



*Theme: Resilient African Aviation: Partnerships - Empowerment – Profitability*

# Air Cargo as an Economic Catalyst

*Unlocking Africa's Trade Potential*

Synopsis : An in-depth look at air cargo's role in boosting African trade, e-commerce, pharmaceuticals, and perishables, with a focus on digitalisation, sustainability, and policy support.

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Chairman, AFRAA Route Network & Cargo Committee

## Demand exists. Connectivity doesn't.

**<3%**

of global air cargo  
market share

**18%**

of world  
population

**54**

countries, fragmented  
markets & high costs

*Africa carries 18% of humanity — yet commands less than 3% of global air cargo.*

*The gap is a solvable infrastructure problem, not a destiny.*

*Africa is not just emerging — it is integrating into global supply chains in real time*

*Africa's cargo demand is less cyclical and more necessity-driven — making it structurally resilient.*

*Africa's cargo future is not only intercontinental — it is increasingly intra-continental*



## AfCFTA Trade Enablement

The African Continental Free Trade Area creates 1.3 billion consumers — air cargo is the spine that connects them.



## Fresh Produce & Floriculture

Africa exports Perishables to the World. Speed is everything; air cargo is non-negotiable.



## Pharmaceutical & Cold Chain

Vaccines, insulin, oncology drugs — life-saving cargo that cannot wait. Air cargo equals public health infrastructure.



## SMEs & E-Commerce Access

Africa's e-commerce grows at 20%+ annually. Air cargo gives small businesses access to global buyers overnight.

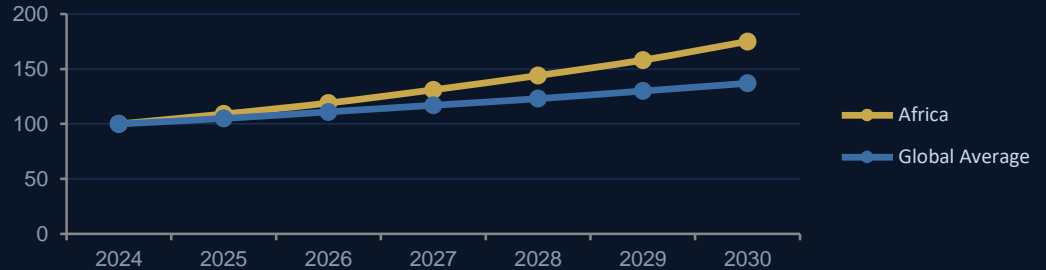


**Air cargo is not just a service —**

**it is an economic infrastructure.**

*Freight traffic to, from and within Africa is projected to grow faster than the rest of the world — with international traffic leading the surge.*

**PROJECTED FREIGHT GROWTH (Index: 2024 = 100)**



## AGRICULTURE

Flowers, fresh produce & perishables. Kenya exports 500M+ stems to EU annually — speed is non-negotiable.



## OIL, GAS & MINING

Critical equipment, spare parts & samples move under tight schedules to remote extraction sites across the continent.



## MANUFACTURING

Just-in-time components, high-value goods & finished products flowing along global supply chains require air speed.



## E-COMMERCE

Africa's e-commerce grows at 20%+ annually. Air cargo is the backbone connecting consumers to the global marketplace.

>35% of global trade value moves by air

<1% of volume — maximum value density

7%+ Africa freight CAGR vs 4% globally

# BARRIERS TO AFRICAN AIR CARGO GROWTH



## HIGH COST

- Jet Fuel — among the most expensive globally
- Cargo Handling fees inflate operator costs
- Freight Tax & Royalties suppress margins



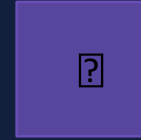
## REGULATIONS

- Lack of SAATM liberalisation
- Restrictions on Traffic Rights block direct routes
- Protectionism favours foreign carriers over African airlines



## CONNECTIVITY

- Intra-Africa cargo routed via Middle East & Europe
- African airlines lack co-operation frameworks
- No viable pan-African freighter network exists today



## INFRASTRUCTURE

- Inadequate terminals, parking & cargo capacity
- Cold chain & warehousing severely underdeveloped
- PPP frameworks needed to unlock private investment



## FOREIGN CARRIERS

- Dominate 80% of African cargo revenue
- 5th Freedom rights granted on key intra-Africa routes
- JNB–NBO sector: foreign carriers crowd out African operators

