

## CHANGING PERCEPTIONS

By Ify Ezinwa

*“There’s the perception that airlines coming out of Nigeria in the past didn’t provide the level of service that the passengers really want and demand...that’s what we were faced with; overcoming that perception...” Robert Brunner.*



Robert Brunner - Vice President Arik Air U.S & Canada

There is no overemphasizing the importance of the role of the private sector to the growth and development of any economy. Africa, said to be among the developing continents of the world faces a lot of challenges that impede its development and countries in the continent have come to see the export of goods and services as one of the means to attaining the much needed development.

Export is expected to build networks and linkages between societies and in this case, Africa and the rest of the world which would in turn, improve market access. If properly applied, the networks and linkages could generate income that would ultimately help improve living standards; one of the yardsticks for measuring a country’s level of development.

Reports available to us indicate that building and maintaining standards are some of the impediment to the successful exportation of goods and services from Africa to the

rest of the globe. This is one area that the continent needs to improve upon if they want to compete favorably in the market place as numerous businesses in Africa with potentials for expansion and export have remained domestic players, mostly as a result of their inability to meet expected global standards.

My focus for this piece is the airline industry in Africa and a case in study here is Arik Air, an airline that commenced business in October, 2006 as a small time player in Nigeria. Arik quickly expanded to West African countries and in October 2009, commenced travels to London and New York, from Lagos, Nigeria. Presently, Arik Air is the only locally-owned airline in Nigeria that is licensed to fly directly between Lagos and New York. To achieve this feat, an airline is required to meet the FAA and the CAA type standards and prove that it can operate in a safe and secure environment.

Numerous airlines existed in Nigeria before Arik Air came into the scene in 2006. The

fact that within three years, the airline expanded its operation to West Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States of America goes to prove the fact that African businesses can operate and compete on the same level as other businesses across the globe. Asked how this was possible, Robert Brunner, the Vice President of Arik Air in the US and Canada was quick to explain:

***“Maintaining a standard isn’t hard so long as you’re focused on it. Getting to the standard might be considered the goal, the objective... It’s been done by many airlines around the world and there’s a good pattern for doing it. It’s a commitment you can’t take your eyes off of. You have to really be focused and stay the course and see that everything you’re doing has to be the right way. There are no shortcuts! There’s no shortcut when it comes to safety, there’s no shortcut when it comes to security...”***

There’s no arguing the fact that globally, the commercial airline industry has played a major role in shrinking the world into ‘a global village’. This further stresses the importance of the industry to the economic growth and development of a continent like Africa. Apart from the issue of building and maintenance of standards, several factors negatively affect the airline business in Africa, some of which Brunner spoke about.

***“The physical airport buildings are not what people in America are used*** →

