

Impacts of the Victor Attah International Airport on Socio-Economic Development of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the impacts of the Victor Attah International Airport on socio-economic development of Akwa Ibom State Nigeria. Two research questions were raised to guide this study. The research employed a quantitative research method. The projected population of Uyo, Ikot Ekpene and Eket LGAs in 2022 are 390,400, 180,500 and 220,600 respectively giving the total 791,500. Krejcie and Morgan Sample Determination Table was used for sample size determination. A sample of 384 respondents was used for the study according to Table and selected using stratified random sampling technique and simple random sampling technique. Data was collected using a questionnaire titled "Impacts of the Victor Attah International Airport on Socio-economic Development Questionnaire (IVAIASDQ)". Data collected were analysed using frequency and simple percentage. Finding showed that adequate infrastructure, employment opportunities and supports local small businesses, are the socio-economic indicators of Victor Attah International Airport. Finding revealed that Akwa Ibom State has diversified the economy with various industries (transportation, education, tourism and commerce), high unemployment rate reliable and affordable transportation options, population growth and in-migration. Based on the findings of this study it is recommended among others that the state government should continue to invest in the development of infrastructures in the Victor Attah's International Airport to improve the quality of its services to meet the needs of the locals and the international standards.

Keywords: Airport, Development, Socio-economic indicators, social dynamics

Introduction

Every human society strive to develop socio-economically in order the sustain the livelihood of the populace. Socio-economic development refers to the progress and improvement in the quality of life of individuals, communities, and societies as a whole, achieved through addressing both social and economic aspects. According to Burger and Owen (2020) social development is a process that results in the transformation of social institutions in a manner that improves the capacity of the society to fulfil its aspirations. It implies a qualitative change in the way the society shapes itself and carries out its activities, such as through more progressive attitudes and behaviour by the population, the adoption of more effective processes, or more advanced technology.

The process of social and economic development in a society according to Chojnicki (2020) is measured by indicators, such as GDP, life expectancy, literacy and levels of employment, personal dignity, personal safety and freedom from fear of physical harm, and

the extent of participation in civil society. Meanwhile, air transport development is key driver for socio-economic growth in national and international scale (Dimitrios, *et al.*, 2017)

The aviation industry plays an important role in the aspect of work and leisure to people around the globe. The sector helps to promote and improve quality of life, living standards of people within the nation. All this helps to generate economic growth and poverty alleviation by way of providing employment opportunities, increasing revenues from taxes. The employment opportunities would be generated through supply chain transformation from the airports. Air transportation is a major industry in its own right and also provides important inputs into wider economic, political, and social processes. The demand for its services, as with most transport, is a derived one that is driven by the needs and desires to attain some other final objective (Air Transport Action Group, 2018). Aiyegbajeje, (2023) noted that lack of air transport, as with any other input into the economic system, can prevent efficient growth. But equally, inappropriateness or excesses in supply are wasteful.

Air transport system is fully driven by the global economy; it is an important catalyst to the global economy. Ogunmola and Akinwumi (2018) in a study assessed the socio-economic impact of Akwa Ibom International Airport on the host community using mixed-methods, combining quantitative survey and qualitative interviews. It was found that the Akwa Ibom International Airport has had a positive impact on the socio-economic well-being of the host community, Uyo. The airport's presence has led to increased employment opportunities, improved income levels, and the development of supporting infrastructure, such as roads and commercial establishments. The study also highlighted the airport's role in promoting tourism and attracting private investments to the local area.

Furthermore, a study was carried out by Nwaogbe *et al.* (2018) to describe the significance and the catalytic nature of Air transport/ Aviation sector for the Nigeria and global economic development through job creation, tourism and facilitation of global trade and found that aviation industry plays an important role in the aspect of work and leisure to people around the globe and also helps to promote and improve quality of life and living standards of people within the nation. All these impacts of the air transport help to generate economic growth and reduce poverty by providing employment opportunities and increasing revenues from taxes. The employment opportunities would be generated through supply chain transformation from the airports.

