

Building a pool of flight operators

By Benon Ojiambo

Statistics show that globally, the Aviation industry is projected to have a shortage of between 350,000 - 500,000 professional personnel by 2030 considering the rate of aircraft acquisitions and traffic growth as compared to the rate of qualification of the aviation professionals.

The shortage in Uganda can be witnessed by the huge number of foreign professionals supporting the industry due to lack of qualified Ugandan citizens.

The shortage is happening at a time when Uganda's aviation industry showing positive growth trends posting a 14.1% increase in passenger traffic from 1.08 million international arrivals in 2011 to 1.23 million arrivals in 2013, different players in the industry are devising means of leveraging on such affirmative results.

According to Capt. Dodd Katen-deigwa, the Vine Air Flight Academy (VAFA) chief executive, such statistics show that there are immense opportunities that need to be exploited.

"In countries where the industry has been well-focused such as the United Arab Emirates, it contributes nearly 30% to the country's GDP and employs nearly 7-15% of the entire country's workforce," Katen-deigwa said.

Driven by improving incomes, demographic boom, increasing urbanisation and the emergence of the middle class, aviation traffic in Africa is projected to grow by over 6% per annum for the next 20 years.

Located at Civil Aviation Authority's building at Kimaka Airfield in Jinja, VAFA has plans of building a state-of-the art facility with ample lecture theaters, simulator rooms, offices, a hanger for engineering training and a leisure center. The proposed academy structures will also house a new terminal for the Kimaka Airfield, transforming it into a regional airport.

This shall make VAFA a place that comes to one's mind when they think of offering affordable aviation training in the great lakes region, according to Katendeigwa.

He also adds that the location of the institute near the source of the Nile will offer life-balance opportunities for the prospective students for dining, accommodation, recreation and balanced student academic life.

The institution will also save on the money and time that has been previously spent on going to foreign countries for aviation training.

"You don't have to travel to Kenya, South Africa, Ethiopia or the United States to obtain a pilot's license when you can get one in Uganda

and save both money and time," he said.

Throughout its four years of existence, VAFA takes pride in the certification that it earned from CAA through a rigorous process that they underwent to the end, something that proves its authenticity as a genuine aviation and separates it from masqueraders in the industry. The Vine Air Flight Academy has been in existence for nearly four years now.

TEACHING FLIGHT OPERATORS

About 30km south of Kampala city center along the Kampala-Entebbe road at Lyamutundwe is located the yet to be certified Moriah Aviation Training Center (MATC).

Geoffrey Acok, MATC's head of training, says the growth of the aviation industry presents an opportunity for them to tap into and utilise.

A flight operations officer/dispatcher is person who assists in planning flight paths, taking into account wind direction and other conditions at destination or alter airports.

They usually work in the operations or control, weather, storms, aircraft performance and loading, landing condition center of the airline and advise pilots on conditions of paths change. They are 50% legally responsible for the safety of every flight they dispatch.

Though it has not yet been licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) as an aviation institute, MATC started its operations three years back and is in process of being certified by the regulator authority.

"It is now three years since we started the process of becoming a certified aviation training institute. We are not yet but in the process of being certified by the Civil Aviation Authority," Acok said.

Ignie Igunduura, CAA's manager for Public Affairs says certification is a long process that requires submission of various documents before being licensed.

"They (MATC) have submitted their application for certification but we are not certain of when they will be certified.

"We are fully aware of their existence and we provisionally allowed them to begin operations before being licensed because they have met the minimum requirements set by the regulator (CAA). There are no consequences of operating without being certified as long as whatever they do is within the law," Igunduura says.

Acok says they are looking



Moriah students during a flight plotting class



A flight operator guides a pilot on landing



forward to leveraging on the advantages that the huge youthful population in the country presents.

"We are targeting to equip the youths with skills the youths in the country. We aspire to as well as career guidance to students in secondary schools to join aviation so that it can grow further" he also said.

WHAT IT TAKES TO JOIN THE INSTITUTE

Anybody with at least two principle passes in science subjects like Physics, Mathematics and Geography at Advanced level is eligible to join the school, according to authorities.

Christopher Kagaba, the quality manager and Senior Instructor says they also accommodate Uganda

Certificate of Education (UCE) holders with good grades in sciences.

However, Kagaba adds, students shall be subjected to fundamentals of aviation training that one has to pass before being admitted.

Because CAA's minimum age to qualify for a license as a flight operations officer is 21, the minimum age requirement for admission is 20 years because by the time one finishes the 9 months course, they will be making 21 years.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Kagaba says that the establishment of MATC brought in more competition in the industry, something that will improve on service delivery and subsequent development

WHAT MATC STUDENTS SAY

RINAH ATURINDE

I love flight school. The training manuals as well as the aircraft manuals are handed out from the start. This way I know exactly what I am up to right from the start and I can prepare myself.

PEARL LISA MAFABI

My instructor exceeded my expectation for his availability and concern. Also, unlike in most other schools, my training was not only to pass the final test but to make me a better and safer flight operations officer/dispatcher and prepare me for the airline environment.

IRENE NAMBUUSI

It is the place to which I should come to further myself as an aviation professional.

EPHRAIM MUNIALA

It has helped me build my personality and made me a thorough professional.

I will surely recommend MATC to all those friends and others who are inspiring of taking a career in aviation.

The package offered already stands out from that of other schools and I truly believe that Uganda must be one of the best places in East Africa for flight operations officers/dispatcher training.

of the industry.

CHALLENGES

However, it has not been a bed of roses for the aviation industry as very few Ugandans are aware of the industry, according to Acok.

He also says the high costs associated with the field are posing a great challenge to the intake. As people get the proper picture of the benefits in the field,

Due to the need to guarantee the safety standards of the services offered, the aviation industry is highly regulated both at national and international levels. This has led to setting of tough guidelines followed in the licensing and certification process of aviation training schools.

Katendeigwa decried the process as a lengthy and costly one that leads to loss of time for the students, the institution and the industry slackening its growth.