## Africa trades with the world more easily than with itself.

### The Problem

- Only ~30 intra-Africa freighter pairs operate regularly
- 70%+ of intra-Africa cargo routes via European or Middle East hubs
- Average shipment: 3-5 days Nairobi → Lagos vs 1 day Nairobi → Dubai
- Hub dependency adds cost, time, and carbon footprint

### The Opportunity

- AfCFTA unlocks \$3.4 trillion intra-Africa trade potential
- Under-served city pairs: East → West Africa / South → West Africa / North – South Africa
- Air cargo network effect: one new route enables 5+ trade relationships
- AFRAA's Route Network Committee promotes Airline Partnerships/JV's



## e-AWB Adoption

Electronic Air Waybills eliminate paper, cut processing time by 65%, and reduce errors. Africa's e-AWB penetration still trails at under 50%.

**65%**

processing time saved



## Real-Time Tracking

IoT-enabled cargo tracking delivers shipper confidence. Temperature-sensitive pharma and floriculture especially benefit from live monitoring.

**24/7**

shipment visibility



## Cargo Community Systems

Shared data platforms connecting airports, customs, handlers, and airlines. Rwanda and Ethiopia leading; most African hubs still fragmented.

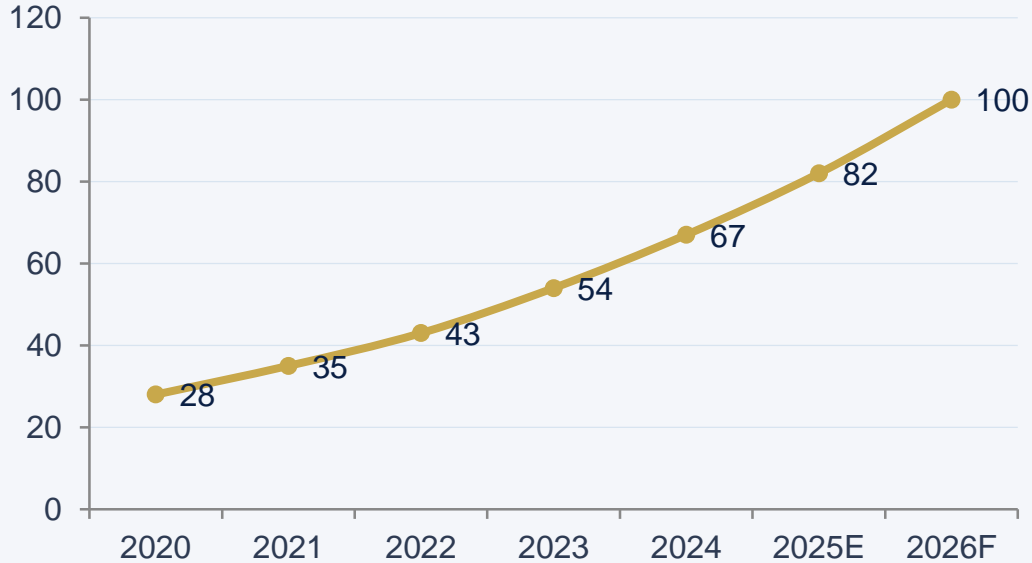
**3×**

faster clearance

# Africa's E-Commerce Explosion



E-Commerce Revenue Trajectory (\$B USD)



**20%+**

annual growth rate — fastest globally

**\$100B**

projected market size by 2026

**Last-mile**

the air cargo opportunity — reliable backbone required

**Jumia, Takealot**

regional giants demanding faster fulfillment

*Air cargo is the backbone of African e-commerce. Without reliable, affordable freight, the digital economy stays digital — and local.*

## Air cargo = public health infrastructure

### COVID-19 Lesson

Africa's inability to rapidly distribute vaccines exposed a fatal gap in cold-chain air logistics. Distribution speed = lives saved.

### GDP Compliance Gap

Less than 15% of African airports have IATA CEIV Pharma certification. Investment in certified facilities is urgent and bankable.

### Cold Chain Demand

Africa's pharma market grows at 9% annually. Temperature-controlled logistics for vaccines, insulin, and oncology drugs drives premium freight revenue.

### Astral's Position

Operating temperature-controlled cargo across 24+ African destinations — bridging the gap between production and patient.

