

Interview with Mr. Abdérahmane Berthé, Secretary General, AFRAA



Mr. Abdérahmane Berthé, AFRAA Secretary General shares with Hermes insights on AFRAA's perspective and actions on the sustainability of the aviation industry.

1. How do you define sustainability in aviation?

Aviation provides the only worldwide transportation network, which makes it essential for global business and tourism. It is vital in facilitating economic growth, particularly in developing countries. Air transport has become a driver of economic, social, and cultural development and has fundamentally changed how we travel, interact with others, and do business.

Sustainability is defined simply as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.”

Sustainability is a business strategy that drives long-term corporate growth and profitability by mandating the inclusion of environmental and social issues in the business model.

Building a sustainability strategy creates long-term value, improves efficiency and reputation, meets customer demands, and fosters the Aviation Industry's resilience and longevity.

2. What are the key features of a sustainable aviation industry?

Sustainability is not just about the environment and society. It is about ensuring a prosperous future for the next generations.

Social, environment, and economy are the three features of the sustainable aviation industry. It is referred to as people, planet, and profits in today's business environment.

3. How can the aviation industry best reduce its environmental footprint?

Air Transport contributes to 2% of human-made CO₂ emissions. The climate change trends put pressure on the sector to further reduce its modest share of CO₂ emissions faster. ICAO Assembly adopted the Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA).

We believe that the aviation industry will contribute to protecting the environment better with coordinated efforts in line with five pillars:

- Continuous Fuel Efficiency Improvement through New Technology.
- Alternative Fuel.
- Implementation of Fuel Conservation Initiatives in Operations.
- Air Navigation Infrastructure.
- CORSIA.

4. How will investments in sustainability impact the efficiency and profitability of aviation?

Aviation sustainability, in addition to addressing the industry's environmental

impact, focuses on the survival and success of the aviation value chain.

To achieve the five pillars and positively impact efficiency and profitability requires investment in new technologies, alternative fuel, efficient infrastructure, and cost-saving competitive operations.

Airlines need finance to invest in the modern, efficient fleet and relevant technologies that will make them competitive and sustainable. Aviation and tourism infrastructure investments are also required to boost the sector's total development.

5. What are the industry's best practices, already in place, that improve sustainability?

The good thing is that, in aviation, best practices are not traded secrets. They can be easily accessed and learned from.

The African Continent will have to learn from other regions where airline ownership limits are relaxed and foreign equity capital encouraged and not frowned upon. A deliberate policy to privatise state-owned airlines and invite foreign investors to take a stake will attract the capital and managerial expertise needed to run such airlines professionally. Airlines that are efficiently and profitably run are sure to be sustainable, provided the right regulatory environment is created to support business. This is the trend in many parts of the world.

On economic sustainability, consolidation and collaboration are crucial elements in the success of the African airlines. Airline consolidation across other regions has positively impacted the growth and sustainability of the airline industry. In the African context, the ripple effect of strengthened collaboration amongst airlines will be an increase in the industry's contribution to the sustainable development of Africa. The engagement of states, airlines, and all relevant

stakeholders is necessary to achieve the required outcomes on airline consolidation in Africa effectively.

On social sustainability, industry stakeholders across the globe are taking various actions to address gender diversity and develop the Next Generation of Aviation Professionals (NGAP) to meet the African global needs of the aviation industry of tomorrow. The development of skilled aviation professionals in Africa's aviation and aerospace industry is critical as a large contingent of the current aviation professionals will retire, and aviation growth will require more qualified and competent professionals. The continent can train, develop and groom youth.

6. How can these best practices be fully implemented throughout the industry?

The acceleration to aviation sustainability will be realised if Africa allows the private sector to drive the commercial side of the business. At the same time, governments focus on enacting the enabling regulations to support the industry.

7. What are the regulatory impediments to increasing sustainability?

African aviation sustainability renaissance began with adopting the African Union (AU) Vision 2063, a continental development roadmap. Among the flagship projects in this document are the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM); the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA); and the Protocols on the free movement of people and goods – three inter-related projects aimed at liberalising the air transport market, facilitating trade and the movement of people across borders. To ensure the successful implementation of all three projects, conscious efforts are being made to put the regulatory framework and institutional structures in

place and to disband or amend national regulations that may not align with the letter and spirit of the AU Agenda 2063 and these flagship projects.

8. How can regulations incentivize and facilitate the aviation industry to be more efficient and more sustainable?

The full implementation of the Yamoussoukro Decision (YD), AfCFTA, and facilitation of mobility through visa and passport protocols will guarantee aviation sustainability in Africa.

Harmonisation and implementation of appropriate policies and regulations are essential for the oversight of the AUC Agenda 2063 projects which will spur the sustainability of the air transport sector in Africa. Governments, Development Financing Institutions (DFIs), and other partners should support the efforts to implement all the regulations and set up functional structures.

9. How can industry participants, including airport, airlines, and air navigation providers, cooperate to improve sustainability?

Aviation has traditionally been a business that collaborates and coordinates to provide transportation services. Historically, airlines work with governments, airports, air navigation service providers, civil aviation authorities, tourism organisations, safety/security institutions, and other sectors.

Indeed, collaboration has seen the aviation industry agree on CORSIA to address the global environmental challenges instead of the earlier unilateral regional/country measures that would have been expensive and chaotic.

AFRAA believes that aviation 'talks too much to itself' and excludes other relevant players that influence the industry.

As the leading air transport body on the continent, AFRAA is conscious of this reality and has decided that in 2022, it will

begin to change the narrative and establish broader consultation with all stakeholders for the industry's good. In furtherance of this, AFRAA organised in June 2022 a 'Laboratory' of relevant players to consult broadly on critical issues of the aviation, trade, tourism, financial and regulatory sectors. The LAB brought together government, international development partners, aviation entities, trade and tourism organisations, financiers, regional economic communities, and selected consumers of air transport services.

The laboratory developed roadmaps grouped under five projects that deliberated on out-of-the-box solutions on specific subject areas, including fuel and customs taxes, high taxes and charges, navigation – Free Routing Area (FRA), implementation of the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) and partnerships between airlines, hospitality and tourism bodies to improve intra-African tourism. The roadmap, which will be tabled for adoption by AU Policy Organs, shall be monitored, assessed, and reviewed by a multi-sectoral steering committee coordinated by AFRAA.



Author: AFRAA

10. Sustainability is often thought of as a long-term goal, but what three key changes can the aviation industry implement within the next five years to increase sustainability?

A sector struggling to survive will find it difficult to focus on the long-term environmental goals that do not yield short-term visible results. This does not mean the environmental priorities are less critical.

The aviation world can do more by ensuring that all regions have viable and sustainable aviation businesses in the first place. Particularly in the developing world, where connectivity and mobility are limited, costly, and local airlines cannot sustain their businesses, there is a need for stakeholder collaboration to address some of the bottlenecks.

At the same time, governments should prioritise aviation and support the industry with the right laws that guarantee market access, capital access, and capacity development.

Finally, the efforts made by African states under the leadership of the African Union to implement SAATM and AfCFTA and facilitate the movement of people and goods are giant steps toward aviation sustainability in Africa. 🌐

