all participants was 75%. For Airlines it was 67% and for the travellers it was 83%. This shows that out of 24 questionnaires, 18 were returned. For Airlines out of 12 issued, 8 were received and the other 4 did not return the questionnaires. For travellers out of 12 questionnaires issued, 10 were received and 2 were not received.

#### Interpretation of the response rate

The high response rate may be attributable to the nature of the topic. Some airlines did not return the questionnaires; the reason might be that they did not know what the information might be used for. Some might have been worried about the confidentiality of the information, thinking that the material they provide could be used to victimise them. All those fears were actually addressed in face to face interviews with the participants. Non-response by other research

participants may be attributable lack of interest in the topic being studied or may be an indication of language barrier that prevented them from responding.

### Analysis of causes to the decline of foreign flights

#### Response to political instability as a major cause of decline of foreign flights

	Airlines	Travellers
Political reasons	75%	100%
Non political reasons	25%	0%

*Source: airline questionnaires*

The table shows the responses obtained on the effects of the political instability that culminated in Zimbabwe over the past decade or so to be a major cause in decline of foreign flights. The source of data was extrapolated from questions 2 and 3 of the airline questionnaires. Six of the responses from the airlines sub group showed that political unrest in Zimbabwe has been the chief cause. All the travellers who returned the questionnaires also indicated that political unrest has precipitated the decline in foreign flights.

The researcher realised that politics had a part to play in aviation. If airlines do not realise any business in any country they simple withdraw from the route. To a larger extent, the land reform programme that took place in the country contributed to the aviation's demise. Airlines like Das Air Cargo and Cargolux did not have any more business to carry agricultural produce and flowers and they terminated the route. The researcher also established that most travellers feared coming to Zimbabwe due to reports of breakdown of law and violence that escalated during the era. The political tension between Harare and London played a major role to the withdrawal of British Airways and its allies. Critical economic ties were also terminated as a result of diplomatic collapse. The airlines that were interviewed had more than 10 years flying experience to Zimbabwe hence the author found authenticity that the findings are from well informed sources.

#### Effects of negative publicity to the aviation in Zimbabwe

	Has effect	Has no effect
Travellers	90%	10%

The data obtained from question 6 of the air travellers questionnaires. Nine out of ten who responded to the questionnaires, described the negative publicity Zimbabwe was receiving through foreign broadcasters like CNN and BBC as having affected travellers. They indicated that Zimbabwe was viewed as an unsafe and insecure destination and that has led to dwindling number of air travellers thus taking away business for airlines. As point out by one of the managers, German Lufthansa used to fly with an average of one hundred passengers every Wednesday before 2002 but when it withdrew its route in 2005 it was flying with less than twenty passengers and it had to pull out of the route citing viability challenges. Of the 10% respondents who argued that publicity had no effect, indicated that the decline the negative publicity from the media was just a media war Zimbabwe remained a safe destination.

The author established that the negative publicity has greatly affected Zimbabwe aviation as safe and secure destination. Zimbabwe continued to suffer isolation from the rest of the world thus affecting tourist arrivals. As a result a decline in foreign flights was experienced.

#### **Customer's perception on quality of service delivery at the airports**

	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
Timeous	50%	30%	20%	0%
Check in procedures	80%	15%	5%	0%
Baggage distribution	88%	12%	0%	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>0%</b>

The table shows views or perceptions from airlines who are the core customers when it comes to service delivery at Zimbabwean aviation. In terms of being punctual to customers' needs 50% indicated it was poor, 30% average, 20% said it was good. The service of the check in procedure 80% said it was poor, 15% average, 5% said it was good. From the traveller's perception 88% of the airlines indicated that it was poor and average 12%. The overall response to service delivery

was 73% poor, 19% average and 8% said it was good. The findings showed that most airlines need a good service delivery as that is depicted by the poor high percentage in service delivery. The reason that no airline rated service delivery in all aspects as excellent meant that the quality is very poor and leading to alternative routes by airlines. When Zambian Airways withdrew in 2008 it cited depressed delivery service. The aviation employees are very slow when it comes to checking in customers thus delaying take off times added to the slow turnaround time. Passengers on transit their bags sometimes would be improperly tagged and they would go to wrong destinations and this was one of the reasons why they withdrew their services.

