An Evaluation of the Passenger Management and Tourist Potential at the Eldoret International Airport in North Rift Valley Kenya

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ABSTRACT
This paper undertakes an evaluation of the passenger management and tourist potential of the Eldoret International Airport as a strategic resource in western Kenya. The paper is based on a study that focused specifically on the levels of passenger use of the Airport and the flow of tourists to western part of the country through the facility. The research adopted a case study design. It has thus used the case study approach in which case the population of interest was centred within the Airport. However, efforts were made to seek information from relevant Ministry officials and stakeholders in Eldoret town. The data needed was obtained through face-to-face interviews with various Airport officials. A questionnaire was also prepared and used to ascertain the respondents’ perception of the operations of the Airport as a public utility. Tables, graphs and charts were used to analyse and present data. From the study results, the passenger airlines landing and departing from the Airport carry passengers of diverse orientations. They include ordinary travellers and tourists. It was not clear whether most tourists use the airport to connect flights or not. However, according to the tourism office in Eldoret the flow of tourists to the region has not been encouraging. On the tourism potential of the Airport, records revealed that the Kenya Airports Authority had six major objectives when establishing the Eldoret International Airport. Apart from creating major cargo hub in the region the government, through the Kenya Airports Authority, also sought to establish and promote the tourist circuit in the Western Kenya. In 2001 the government organized a flurry of promotional activities in which it undertook to repackage the western Kenya circuit. Western Kenya has many tourist sites. It has the biggest population in the country and can offer rich
and diverse cultural experiences and heritage. This gives the region a tourist potential. The government should consider giving concessions to would-be investors on tourism to put up standard hotels and other accommodation facilities. It should also put in place infrastructure that promotes investment in remote areas seen to have potential in tourism. Telephones, electricity and provision of water in such areas is important.

**Keywords:** Passenger Management, Tourist Potential, Eldoret International Airport, North Rift Valley Kenya

**INTRODUCTION**

Eldoret International Airport was started in 1995 after the government acquired lands from East African Extract Company (EATEC). It is located approximately 15 km south of Eldoret town on the Eldoret-Kisumu highway. The construction of the Airport was completed in 1997. It went into operation the same year. The Eldoret International Airport is a category six (6) airport. It lies on latitude 0° 24'; 24"N and a longitude 35° 14' 09"E. Its height above sea level is 6877 feet. It has a reference temperature of 25°C and a magnetic valuation of 2°W.

The Airport has a 3500m long and 45m wide runway connected to the upfront run by 2 cross taxiways each measuring 400m long by 23m wide. The strength size and conditions of the pavement is such that the facility can handle aircrafts such as the size of a medium haul jet such as Boeing B767 or Airbus 310. The upfront run area is such that it can park 7 aircrafts at any one time, one medium haul aircraft such as A310, two short haul aircrafts, e.g. Fokker 50, and four general aviation Aircrafts such as the C402 or BE 200. The freight terminal with 2000 sqm up front and 220 sqm freight was built with expansion of business volumes in mind.

It is imperative that public utility projects have to be justified before inception and their eventual implementation. Boyes and Melvin (1995) in their book *Macro Economics* argue that firms invest more and have incentives to buy and stock more inventory when they are bought and move faster; when idle capacity exist there develops disinterest hence reluctance to invest. The Turkwel Dam Project, for instance, has a past trace of its inception, going down to 1934 (SOGREAK Engineers Publication, 1986). During this period the colonial government felt that the Turkana
and West Pokot regions suffered overgrazing. There was need to preserve vegetation and limit effects of desertification among many alternative decisions to 'solve the overgrazing' problem ranging from enforcing emigration to setting up group camps where the people would be fed through food relief programmes. It was decided that other occupations besides pastoralism would have to be established.

