

## Socio-Economic Opportunities and Challenges of the Victor Attah International Airport in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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### **Abstract**

*The main purpose of the study was to investigate socio-economic opportunities and challenges of the Victor Attah International Airport in 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 "Socio-Economic Opportunities and Challenges Questionnaire (SOCQ)". Data collected were analysed using frequency and simple percentage. Findings of the study revealed that airport prioritize the hiring and training of local residents, sustainability initiatives to reduce its environmental impact on the local area, provide support for local cultural, educational, or sporting events. Findings also showed that the presence of airport resulted in the displacement of local residents, rise in the cost of living and housing prices, pose health and safety risks to the local community, exacerbated income inequality and socio-economic disparities as well as loss of agricultural land. Based on the findings of this study it is recommended among others that the administrators and management of the Victor Attah's International Airport should formulate a strategic plan to curb the environmental impact of the facility.*

**Keywords:** Airport, Development, Socio-economic opportunities, Challenges

### **Introduction**

The aviation industry, as a crucial component of the global economy, has also been increasingly recognized for its potential to contribute to socio-economic development through cooperate social responsibility initiatives. Rahi *et al.* (2020) asserted that airports, in particular, serve as important hubs that can drive economic growth, job creation, and infrastructure development in their surrounding regions. The Victor Attah International Airport in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, is one such airport that has the potential to play a significant role in the socio-economic development of the state and the surrounding region.

Airports play a crucial role in regional development, contributing to economic, social, and cultural progress. The Akwa Ibom International Airport, located in Uyo, the capital of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, has its historical context tied to the broader regional and national development plans. Before the construction of the Akwa Ibom International Airport, the state relied on existing airports in neighboring regions for air travel and transportation needs. The decision to construct a new international airport in Akwa Ibom was driven by the need to enhance the state's connectivity, promote economic development, and attract investment (Essiet, 2018). The idea gained momentum through government approvals and planning. The state government, recognizing the importance of air transportation, embarked on the project as a strategic initiative. Construction activities began, and the airport project involved the development of runway facilities, passenger terminals, cargo handling facilities, and other necessary infrastructure (Essiet, 2018).

The Akwa Ibom International Airport was inaugurated to the public on September 23, 2009. It marked a significant milestone for the state in terms of infrastructure development. The airport's establishment aimed to boost the state's economy by improving transportation links, attracting business investments, and facilitating trade (Campos, 2023). The inauguration of the Victor Attah International Airport was a landmark event for Akwa Ibom State, as it ushered in a new era of economic and social transformation. The airport has since served as a catalyst for various development initiatives, including the establishment of the Akwa Ibom State University, the Ibom Industrial City, and the Ibom Seaport (Akpan & Akpan, 2021). Moreover, the airport has played a crucial role in enhancing the state's connectivity with the rest of Nigeria and the global community. It has facilitated the movement of goods, services, and people, and has emerged as a key hub for both domestic and international air travel (Nwaogbe *et al.*, 2018).

The airport facility has the potential to contribute to the socio-economic development of Akwa Ibom State and the surrounding region is significant. As a major transportation hub, the airport can facilitate the movement of people, goods, and services, thereby stimulating economic activities and creating employment opportunities (Adewole *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, Appold and Kasarda (2016) examined the airport city phenomenon using evidence from large U.S. airports. Quantitative and spatial analyses were employed for the study. Data analysis was carried out using regression models and spatial clustering analysis. The study found that the development of airport cities, or aerotropolis, around major U.S. airports has led to significant socio-economic opportunities in terms of job creation, business attraction, and regional economic growth. However, the study also highlighted challenges related to land use conflicts, infrastructure development, and community integration. In addition, Nkamnebe *et al.* (2020) noted that the airport's operations and associated infrastructure development can generate direct and indirect economic benefits, such as increased tax revenue, improved accessibility, and enhanced connectivity.

Similarly, Ogunsanya *et al.* (2019) explored the socio-economic impacts of airport development of the Murtala Muhammed International Airport, Lagos, Nigeria using mixed-methods, combining quantitative survey and qualitative interviews. A Sample: 400 respondents

for the survey, and 20 key informants for the interviews were used for the study. The study revealed that the development of the Murtala Muhammed International Airport has had both positive and negative socio-economic impacts on the local community. While the airport has generated employment opportunities and stimulated economic growth, it has also led to challenges such as land displacement, environmental degradation, and infrastructure congestion.