Globalisation primarily shapes people's social, economic, and cultural realities through transportation. The primary resource for developing one global economy and culture is now considered to be the aviation industry (Akorede *et al.*, 2021). In a growing, interdependent global community, it promotes diversity, educational opportunity, industrial progress, and social and cultural peace. Safe, dependable, and acceptable costs are crucial to the industrial community. Since it has handled the rising need for mobility, the sector has been one of the biggest beneficiaries in the development of modern environments.

One of the major factors in dynamics found in Airports includes the passenger's choice of Airports. For example, Ashford and Bencheman (2019) conducted a study on passengers' choice of airport in United States using Multinomial Logit Model and observed that air

travellers' choice of airport is influenced by a variety of socio-economic factors, including income level, age, and purpose of travel. The availability of transportation options and airport amenities were also significant determinants of airport choice. In another study, Yilmaz and Bakir (2017) also determined the socio-economic impacts of airport development using a case study of Istanbul SabihaGökçen International Airport using mixed methods and found that the development of the SabihaGökçen International Airport has had a significant positive impact on the socio-economic dynamics of the surrounding communities. The airport has generated employment opportunities, stimulated the growth of the tourism industry, and led to the development of supporting infrastructure and services.

Monterrubio *et al.* (2020) noted that even though the economic impacts of the airport's construction are recognised as positive, its environmental and social effects on locals' everyday lives are perceived more negatively. As a result, most locals interviewed do not support the airport project. The aim of this study is to examine the impact of air transport to socio-economic development in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. This will aid ascertaining the contributions of the infrastructure to the development of Akwa Ibom State thereby providing insight into measures to ensure air transportation is sustainable and its impact remains indefinite.

Statement of the Problem

Although Victor Attah International Airport is domiciled within three Local Government Areas (Nsit Atai, Okobo and Uruan), the infrastructure was established to positively impact not just the host communities but the entire state. It is expected that airport should play a vital role in achieving sustainable development in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The extent to which the airport enhances regional connectivity, facilitates trade, and attracts investments remains underexplored, hindering a comprehensive evaluation of its role in regional development. As the state invests in this vital transportation hub, there is a pressing need to systematically assess its impacts on socio-economic development. Despite the strategic importance of airports in fostering economic growth and regional transformation, unemployment rate in the study area is quite alarming especially among youths. Most youths are yet to be gainfully employed and this has culminated to various restive behaviours and crimes such as arm robbery, kidnapping among others. Also, there seems to be a prevalence of shortage in power supply, inadequate supply of clean water; inadequate educational facility development, poor health facilities and healthcare services especially in rural areas of Akwa Ibom State. While the potential economic benefits of the airport are acknowledged, a detailed understanding of its direct and indirect contributions to employment, income generation, and economic growth is lacking. This study intends to bridge this gap.

Research Questions

The following questions were answered by the study

- i. What are the socio-economic indicators of Victor Attah International Airport?
- ii. What are the socio-economic dynamics of the study area?

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study sought to assess the impacts of the Victor Attah International Airport on socio-economic development of Akwa Ibom State Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- i. Assess the socio-economic indicators of the presence of Victor Attah International Airport
- ii. Examine the socio-economic dynamics around Victor Attah International Airport

The Study Area

Location

The research was conducted in Akwa Ibom State. The study area is situated in the humid tropical rainforest zone of South-South Nigeria and lies between the coordinates of latitude $4^{\circ}32'N$ and $5^{\circ}33'N$, and longitude $7^{\circ}25'E$ and $8^{\circ}25'E$ of the Greenwich Meridian. Akwa Ibom State is bounded on the East by Rivers State, on the West by Cross River State, on the North by Abia State and on the South by the Bight of Bonny.