Fishing in Kalokol and irrigation schemes for farming in Katilu were thus initiated. However, the land under agriculture was still less and there was strong demand for more. The Turkwel multipurpose project was thus thought out. The implementation of the Turkwel Dam in mid-1980 was faced with controversies. This controversy bordering on non-viability also hit Eldoret International Airport. It is instructive that on being evaluated recently by SOGREAH Engineers from France, Turkwel power project was found to be very stable and sustainable. It contributes a sizable amount of power to the National Grid's Hydroelectric Power (103 Mw). Moreover, while other dams in the country dry up during dry spells, thereby necessitating power rationing, Turkwel power dam does not.

It is clear that projects should not be criticized while at their initial stages before giving time to prove their worth. It was necessary to carry out an evaluation study at Eldoret International Airport to establish whether at its present stage, six years after going into operation, it had proved worthwhile in Western part of the country. It was noted that no studies had been carried out on the Airport in respect to its evaluation. There was, therefore, need to conduct one in this facility to establish its resourcefulness.

In their book, *Terrorized Citizens*, Kamenju, Singo and Wairagu (2003) report that business in the North Rift Districts has negatively been affected because of insecurity taking the form of cattle rustling. Cattle buyers do not go to the region to buy cattle. Businesses in the region have stalled all because the place has been insecure (ibid.). The authors also report of minerals in the North Rift Region such as gold deposits, gypsum and semiprecious metals, which are fairly quantitatively profitable. Limestone deposits are also available in greater commercial amounts in Ortum, West Pokot District. However, due to insecurity, these resources remain largely unexploited (ibid.).
It is the prerogative of scholars to find out the extent to which economic activities in the North Rift have been undermined by the prevalence of insecurity in the region. For a long time, the region was the centre of tribal clashes in Kenya. As such, the study sought to ascertain if the Eldoret International Airport also became a victim to the insecurity debacle in the region.

There are tourist destinations in Baringo, prehistoric sights in Turkana, the beautiful Kerio Valley, and the Mt. Elgon Game Reserve and many others. Kamenju, Singo and Wairagu (2003) posit that insecurity undermines tourism in the North Rift and the areas around Eldoret. Therefore, the study sought to evaluate the Eldoret International Airport as a public utility within a short period. Evaluation, as defined by Cooley and Lohnes (1986), is a process by which relevant data is collected and transformed into information for decision-making. It aims at determining the worth of whatever is being studied.

Public utilities are put up by government in order to serve the society by enhancing their capacity to meet their needs. It is hoped that a public utility becomes a booster of people’s standards of living. An educational institution helps people acquire knowledge, which enables them make informed decisions. The medical facilities promote health among individuals, roads enhance transport of goods, and airports facilitate safe landing and departures of flights. They also open up a country to the international community. In the same fashion, the study focused on Eldoret International Airport as a public utility.

The idea to construct the Airport was mooted and eventually put into action by the Kenya Airports Authority acting on the powers bestowed upon it by the Laws of Kenya CAP 395, Section 3. The Authority felt that the facility upon completion would effectively serve the western region of the country. According to the Kenya Airports Authority management, the Eldoret International Airport aims at maximizing revenue generation from airport operations by opening up tourism and promotion of businesses in western Kenya and the Great lakes region. This is achieved through provision of modern airport facilities that adequately addressing comfort, safety and security matters in line with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) standards. It also has to be in conformity with the recommended standards and
practices in line with the country's national development policies (Kenya Airports Authority Act, 2000).

According to Kenya Airports Authority (2000), the Airport embraces strategic management practices. Strategic management is the process of formulating, implementing and evaluating business strategies to achieve future objectives (David, 1997). KAA publication further expounds that Eldoret International Airport in adopting modern management practices and in its endeavours to be conscious and focused on changing management dynamics has come up with strategies that would guide to achieve its objectives:

a) Pursuing aggressive marketing of the Airport locally and internationally
b) Provide world-class services and maintain quality facilities and services.
   c) Facilitate the establishment of the tourist circuit in Western Kenya.
d) Create a regional cargo hub
e) Design and implement appropriate safety standards, regulation and procedures.
f) Develop and implement sound effective personnel administration policies that adequately address all matters pertaining to personnel management.

Apart from setting up strategies the management also has keen interest on quality customer delivery, sustainable internal and external focus. However, continuous development of company capability and planning and implementation issues in managing strategy are yet to be noticed.