However, the realization of the socio-economic potential of Victor Attah International Airport is not without its challenges. Issues such as airport infrastructure, operational efficiency, and stakeholder engagement can all impact the airport's ability to effectively contribute to the local economy (Adegoke & Popoola, 2021). It is against this backdrop that this study aims to examine the socio-economic opportunities, and challenges of the Victor Attah International Airport in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The study delved into the its impact on the local economy, and the challenges it faces in effectively contributing to the socio-economic development of the region. By analyzing these aspects, the study will provide insights into the airport's role as a driver of sustainable development and inform policymakers, airport management, and stakeholders on strategies to enhance the VAIA's socio-economic contribution.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Victor Attah International Airport in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, has the potential to play a significant role in the socio-economic development of the state and the surrounding region. As a major transportation hub, the airport can facilitate the movement of people, goods, and services, thereby stimulating economic activities and creating employment opportunities (Adewole *et al.*, 2021; Appiah-Kubi *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, the airport's operations and associated infrastructure development can generate direct and indirect economic benefits, such as increased tax revenue, improved accessibility, and enhanced connectivity.

However, the available literature suggests that the Victor Attah International Airport has faced several challenges in effectively contributing to the socio-economic development of Akwa Ibom State. Studies have highlighted issues such as inadequate infrastructure, operational inefficiencies, and stakeholder engagement challenges, which have hindered the airport's ability to serve the needs of its users and maximize its impact on the local economy (Udo, 2020).

If these challenges are left unaddressed, the Victor Attah International Airport may fail to realize its full potential as a driver of socio-economic development in Akwa Ibom State. This could result in missed opportunities for job creation, infrastructure development, and economic diversification, ultimately hampering the state's overall economic growth and prosperity.

Moreover, the existing literature on the socio-economic impact of airport facility in Akwa Ibom State is limited, with few studies providing a comprehensive understanding of the airport's, contribution to the local economy, and the challenges it faces in effectively addressing the needs of the surrounding community. This lack of in-depth analysis and empirical evidence

hinders the ability of policymakers, airport management, and other stakeholders to develop and implement strategies that can maximize the socio-economic impact. It is against this backdrop that the present study aims to bridge the gap in the existing literature by examining the socio-economic opportunities and challenges of the Victor Attah International Airport in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions were answered by the study

- i. What are the impacts of the social corporate responsibility of airport in the study area?
- ii. What are the available socio-economic development opportunities of Victor Attah Airport in Akwa Ibom?
- iii. What are the available socio-economic development challenges of Victor Attah Airport in Akwa Ibom?

### **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

This study seeks to assess the social corporate responsibility, opportunities and challenges of the Victor Attah International Airport in Akwa Ibom State Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- i. Assess the impacts of the social corporate responsibility of airport in the study area
- ii. Examine the available socio-economic development opportunities of Victor Attah Airport in Akwa Ibom
- iii. Examine the available socio-economic development challenges of Victor Attah Airport in Akwa Ibom

### **The Multiplier Effect Theory**

The Multiplier Effect theory is associated with the economist John Maynard Keynes. While Keynes did not specifically develop the multiplier concept, his work laid the groundwork for its development. The multiplier effect theory was later formalized by Richard Kahn

The multiplier effect is a concept in economics that describes how an initial injection of spending into the economy results in a larger increase in overall economic activity. The basic idea is that an initial increase in spending (such as government spending, investment, or exports) leads to increased income for individuals, who, in turn, spend a portion of their additional income. This spending by individuals becomes income for others, creating a ripple or multiplier effect throughout the economy (Sinha and Kasturi, 2020).

The multiplier effect theory relates to the present theory in that it suggests that the economic impact of airports extends beyond direct contributions. By attracting businesses, tourism, and trade, airports can stimulate economic growth in the surrounding region and contribute to the overall development of the national economy. Applying the multiplier effect theory in assessing the impact of airports on socio-economic development involves considering the indirect and induced effects of airport-related activities. This includes evaluating the broader economic consequences such as increased output, job creation, income generation, and

infrastructure development that result from the initial economic stimulus provided by the 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 coastal areas characterized by flat land and slopes favours air transportation in terms of citing of facilities.

#### **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 State also has three distinct vegetation zones: the saline water swamp forest, the fresh water swamp forest and the rain forest. (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. 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 (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. However, in the coastal areas, rain falls almost all year round. The harmattan, accompanied by the North-East Wind occurs in December and early January. Aviation industry can operate in both seasons in Akwa Ibom since the two seasons are not at the extremes.