Physiography

The physical relief of the State is basically flat. There are in some areas, valleys, creeks and swamps due to the influence of the Atlantic Ocean, the Qua Iboe and the Cross Rivers which traverse the length and breadth of the State (Udom, 2008). The physical relief of riverine area in Akwa Ibom State provides stream, rivers and swamps are natural sources of water which favours water transportation. On the other hand, coastal areas characterized by flat land and slopes favours air transportation in terms of citing of facilities. The landscape of Akwa Ibom is mostly flat. This is because the underlying geology of the state is predominantly coastal plain sediments. The coastal nature of the state makes it the natural deposit of mosaic of marine, deltaic, estuarine, lagoonal and fluvio- lacustrine material. Most areas in the state that are around water bodies and with poor road transportation network, triggers the need for development of aviation industry for easy transportation of goods and people within and outside the state.

Vegetation

Akwa Ibom falls within the tropical zone with a dominant vegetation of trees and shrubs. It constitutes a major chunk of the nation's oil-palm belt. The Atlantic coastline stretches 129km from Oron in the East to Ikot Abasi in the West. The State also has three distinct vegetation zones: the saline water swamp forest, the fresh water swamp forest and the rain forest. The prevalent vegetation in the coastal and riverine area is predetermined by the rainfall (Umoren, 2022). The vegetative cover of the study area helps keep the environment stable for the operation of aviation industry.

Climate

The location of Akwa Ibom just north of the Equator and within the humid tropics and its proximity to the sea makes the state generally humid. On the basis of its geographical location the climate of Akwa Ibom State can be described as a tropical rainy type which experiences abundant rainfall with very high temperature. The mean annual temperature of the state lies between $26^{\circ}C$ and $29^{\circ}C$ and average sunshine cumulates to 1,450 hours per year,

while mean annual rainfall ranges from 2.000mm to 3.000 mm, depending on the area. Naturally, maximum humidity is recorded in July while the minimum occurs in January. Thick cloud cumulonimbus type is commonly experienced in the months of March to November. Evaporation is high with annual values that range from 1500 mm to 1800mm (Ansa and Ukpong, 2015). The State has basically two distinct seasons: The rainy season lasts from May to October, while the duration of the dry season is November to April.

People and Culture

Akwa Ibom State is made up of Ibibio, Annang and Oron speaking people. Besides the three major ethnic groups, Akwa Ibom State has minor ethnic groups such as Eket, Ibeno and Obolo. The Ibibio language is very widely spoken in Akwa Ibom State. The organization of the society is based on segmentary principles and administration is based on genealogical lineage. For this reason the society is politically organized on the basis of people in various units as families, wards, villages and clans. Culturally, in most villages in Akwa Ibom State set fire in bushes during farming preparations and populace use fire for very many purposes such as cooking, processing of products like wine, preservation of products like fish etc.

Demographical Setting

The National Census of Nigeria carried out in 1991 put the provisional population of Akwa Ibom State at 2,409,613. In 2006, Akwa Ibom State has an estimated population of 3,902,051 (1,983,202 males and 1,918,849 females) as reported by NPC, (2006). This accounts for 2.8percent of Nigeria's population. Of the 36 states, Akwa Ibom is the 30th largest in area and fifteenth most populous with an estimated population of nearly 5.5 million as of 2016. Over 80percent of the population are estimated to live in rural areas and are involved in semi-subsistent agriculture and related activities including trades, skilled crafts, commerce and other important livelihood occupations. Several land holding systems have been recognized in rural Akwa Ibom State (Ekong 2003). The most important ones with implications for fire management practices include the involvement of every member of the community. More so, airport is a modern facility that triggers speedy network.

Socio-economic activities

The economic activities in the area is based on the predominant resources found thereof. Their major economic activities include; trading, small scale industry, fishing, hunting, wood carving, raffia works, black smiting, pottery, iron works, tailoring, craft creations, hair barbing and dressing, entertainment and civil service. In the area of aviation, major socio-economic activities include ticketing, sales of customer goods, hotel businesses, radio and TV stations that promote the airport's activities through broadcasts and jingles.