1.1 The History, Development and Growth of Eldoret International Airport

When Eldoret international Airport was completed in 1997, already other international airports in the country had been in existence, these being Moi International Airport in Mombasa and the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi. The entry of this Airport was therefore significant in that the Kenya Authority (KAA) must have felt a need to bring it into fore.

The three airports are miles apart from one another. For example, between Nairobi and Eldoret is 311km and from Nairobi to Mombasa is 482km. Porter (1996) says that a new entrant into an already established industry has an entrepreneurial edge over the incumbent business units. The geographical positioning of the Eldoret International
Airport was based on economic reasons, as the region is robustly endowed with agriculture potential. According to Porter (1996), new positions woo customers from established positions. Whether these customer exits from either Jomo Kenyatta Airport or Moi Airport Mombasa took place with the advent of the Eldoret International Airport is yet to be known.

Operational effectiveness may be the benchmark for measuring performance in business units cutting across a given industry (Hill & Gareth, 2001). In operational effectiveness a company performs similar activities better than its rival. However, in positioning, companies perform different activities from those of rivals or perform similar activities in different ways. Currently in Kenya geographical positioning is what thrives in the aerodrome performance (Kenya Airport Authority, 2001).

This may work well for a given facility depending on how endowed it is. According to the Kenya Economic Survey (2000/2001), the Eldoret International Airport recorded an improved cargo traffic performance in 2001, as it more than doubled to 10,110 tonnes in 2001 from 4968 tonnes in 2000. However, passenger traffic declined by 24.8% to 32 thousand from 42 thousand passengers handled in 2000.

1.2 Strategic Management Issues
1.2.1 The Corporate Level Strategy

The revenue sources of any airport include landing and parking fees, land rent, building rent, trade concessions, fuel through put car park and other miscellaneous sources. In keeping with the facility's objectives of maximizing revenue generation by promoting tourism and businesses in western region of the country, the airport management has put strict adherence to provision of quality airport services. This in line with the Kenya Airport Authority's mission of providing world class services in our airports' management, the strategic intent put in place to guide the Authority so as to attain its goals is to offer preferred airport services in the region.

This is well spelt out by the Authority's vision: "to be the preferred airport services provider in the region". The Airport is still in its infancy stage and has no subsidiaries. The promotion of business is a strategy,
which it is hoped to generate synergistic benefits. In fact this promotion of business and tourism will hopefully propel the Airport into a giant hub in western Kenya as well as the whole of the Great Lakes region. Currently, the management has seriously embarked on publicity of the Airport and sensitizing investors and potential businessmen, including farmers to double their efforts so as to make use of the airport.

These strategies, which are meant to promote business at the Airport, apart from using brochures include use of media, i.e. the SAYARE radio station, arranging seminars and making visits. The management made bold steps by identifying business opportunities in the region and then went further to compile them in form of brochures. The same has been done for tourist destinations. This effort is set to pay dividends as the Ministry of Tourism has given due attention to the need to promote tourism in the region.

For now it may be said that going further to promoting business and tourism in the region may not be the core functions of the Airport. It may constitute to an unrelated diversification. This strategy may hold and become beneficial with time. However, when businesses and tourism become developed and robustly sustaining in the region, it may become desirable for the Airport to abandon these tasks and concentrate on its core functions - provision of quality Airport services.

1.2.2 Business Level Strategy
According to Johnson (1987), business strategy is a broad general term defined as the process of determining basic long term business objectives, obtaining and allocating the required resources necessary to achieve the chosen strategy and creating the appropriate organization to implement the strategy. Hill and Gareth (2000) observe that a business strategy is an overall competitive theme that a company chooses to stress the way it positions itself in market place to gain competitive advantages by establishing a positioning strategy that can be used in different industry settings. The airport's business strategies are relatively not elaborate. They are also not well developed yet. However, service handling is quicker and efficient. This may be attributed to the fact that the aerodrome prides itself as the most automated facility in the country in particular and to a large extent, E. Africa.
The cargo handling is carried out by use of modern machines and equipment. Delays however occur but they are caused by quite unnecessary bureaucratic arrangements imposed upon by the Airports’ government agencies, e.g. the custom authorities, the police and the health officers. These various arms of government are dotted over a wide range of distant sites of the Airport instead of them being stationed in one place to quicken delivery of services.