#### **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 economy of the state relies predominantly on agriculture, oil and tourism. Solid minerals found in commercial quantities in the state are uranium, iron ore, manganese, tourmaline, barites and

marbles. According to Akpan (2020), the people design and practice simple administrative structure which centres on the village assembly.

### **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, (2022). 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 (Okoji 2000). More so, airport is a modern facility that triggers speedy network.

### **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. 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 (National Population Commission, 2022).

### 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
	<b>Total</b>	<b>791,500</b>	<b>384</b>

Source – Researcher’s Compilation, 2024

### Instrument for Data Collection

Data was collected using a questionnaire titled “Socio-Economic Opportunities and Challenges Questionnaire (SOCQ)”. 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, hospitality promotion, health of populace, 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 “Socio-Economic Opportunities and Challenges Questionnaire (SOCQ)” 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. Pearson Product Moment Correlational coefficient of 0.77 was used to 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 Development Opportunities of Victor Attah Airport in Akwa Ibom

The study looked at the available socioeconomic development opportunities of the Victor Attah International Airport and the following results were obtained;

**Table 2: Opportunities of Victor Attah Airport in Akwa Ibom**

s/n	Items	Response Options	
		Yes (percent)	No (percent)
1	The airport prioritize the hiring and training of local residents in its operations	332 (86.5)	52 (13.5)
2	Airport in my area has sustainability initiatives to reduce its environmental impact on the local area	267 (69.5)	117 (30.5)
3	The airport provide support or sponsorship for local cultural, educational, or sporting events	319(83.1)	65 (16.9)
4	The presence of Victor Attah International Airport create employment opportunities for the local community	277 (72.1)	107 (27.9)
5	The airport's operations led to the development of supporting infrastructure (e.g., roads, transportation, utilities) in the surrounding area	319 (83.1)	65 (16.9)
6	Airport contributes to the overall economic growth and diversification of the local and regional economy	264 (68.8)	120 (31.3)
7	Airport provide opportunities for local entrepreneurs and small businesses to thrive	331 (86.2)	53 (13.8)
8	Airport's operations led to the improvement of social amenities and quality of life for the local community	236 (61.5)	148 (38.5)

**Source: Field Survey 2024**

Table 2 shows the available socio-economic development opportunities of Victor Attah Airport in Akwa Ibom State. It reveals that 86.5percent of the respondents agreed while 13.5percent disagreed that the airport prioritized the hiring and training of local residents in its operations respectively. More so, response indicates that 69.5percent of the respondents agreed while 30.5percent disagreed that airport in my area had sustainability initiatives to reduce its environmental impact on the local area respectively. It was also observed that 83.1percent of the respondents agreed while 16.9percent disagreed that the airport provided support or

sponsorship for local cultural, educational, or sporting events respectively. Also, 72.1percent of the respondents agreed while 27.9percent disagreed that the presence of Victor Attah International Airport creates employment opportunities for the local community respectively. Furthermore, response shows that 83.1percent of the respondents agreed while 16.9percent disagreed that the airport's operations led to the development of supporting infrastructure in the surrounding area respectively. Also, it was observed that 68.8percent of the respondents agreed while 31.3percent disagreed that airport contributed to the overall economic growth and diversification of the local and regional economy respectively. Similarly, 86.2percent of the respondents agreed while 13.8percent disagreed that airport provided opportunities for local entrepreneurs and small businesses to thrive respectively. Likewise, response also indicated that 61.5percent of the respondents agreed while 38.5percent disagreed that airport's operations led to the improvement of social amenities and quality of life for the local community. The implication is that there are many unexploited opportunities in the aviation industry in Akwa Ibom State.

### Socio-economic Development Challenges of Victor Attah Airport in Akwa Ibom

**Table 3: Challenges of Victor Attah International Airport in Akwa Ibom**

s/n	Items	Response Options	
		Yes (percent)	No (percent)
1	Airport's operations have a negative impact on the local environment and natural resources	81 (21.1)	303 (78.9)
2	Airport's presence led to the displacement of local residents or disruption of traditional livelihoods	258 (67.2)	126 (32.8)
3	Airport's operations contribute to increased traffic congestion and strain on the local transportation infrastructure	60 (15.6)	324 (84.4)
4	The airport's presence led to a rise in the cost of living and housing prices in the surrounding area	257 (66.9)	127 (33.1)
5	The airport's operations pose health and safety risks to the local community	309 (80.5)	75 (19.5)
6	The airport's presence exacerbated income inequality and socio-economic disparities in the local area	306 (79.7)	78(20.3)
7	Airport's operations contributed to the loss of agricultural land or disruption of traditional livelihoods	309 (80.5)	75 (19.5)
8	Airport's presence leads to an increase in social problems, such as crime, drug abuse, or human trafficking	184 (47.9)	200 (52.1)