Methodology

Research Design

The research employed a mixed method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. The mixed method approach involves the integration of both quantitative and qualitative research methods within a single study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The mixed method was deemed appropriate for this study in that it enabled the researcher to obtain a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of complex research

problems. The integration of these complementary approaches would lead to more informed decision-making, the development of more robust theoretical frameworks, and the generation of insights that may not be accessible through the use of a single research method alone.

Nature and Sources of Data

The data sources for this research included primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions with key stakeholders, including government officials, business owners, airport authorities, and local residents. Secondary data were obtained from government reports, academic publications, and other relevant sources.

Population of the Study

Specifically, Uyo from Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District, Ikot Ekpene from Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District and Eket from Akwa Ibom South Senatorial District. The choice of Uyo, Ikot Ekpene and Eket Local Government Areas was based on the fact that they are the major city in each of the Senatorial Districts. That is they were purposively selected.

Sample Size

Krejcie and Morgan Sample Determination Table was used for sample size determination. The Krejcie and Morgan Sample Determination Table stated that the valid sample size for population of 1,000,000 and above is 384. For the purpose of this research, a sample of 384 respondents was used for the study according to table. This method helps to choose a reasonable sample without bias.

Sampling Technique

Stratified random sampling technique and simple random sampling technique were used to select the sample size. Stratified random sampling technique involves was deployed to select one Local Government Area from each of the Senatorial District. The sharing of respondents into different groups before selecting samples based on the proportion of each group to the sample size. Furthermore, four communities were randomly selected from each of the LGAs from which respondents were drawn. This implies that Local Government that is densely populated would have sample representation (proportion) than areas with lesser population.

Table 1: Sampled Population

Senatorial Districts	Sampled Local Government Areas	Population of LGAs	Sample based on Proportion
Akwa Ibom North-East	Uyo	390,400	189
Akwa Ibom North-West	Ikot Ekpene	180,500	88
Akwa Ibom South	Eket	220,600	107
	Total	791,500	384

Source – Researcher's Compilation, 2024

Instrument for Data Collection

Data was collected using a questionnaire titled “Impacts of the Victor Attah International Airport on Socio-economic Development Questionnaire (IVAIASDQ)”. The questionnaire was structured to elicit information from the sample selected for the study. The instrument had two sections A and B. Section A elicited information on the demographic characteristics of the respondents while Section B focused on the impact of airport facility taking into consideration job creation, social dynamics, trade activities and development of social amenities. The items for section B were structured under the ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ response options.

Validity of the Instrument

The instrument “Social Corporate Responsibility, Socio-Economic Opportunities and Challenges Questionnaire (SCRSOCQ)” was validated by the supervisor and trial test was carried out on 20 respondents who were not part of the main study. Test-retest method was used in administering the instrument with the time gap of two weeks. Correlational coefficient result of Pearson Product Moment Correlation which yielded 0.88 was ascertain the reliability of the instrument.

Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out using frequency, mean and percentages, and presented on tables and charts.

Results

Socio-economic Indicators of Victor Attah International Airport

The study further looked at the socio-economic indicators of the Victor Attah International Airport and the following indicators were obtained; adequate infrastructure (such roads, parks/cargo facilities, hotels, street light, entertainment centres, electricity supply and shopping centres), employment, economic development, local small business development

Table 2: Airport have adequate infrastructure to support the local community

LGAs	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Uyo	Yes	110	28.5
	No	79	20.6
Ikot Ekpene	Yes	54	14.2
	No	34	8.9
Eket	Yes	88	22.9
	No	19	4.9
Total		384	100