The Eldoret Airport management has not focused beyond their routine and core functions unlike the other airports like Jomo Kenyatta and Moi international Airport in Mombasa. Perhaps this can be attributed to its being new. The number of flights handled by the Airport is still small. In 2001, for example, the facility handled an average of 8 planes a day, 2516 during the same year. Jomo Kenyatta, for example, handled an average of 100 planes per day in the same period. Although Eldoret International Airport has minimal flight handling perhaps because of poor marketing strategies or lack of it the airport performance is favourably attractive and the number of planes and cargo tonnage keep on increasing right from the time to its inception. This is a positive development.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

There are observable merits of using Eldoret Airport compared to both Jomo Kenyatta and Moi Airports in Nairobi and Mombasa respectively. There is a two-hour distance difference between Eldoret International Airport and Moi International Airport when accessing both European and Asian markets, Eldoret being shorter. When compared with Jomo Kenyatta Airport, there is one-hour difference, Eldoret again being shorter (Kenya Airports Authority, 2000). Despite this glaring time advantage, Eldoret International Airport still suffers lesser utilization than the other two international airports in Kenya. This begs the question of what could be undermining the effectiveness of Eldoret International Airport.

When the idea to construct Eldoret International Airport was born and Eldoret town was identified as its suitable location, the strongest criticism was, interestingly, received from politicians who vehemently opposed its construction citing non-viability of the location. According to these critics, the Airport would be a white elephant. This opposition and subsequent criticisms were so intense that donors became hesitant in supporting its construction and the result was that the size of the Airport had to be
scaled down. For instance, its runway hitherto poised to be 4.7km long was reduced to 3.5 Km long. This again begs the question on whether or not these criticisms were genuine.

There are rich tourist destinations and striking sites in the Western part of Kenya (Eldoret International Airport's, 2000). These include the beautiful Rift Valley, the expansive green tea farms in Kericho, the Kisii soap stone carving, and prehistoric sites in Turkana, Bird watching and Bull fighting in Kakamega, Boat motoring in Lake Victoria, and the giant caves in Mt. Elgon. Others include Athletic activities in the North Rift. There are also Game Reserves found in Mt. Elgon and Kapnorok in Mt. Elgon and Baringo Districts respectively.

These tourist sites are available in the region and one wonders why with these tourist destinations the Eldoret International Airport has not attracted tourists and a number of chattered passenger planes. The study, therefore, sought to establish the reasons for this state of affairs at the Airport.

1.4 MATERIALS AND METHODS
The study used the case study research design. In this case, Eldoret International Airport was identified as a case for study. Case study is commonly used in policy research. A policy research focuses on an analysis of a fundamental special problem in order to provide policy makers with action oriented recommendations for alleviating the problem (Majchrzak, 2013).

Rist (1982a, 1982b) asserts that case studies give an in-depth analysis of superficial statistical portrayal of populations. Case studies also give complete understanding of complex situations by examining behaviour. The Eldoret International Airport fraternity was the population of interest.

To collect the required data, questionnaires were developed and administered to the target population. There was no population sample required in the study, as it was a case that targeted formalized groups. Secondary data was sourced from the Airport itself and also the Kenya Airport Authority Offices. The data was necessary to give evidence to the prevailing facts on the ground. The key informants in the study included the Airport management, tourist officers in the region of study, Airport Staff and the stakeholders of the Airport. The management gave insight into the nature of operations at the Airport. It also gave authoritative information
particularly on internal dynamics surrounding the Airport.

The management had in-depth knowledge on the attitude, the entrepreneurial nature and the perceived inadequacies and strengths of the facility. Workers were able to reveal information bedevilling performance from within, ranging from motivation to undue bureaucracy at the Airport precincts. Stakeholders included suppliers, exporters and importers. The stakeholders gave the perceptions and attitudes held about the Airport. This was studied to establish whether or not there is a link between perception and Airport performance.