**Source: Field Survey 2024**

Table 3 shows the available challenges of Victor Attah International Airport in Akwa Ibom State. It reveals that 21.1percent of the respondents agreed while 78.9percent disagreed

that airport's operations had a negative impact on the local environment and natural resources respectively. Responses also showed that 67.2percent of the respondents agreed while 32.8percent disagreed that airport's presence led to the displacement of local residents or disruption of traditional livelihoods respectively. Similarly, responses also showed that 15.6percent of the respondents agreed while 84.4percent disagreed that the airport's operations contribute to increased traffic congestion and strain on the local transportation infrastructure respectively.

Table 3 further showed that 66.9percent of the respondents agreed while 33.1percent disagreed that the airport's presence led to a rise in the cost of living and housing prices in the surrounding area respectively. It was also observed that 80.5percent of the respondents agreed while 19.5percent disagreed that the airport's operations pose health and safety risks to the local community respectively. Also, that 79.7percent of the respondents agreed while 20.30percent disagreed that the airport's presence exacerbated income inequality and socio-economic disparities in the local area respectively. It was also observed that 80.5percent of the respondents agreed while 19.5percent disagreed that airport's operations contributed to the loss of agricultural land or disruption of traditional livelihoods. Responses further reveal that 47.9percent of the respondents agreed while 52.1percent disagreed that airport's presence led to an increase in social problems, such as crime, drug abuse, or human trafficking respectively. This implied that the presence of airport in Akwa Ibom State triggered some socio-economic dynamics which may be challenging to the populace such as displacement and high cost of living, crime among others which must be addressed to foster health business environment for all.

## **Discussion of Findings**

### **The Available Socio-economic Development Opportunities of Victor Attah Airport in Akwa Ibom**

Findings of the study on socio-economic development opportunities revealed that airport prioritize the hiring and training of local residents, sustainability initiatives to reduce its environmental impact on the local area, provide support for local cultural, educational, or sporting events. Finding also established that Victor Attah's International Airport creates employment opportunities, led to the development of supporting infrastructure, contributes to the overall economic growth and diversification of the local economy and provides opportunities for local entrepreneurs and small businesses to thrive as well as improves social amenities and quality of life for the local community.

The finding is in agreement with the findings of *Campos (2023) who reported that* there is a very strong relationship between airport infrastructure investment and GDP per capita growth in the short and long run in Angola. The finding also aligns with the finding of Appold and Kasarda (2016) who found that the development of airport cities, or aerotropolis, around major U.S. airports has led to significant socio-economic opportunities in terms of job creation, business attraction, and regional economic growth.

## The Available Socio-economic Development Challenges of Victor Attah Airport in Akwa Ibom

Findings on the socio-economic development challenges showed that the presence of airport resulted in the displacement of local residents, rise in the cost of living and housing prices, pose health and safety risks to the local community, exacerbated income inequality and socio-economic disparities as well as loss of agricultural land. The finding is supported by Ogunsanya *et al.* (2019) who reported that Murtala Muhammed International Airport has had both positive and negative socio-economic impacts on the local community. While the airport has generated employment opportunities and stimulated economic growth, it has also led to challenges such as land displacement, environmental degradation, and infrastructure congestion.

### Conclusion

Victor Attah International Airport is one of the major transport infrastructures in Akwa Ibom State that prioritize the hiring and training of local residents as well as provide support for local cultural and other socio-economic events. Meanwhile, the presence of airport resulted in the displacement of local residents, rise in the cost of living and housing prices, pose health and safety risks to the local community, exacerbated income inequality and socio-economic disparities as well as loss of agricultural land.

### Recommendations

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

- i. The administrators and management of the Victor Attah's International Airport should formulate a strategic plan to curb the environmental impact of the facility.
- ii. State government should provide airport residents with access to estate and housing facility at a subsidized rate to help ameliorate the effect of internal displacement of persons posed by airport facility and development.
- iii. Host communities to airport facility should be empowered by government to start-up small scale businesses to improve their livelihood and socio-economic status.

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