#### **Response on the state of technology and infrastructure at aviation.**

	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent
Condition of buildings	40	40	20	0
Logistics support equipment	60	20	20	0
Runways and taxiways	60	20	20	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>0</b>

The table above depict the responses on the state of infrastructure and technology. Of the total respondents 40% stated that conditions of the buildings were poor, another 40% said the conditions were average, whereas the other 20% said that the conditions were good. On the logistics support equipment part of it 60% of the respondents indicated that it was poor, 20% said it was average and another 20% said it was good. When it came to the state of runways and taxiways 60% of the respondents said it was poor whereas 20% said it remained average though and the other 20% said it was good. In total 53% of the respondents thinks the conditions are poor, 27% average, 20% good none of the respondents ever indicated excellence.

The general findings in as far as infrastructure and technology in aviation was concerned it was deteriorating as depicted in the above table. It shows that most airlines do not like the conditions in Zimbabwean aviation. The runways still need to be refurbished as that was seen from most

airlines monthly reports complaining about the old bumpy surface and small potholes. The logistic and support equipment is absolute, the viewer canopy at Chitungwizabase station that links with the radar in order to necessitate communication between the pilot and air traffic controller when landing is not fully functional and runway lights are not repaired on time. On this note the researcher noted that the states of buildings are an eye sores especially the old terminal in Harare and the only terminal in Bulawayo.

The decline has also had an impact to the Zimbabwean economy as tourist receipts dropped yet tourism is the cash cow of most economies, as it is expected to inject funds and help the economy. In the Financial gazette 30 April 2009, the minister of tourism Walter Mzembi argued that at one point 45 airlines were flying to Zimbabwe but the number dropped to only ten.

The researcher established that there are a lot of international marketing strategies that need to be adopted by civil aviation authority of Zimbabwe to lure back the foreign flights. The strategies amongst others include international promotion, lobbying, advocacy and international negotiation. The airport is a product and in operations you have to sell your product by advertising it and lobbying for customers. That has not been the case with Zimbabwean airports. There has not been an advertisement in any form of media selling civil aviation to customers. This has led to Zambia marketing Victoria Falls as their tourist destination.

### Conclusions

This study adds to the knowledge about the impact of international marketing in an attempt to address the causes of decline in the number of foreign flights in Zimbabwe's aviation industry. A model has been derived which identify the internal and external environmental variables that affect the aviation industry and also the strategies airports can implement, like international marketing strategies and growth strategies in order to excel in the aviation which is a globalised industry. This clearly shows that failure to adapt and modify the environment may lead an organisation into discontinuity and failure. The external environment poses more challenges but also internal issues does affect. This is because internal support at all levels and across all functions is critical in international marketing of airports. Responsibility for international airport marketing is less likely to reside with one person or more likely to be a team representing the main functional areas. This is likely to be led by a senior manager or marketing manager who has the vision and the power to build shared support. Having a strong customer-oriented is important, but equally important is an international airport marketing supporting culture, based on shared

values. It is recognised, however, that wider marketing alone will not itself lead to higher levels of tourism and growth of aviation industry. The realisation of sustained growth depends first on domestic political stability, maintaining price-competitiveness in the face progressive penetration by competitors. Standardisation is also necessary, as there cannot be a better marketing tool than a satisfied customer.

In a nutshell, the tourism and aviation industries strive first of all in an atmosphere of peace and security. It requires good marketing, market research, orientation and promotion at both local and international arena to be successful. It requires infrastructural support, good transport and communication networks and public services such as constant water and electricity supplies. For the industry to regain its lost pride, depends upon the depth of commitment from the tourism, aviation, government, private players and the lessons learned from the present problems. External (domestic and international) and internal (intra-company) variables operate in co-alliance to influence the number of foreign flights, tourists' arrivals and cargo throughput and consequentially foreign currency inflow and adoption of strategies that must also include international marketing strategies.