*Balancing environmental responsibility with economic realities*

## The SAF Challenge

- SAF costs 3-5× conventional jet fuel
- No SAF production facility exists in Africa today
- African carriers cannot absorb European SAF mandates without support
- Risk of green policies creating a compliance barrier for African airlines

## Fleet Modernisation Path

- B737-800F: 17% lower fuel burn vs older 737Cs
- B777F: world's most fuel-efficient large freighter
- Right-sizing aircraft to route reduces emissions per kg

## Africa's Pragmatic Position

- Emissions per tonne-km already lower than road alternatives
- Carbon-efficient routing via direct intra-Africa lanes
- Development finance must fund green aviation transition
- Green goals and growth goals are not in conflict — with investment

## Policy is the single biggest unlock for African air cargo.

### SAATM Status & Implementation Progress

As of early 2026, the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) has gained significant momentum, with 35 to 38 African Union member states having signed the commitment to open their skies. Regulatory frameworks, including competition rules and dispute settlement mechanisms, are in place, though practical implementation remains sluggish, with many airlines still facing traffic rights restrictions and high airfares.

**Implementation Steps:** 26 countries have signed Memoranda of Implementation (MoI) as of late 2025, with about 60 bilateral air service agreements modified to align with liberalization, representing roughly 80% of African air traffic.

- **Progress:** More than 110 new intra-African routes have been developed, including 19 fifth-freedom routes.
- **Challenges:** Despite policy and regulatory progress, many signatories have not fully implemented the necessary domestic policies, resulting in delayed liberalization of capacity, frequency, and tariffs.

#### Liberalise Cargo Skies

Full SAATM implementation for freighter operations — cargo first, passengers will follow

#### Customs Acceleration

Single-window processing, pre-clearance programs, and 24/7 customs operations at hubs

#### Tax Incentives for Cargo

Waive import duties on aviation equipment; create cargo SEZ zones at key airports

*No single player can solve Africa's logistics gap alone.*

## Airlines × Logistics Firms

SPA agreements, interline deals, and joint product development — shared risk, shared revenue, deeper market penetration.

## Public-Private Partnerships

Governments provide infrastructure; airlines provide operations. Neither can build the ecosystem alone — PPPs are the architecture.

## Development Finance

AfDB, AFREXIMBANK IFC, USTDA, and bilateral DFIs can de-risk first-mover cargo investments that commercial capital still avoids.

## Shipper Partnerships

Strategic shipper relationships — pharma, flowers, e-commerce — provide load guarantees that make new routes bankable.

Three priorities that will transform African air cargo in this decade:

## 01 Liberalise the Skies

Full SAATM implementation for cargo.  
Open skies between African nations.  
End bilateral restrictions that force freight via European hubs.

### Key Actions:

- Ratify SAATM cargo protocols
- Waive 5th freedom restrictions for freighters
- Fast-track cargo bilateral agreements

## 02 Invest in Infrastructure

Cargo hubs, cold chain facilities, and sea-air terminals.  
Development finance must lead where commercial capital is still cautious.

### Key Actions:

- AfDB/Afreximbank cargo hub financing facilities
- PPP models for cold chain at 10+ airports
- Sea-Air integration at coastal ports

## 03 Digitise the Value Chain

Mandatory e-AWB.  
National cargo community systems.  
Blockchain for customs.  
Make Africa's logistics as digital as its payments.

### Key Actions:

- 100% e-AWB by 2027 target
- Single-window customs integration
- Real-time track-and-trace standards

## GOVERNMENTS

- Implement SAATM — ratify and enforce
- Reduce airport and fuel taxes for cargo ops
- Create cargo economic zones at key airports
- Allow currency repatriation for airline revenues

## AIRLINES

- Collaborate on interline and SPA agreements
- Invest in digital platforms and e-AWB adoption
- Co-develop routes instead of duplicating capacity
- Build cargo specialisation — don't wait for belly cargo

## INVESTORS

- Back logistics infrastructure, not just passengers
- De-risk first-mover cargo routes with DFI support
- Fund cold chain, cargo hubs, and digital platforms
- Think 10-year horizons — Africa's returns are coming

# Astral Aviation



*Pan-African Cargo Connectivity — Built from Africa, for Africa*

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**Fleet:** B737-800F · B767-300F · B777F\*

**Network:** 14+ African destinations

**Headquarters:** Nairobi, Kenya — East Africa hub

**Model:** System integrator: cargo + logistics + sea-air

**Mission:** To operate a world-class cargo airline delivering Precision, Reliability, and Agility—> connecting underserved markets to global trade lanes while maintaining the highest standards of safety and performance.

**Vision:** To be Africa's most trusted and influential air cargo network, powering trade, connecting markets, and enabling economic growth across the continent and beyond.

*“If Africa is to trade,  
air cargo must lead.”*

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