Source – Researcher’s Compilation, 2024

Table 2 shows the response on airport have adequate infrastructure (e.g., roads, transportation, utilities) to support the local community. It reveals that for Uyo Local Government Area, 28.5percent of the respondents agreed while 20.6percent disagreed that airport had adequate infrastructure (e.g., roads, transportation, utilities) to support the local community. For Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, 14.2percent of the respondents agreed while 8.9percent disagreed that airport had adequate infrastructure (e.g., roads, transportation,

utilities) to support the local community. Also for Eket Local Government Area, 22.9percent of the respondents agreed while 4.9percent disagreed that airport had adequate infrastructure (e.g., roads, transportation, utilities) to support the local community. This shows that most of the respondents affirm that airport had adequate infrastructure (for example: roads, transportation, utilities) to support the local community. The study went further to ascertain the basic infrastructure as a result of the airport and the following result was obtained;

Table 3: Infrastructure arising from the presence of the Airport

LGAs	Infrastructure	Frequency	Percentage
Uyo	Roads	50	13
	Hotels	50	13
	Electricity	15	3.9
	Street light	30	7.8
	Shopping Centers	20	5.2
	Park/Cargos Facilities	20	5.2
	Entertainment Centers	14	3.6
Ikot Ekpene	Roads	30	7.8
	Hotels	9	2.3
	Electricity	10	2.6
	Street light	10	2.6
	Shopping Centers	10	2.6
	Park/Cargos Facilities	2	0.5
	Entertainment Centers	17	4.4
Eket	Roads	26	6.8
	Hotels	20	5.2
	Electricity	11	2.9
	Street light	20	5.2
	Shopping Centers	10	2.6
	Park/Cargos Facilities	10	2.6
	Entertainment Centers	10	2.6
Total		384	100

Source – Researcher's Fieldwork, 2024

The results shown on Table 3 indicated that the major infrastructure that has been put in place as a result of the Airport is roads. Other infrastructures such as parks/cargo facilities, hotels, street light, entertainment centres, electricity supply and shopping centres were gradually developing in that order in the study area. This implies that, airport promotes road development network which is one of the major drivers of economic and infrastructural development.

Table 4: Respondents' responses on whether airport provide employment opportunities for the surrounding community

LGAs	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Uyo	Yes	99	25.8
	No	90	23.4
Ikot Ekpene	Yes	30	7.8
	No	58	15.1
Eket	Yes	47	12.2
	No	60	15.6
Total		384	100

Source – Researcher's Compilation, 2024

Table 4 shows the response on whether airport provides employment opportunities for the surrounding community. It reveals that for Uyo Local Government Area, 25.8 percent of the respondents agreed while 23.4 percent disagreed that airport provide employment opportunities for the surrounding community respectively. For Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, 7.8 percent of the respondents agreed while 15.1 percent disagreed that airport provides employment opportunities for the surrounding community respectively. Also, for Eket Local Government Area, 12.2 percent of the respondents agreed while 15.6 percent disagreed that airport provide employment opportunities for the surrounding community respectively. This shows that most of the respondents affirmed that airport provide employment opportunities for the surrounding community. Based on the respondents that agreed that the airport provided employment opportunities, the study looked at the type of employment opportunities generated by the airport and the following results were obtained;

Table 5: Employment opportunities around the airport

LGAs	Employment Opportunities	Frequency	Percentage
Uyo	loaders/cargo handlers	50	13
	car rental services	50	13
	book sellers	15	3.9
	traffic controllers	30	7.8
	public transport	20	5.2
	security personnel	20	5.2
	fast food centres	14	3.6
	ticket sellers	15	3.9
	visa agents	15	3.9
Ikot Ekpene	loaders/cargo handlers	30	7.8
	car rental services	9	2.3
	book sellers	10	2.6
	traffic controllers	10	2.6
	public transport	10	2.6
	security personnel	2	0.5
	fast food centres	17	4.4
	ticket sellers	2	0.5
	visa agents	2	0.5
Eket	loaders/cargo handlers	26	6.8
	car rental services	20	5.2
	book sellers	11	2.9
	traffic controllers	20	5.2
	public transport	10	2.6
	security personnel	10	2.6
	fast food centres	10	2.6
	ticket sellers	10	2.6
	visa agents	10	2.6
Total		384	100

The employment opportunities around airport were shown on Table 5. It indicates that loaders/cargo handlers followed by car rental services, book sellers, traffic controllers, public transport, security personnel, fast food centres, ticket sellers and visa agents respectively. This

implies that there were more employment opportunities for loaders/cargo handlers and car rental services as passengers likely needed the services of these persons at the airport.