### **Recommendations**

- **Government:** there is need for policies adopted by the government and the institutional mechanisms created to implement them together with a high level of cooperation between the public and the private sector.(Dieke 1998). The government needs to participate at regional aviation forums and pursue issues like the need for the region to have more flexible and liberal laws, increased exposure, better aviation infrastructure and private participation to a greater extent. The inclusive government should work to its expectations and bring back the confidence of foreigners. There is also need to avoid working at cross-purposes and lack of unity of purpose between government and business leaders. There is need for total commitment by both government and the private sector. All parties must be committed to change management and do away with status quo.
- **Industry:**there is need to establish Techno Parks and Industrial Clusters; these are industrial centres/parks that are created by universities, private sector and government and their purpose is to commercialise research ideas. If a nation brings together universities, industries and government together in a Techno Park that synergy results in unparalleled industry growth and economic boom. That may result in the birth of new products and pioneering leading brands.

Also of important is the development of industrial clusters, where organisations within the industry join together for the purpose of developing the industry in any way, for example the development of products and also the marketing of the industry at industry level.

- The ministry of transport and communication: they must understand the strategic importance of aviation to the development of the national economy in general and facilitation of trade, tourism, travel and foreign direct investment. There must be an understanding that Zimbabwe is competing with a host of countries in the sub-region and beyond. This calls for need to associate with external strategic partners at regional, international and global level.
- Organisation in general: internal support at all levels and across all functions is critical in customer services and marketing development. Therefore there is need for good customer service and the presence of a marketing philosophy in the whole organisation. The industry should utilise cross-functional teams, a strong customer orientation and a supporting culture to maximise the success of the aviation. Air transport and marketing development directors must participate actively in the development of global policies standards, programmes and infrastructure on civil aviation and strengthen regional cooperation. Regulatory change must be implemented gradually, so that airlines have time to adapt to the changes. There is need to implement declaration on air transport and to promote strategic alliances with viable airlines. There is need to give priority to re-branding of airports as destinations so that they portray attractive image which can lure airlines and airline travellers and international al traders and even investors.

Information technology department must develop effective online information distribution in order to fully support the efforts of the whole organisation.

Customer service department should ensure that customer service representatives or staff must be given powers to attend and solve problems themselves without having to go through a complex internal process. Human resources department must recruit, train and motivate employees because the essence of the service is in the interaction between customers and employees. Therefore it is crucial that employees are extrinsically and intrinsically motivated.

Airports directors and its respective departments must ensure that airports are modernised and spruced up to allow airports to accommodate larger aircrafts and be capable to meet at least 30 airlines in order to increase foreign currency especially in resort areas such as Victoria Falls. There must be continuous improvement in passenger facilitation and sensitization of personal of

immigration, customs, security and CAAZ personnel at airports to make them more courteous and passenger friendly. There is need to maintain aviation equipment and systems.

- Air Zimbabwe: must consolidate its operations through direct services, or partnerships with airlines operating in the chosen areas and also enter into code-share partnership, which would add value to its customers and operations. There is need for designing larger aircrafts, like the extended Boeing 747 and the super jumbo airbus 380, both will carry more passengers and ostensibly require fewer slots. Therefore it must transform its MA60 and Boeing 737 into low cost carriers in order to cut costs while satisfying the demand effectively.
- The tourism industry: the Zimbabwe tourism authority ZTA must help CAAZ lure more foreign airlines. The CEO of ZTA confessed while addressing the minister of tourism that he deliberately denied issuing operating licences to United Arab Emirates airline and Nationwide to fly in Zimbabwe in June 2008. The reason being that he wanted to protect Air Zimbabwe as those foreign airlines would provide a strong competition. (Financial Gazette 12-18 March 2009). That was a blow to CAAZ as it would have benefited in getting more flights. The stakeholders in the tourism sector must assist aviation industry in soliciting for more foreign flights.
- Zimbabwe revenue authority: the government through the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority must offer incentives in order for the industry to participate meaningfully in the turnaround of the economy. Also to remove withholding tax charged on tourists, as that is double taxation and makes Zimbabwe to be one the most expensive touring destination in the world.

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