The method of administering the questionnaire was by hand-delivered forms to the respondents. Face–to-face interviews were greatly relied upon. The respondents were given a week to respond to the questionnaires. Respondents were given contacts to access the author in case they needed clarification on any of the items. Forums created by interested parties and other stakeholders such as the Presidential Committee on Promotion of Business Activity on Eldoret Airport also contributed ideas immensely.

Tables, graphs and charts were employed as tools of analysis of the research data. The tables were used to show annual incremental rates, the mean and deviations from the mean. The incremental rate was constructed with regard to the rate at which aircrafts and passengers increased in numbers annually. The cargo tonnage annual incremental rates were also given in tables. The charts and the graph were used to back up the information exhibited by the tables. The analysis was also done by employing the author’s own professionally informed judgment of the information obtained from respondents through the interviews and the questionnaires which had been prepared.

1.5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1.5.1 Passenger Movement at the Airport

The passenger airlines landing and departing from the Airport carry passengers of diverse orientations. They include ordinary travellers and tourists. It was, however, not clearly known whether most tourists used the Airport to connect flights or not. Nevertheless, according to the tourism office, in Eldoret the flow of tourists to the region has not been encouraging.

Table 1 above shows the passenger movement at the Airport. At the start of the
airport, i.e. in 1997, passengers were registered at 2036 level. The following year registered 17111 passengers, an increment of 740%. This phenomenal increase is attributed to the excitement of the enthusiastic users of the facility. It is observable from the table that the passengers' flow at the Airport had a decreasing trend as from 1999 to date.

This decrease is notably attributed to the fact that many airlines withdrew from the route, leaving one or two airlines to run the show. The withdrawal by many airlines is explained by the fact that many of them found the route uneconomical since they could not raise passengers sufficient to fill the plane capacity. The standard deviation of 13 is quite a significant deviation from the mean of 23; the deviations is so wide. This is +13 average of the annual passenger flow. This gives a range of between 10 at the lower range of the mean passenger flow and 36 at the higher range. The greater deviation from the annual mean passenger flow is attributed to a pull out of passenger aircrafts from the route hence the downward trend as explained by the table on passenger movement. Study the chart below in Figure 1.

![Figure 1: A chart showing passenger movements](image)

There was a marked increase of passengers handled by the Airport from 1998 to 2001. The downward trend that began in 2002 may have been occasioned by the bombing of the twin towers in New York, USA by terrorists. This terrorist actions spread fear among travellers throughout the whole world. However, there was good performance on passenger flights in 2003. This could have showed improved business had the government not interfered with the operations of the airport in the same year.

1.5.2 Tourism Potential
Kenya Airports Authority had six major objectives in establishing the Eldoret International Airport. Apart from creating major cargo hub in the region the
government through the Kenya Airports Authority also sought to establish and promote the tourist circuit in the western Kenya. In 2001, the government organized a flurry of promotional activities in which it undertook to repackage the western Kenya circuit.

Western Kenya has many tourist sites. It has the biggest population in the country and can offer rich diverse culture and heritage. The richness and therefore tourist potential in western Kenya spans many tourist regions such as Nakuru, Kericho, Kisumu, Kisii, Kakamega, Eldoret, Kitale, Kapenguria, Lodwar and other parts falling under the catchment area of Eldoret International Airport.

Agro-tourism has also flourished in the region. The fertile western highlands region has sugar-cane farms in Nandi, Nyanza and Western Province. Coffee farms in Bungoma and Kericho’s expansive tea farms undulating into smooth and uniform, distinctive light green 'table' of tea bushes.