Discussion of Findings

Findings of this study were discussed according to the objectives that guided the study as follows:

Socio-economic indicators of Victor Attah International Airport

Findings of the study show that adequate infrastructure, employment opportunities and supports local small businesses, are the socio-economic indicators of Victor Attah International Airport. The availability and quality of infrastructure at the Victor Attah's International Airport play a pivotal role in facilitating the movement of people and goods, thereby stimulating economic activities and enhancing the region's connectivity. Result showed that the development of airport infrastructure can have a positive impact on the local economy, improving accessibility and fostering the integration of the region into broader trade and investment networks. It also tallies with the works of Oladun and Ayantoyinbo (2020) who investigated the econometric analysis of air passenger demand in Nigeria and stated that broadly, transport economics and air transport economics, in particular, can be considered the engine of economic activity because of their derived nature.

Findings showed that Victor Attah's International Airport generates direct and indirect employment generated by the airport's operations, including jobs in airport management, maintenance, security, and various supporting industries which are crucial to the socio-economic development of the local communities. The finding also affirm Ogunmola and Akinwumi (2018) who found that the airport's presence has led to increased employment opportunities, improved income levels, and the development of supporting infrastructure, such as roads and commercial establishments. Therefore, the Victor Attah's International Airport has improved the socio-economic aesthetics of Akwa Ibom State through infrastructural development which stimulates the overall economy of the state.

Socio-economic Dynamics of Akwa Ibom State

Finding revealed that Akwa Ibom State has diversified the economy with various industries (transportation, education, tourism and commerce), high unemployment rate, quality healthcare facilities and services, low average household income, quality educational institutions, reliable and affordable transportation options, population growth and in-migration. It further revealed that Akwa Ibom State has a wide range of recreational and cultural amenities and residents have a low standard of living.

The presence of diversified the economy with various industries (transportation, education, tourism and commerce) in Akwa Ibom State may have been triggered by the presence of socio-economic infrastructures like the airport which is one of the facilitators of movement of goods and people for business and other social functions for improved income. The finding is supported by Ashford and Bencheman (2019) who observed that air travellers' choice of airport is influenced by a variety of socio-economic factors, including income level,

age, and purpose of travel. The availability of transportation options and airport amenities were also significant determinants of airport choice.

The finding showed a high unemployment rate, quality healthcare facilities and services, low average household income, quality educational institutions which is a reflection of the improvement in economic activities in various communities in the study area. The finding is also supported by Yilmaz and Bakir (2017) who revealed that the development of the SabihaGökçen International Airport has had a significant positive impact on the socio-economic dynamics of the surrounding communities through employment opportunities, stimulated the growth of the tourism industry which led to the development of supporting infrastructure and services. Thus, the Victor Attah's International Airport has triggered improved social dynamics of the state to match-up with the development trends in other international communities.

Conclusion

Victor Attah International Airport is one of the major transport infrastructures in Akwa Ibom State. The diverse socio-economic indicators of Victor Attah International Airport stimulated positive social dynamics geared toward improving the local economy.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study it is recommended that;

- i. The state government should continue to invest in the development of infrastructures in the Victor Attah's International Airport to improve the quality of its services to meet the needs of the locals and the international standards.
- ii. Populace should take advantage of the availability of airport facilities to diversify the economy of the state for improved socio-economic development.

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