1.5.3 Tourism Response in the Region
Despite the rich and potential of tourism in the western Kenya, visitors going to the region are still insignificant in number. There are reasons that explain the poor tourist response to the region. The reasons given below originate from the seasoned tourist operators and tourist agency officials in Western Kenya:

a) Hotels and lodges in the region are below standards in terms of quality. Quite a number of lodges exist but may either not be enough or the hygienic conditions prevailing in these resort places leave a lot to be desired.

b) Promotion of tourism in the region has not been adequate. Quite often the Kenya Tourism Board has not done enough job to emphasize tourism in this part of the country. In most cases much of their efforts are centred in the coastal region. Tourism offices have just opened in Eldoret town. This is a move they should have made a long time ago.

c) Most airlines have not come to embrace and schedule flights to and from Eldoret Airport. Perhaps as affirmed by many respondents the reasons are in most cases based on attitude. Most interviewees held that due to bad publicity perhaps based on glossy political reasons, the facility has attitudinally low rating.
d) The people within the region have not embraced the concept of domestic tourism. Additionally most people use road transport in their travels. These are particularly people originating from the North rift. This reason may be based on lack of information and lack of efforts to promote air travels by airlines. For instance, most airlines have not opened offices in Eldoret town, may be apart from the Air Kenya.

e) According to many people interviewed and as anonymously agreed in various forums organized by the presidential committee that seeks to promote Eldoret international airport, the airline's charges on passenger travels are very high. This, according to many would-be users is the reason as to why the airlines have not adequate capacity potential.

1.6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To promote entrepreneurial culture, the Ministry of Trade and Industry in conjunction with Ministry of Agriculture personnel needs to inculcate and impart knowledge to the people about good business and best agricultural practices respectively. So far through the European Union Retail & Production on Good Agricultural Practices (EUREPGAP) and the National Agriculture & Livestock Extension Program (NALEP), the Ministry of Agriculture Livestock and Fisheries Development had made steps towards enhancing production and quality. These concepts should be promoted and made to flourish.

The Municipal Authorities within the region, particularly Eldoret town, need to advertise and promote potential investment areas in their authorities so as to attract potential investors. This can be done by organizing trade exhibitions in places like Nairobi, organizing investment forums in the towns, publishing a feature about the authorities both in the print and electronic media. Doing this, the potential investors will get knowledge on the existing potential in the municipal authorities. Eldoret Municipal Council would, for instance, cite the following strengths:

- Vast land expansive enough to facilitate expansion of businesses premises
- Rich agricultural potential within and around its surrounding
Eldoret is a middle point between Nairobi and Kampala in Uganda. Also the proximity to Sudan
- Reliable water supply
- Relatively higher population (450,000)
- Good and well maintained roads
- Adequate power supply
- Relatively adequate security

Self-regulating professional bodies like the Kenya Manufacturers Association (KMA), Horticultural Association of Kenya, Tourist associations, need to be encouraged to open offices in Eldoret. These bodies play an important role in promoting businesses and also regulate business practices in the region.

Towns in North Rift like Eldoret, Kitale, Kapenguria, Kapsabet and others in catchment areas of the Eldoret airport should form lobby groups and associations to promote security, cleanliness and business strategies. The municipal authorities need to be encouraged to draft a concept paper on existing economic resources, how to identify and exploit them. Authorities like the Iten Town Council, Marakwet County Council, Pokot County Council and Lodwar Municipal Authority need to establish and promote livestock product related industries, e.g. the slaughter houses and tanneries. Funds need to be sourced from African Development Bank (ADB), the World Bank and local financial institutions.

The government should consider giving concessions to would be investors on tourism to put up standard hotels and other accommodation facilities. It should also put in place infrastructure that promotes investment in remote areas seen to have potential in tourism. Telephones, electricity and provision of water in such areas is important. The beautiful scenic Kerio Valley for instance requires good recreational facilities such as restaurants, lodges and guesthouses.

The Turkana, Pokot and Marakwet have rich traditions and culture that if put into use through exhibitions and cultural centres can boost tourism in the region. The dance, artefacts, mode of dressing and cultural lectures can work out well. The same people can be used to entertain visitors on arrival from foreign destinations at the Airport.

The Kenya Tourism Board has to move with speed to open offices in Eldoret town to serve the entire western Kenya region. The presence of tourism officials is a boon to
tour enthusiasts and the tour firms that are almost on their knees.

REFERENCES