Twenty-Sixth Meeting of the AFI Planning and Implementation Regional Group (APIRG/26)

7 to 8 November 2023

Agenda Item 3 Other Air Navigation Initiatives

3.6 IATA FOCUS AFRICA U-TALK 2035 PROJECT- AIR/GROUND COMMUNICATION

(Presented by IATA)

SUMMARY	
This working paper presents the outcome of Focus Africa Conference held 20 -21 June 2023 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The Conference officially launch the Focus Africa initiative, a collaborative project, pooling together resources from across the aviation value chain, to urgently address key challenges hindering the advancement of aviation across Africa. The paper also highlights the Six key areas discussed at the conference i.e., Safety, Infrastructure, Connectivity, Future Skills, Sustainability, and Finance and Distribution. **Action by the Meeting is as per paragraph 3**	
Strategic Objectives	Aviation Safety, B- Air Navigation Capacity and Efficiency, D - Economic Development of Air Transport and E – Environmental protection

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Air-Ground communication continues to be a major challenge in many States/Flight Information Regions (FIRs) in the AFI region. IATA has, over the past decade and a half, periodically carried out surveys (on behalf of ICAO and States) which has shown a slow and inconsistent implementation of air-ground network system in Africa.

1.2 Deficiency in communication has had a significant impact on the provision of efficient air traffic services (ATS) and the safety performance of air transport operations in general. It will become even more pronounced with the projected growth in air traffic driven by the implementation of SAATM.

1.3 Air-ground communication is critical for the operationalization of flight plannable Direct Routes (DCTs) and Free Route Airspace (FRA) with benefits, not only on the reduction of CO2 emission and environmental protection, but also time-related engine/airframe and crew costs.

1.3 "U-Talk" 2035 Project is a 'Wall-to-Wall' coverage for Air-Ground Communication strategy in Africa that has the sole objective to improve air-ground communication, consistently and progressively in Africa by the year 2035. The project was born out of the Focus Africa Conference, which was the result of the active participation and contribution of ideas by major aviation stakeholders.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1. Focus Africa Initiative brought together more than 300 aviation leaders, decision makers and influencers representing airlines, airports, government agencies, air navigation service providers, international and regional associations, aviation suppliers, aircraft manufacturers and other stakeholders from Africa, the Middle East and globally, to collaboratively drive the advancement of aviation in Africa.

2.2 The conference focused on six key areas for discussion namely Safety, Infrastructure, Connectivity, Future Skills, Sustainability, and Finance and Distribution.

2.3 One of the key challenges identified was the deficiencies in air-ground communication which is critical for safety performance, efficiency, and sustainability of aviation in the region. In order to address this deficiency, Focus Africa agreed on a project approach to implement U-Talk 2035, which will ensure a 'Wall-to-Wall' coverage of air-ground communication in the region by 2035. The project looks at the current and future technologies that when implemented collaboratively, will support the expected growth in aviation in Africa.

2.4 Inadequate air-ground communication system in Africa has significant impact on safety and efficiency of flight operations e.g., infringements in required separation standards, AIRPROX, TCAS events, other ATS incidents and even accidents.

2.5 Ineffectively air-ground communication networks may contribute to flight crew flying less than optimum flight levels due to inability of effective Pilot-Controller communication, hence high fuel burn and CO^2 emissions.

2.6 Some of the causal factors identified are inadequate infrastructure leading to gaps in VHF/HF coverage area, legacy equipment, poor or lack of a maintenance program, unstable or inconsistent power supply to the ground infrastructure, accessibility to the ground stations etc.

2.7 Whilst the challenges faced by the region in addressing air-ground communication are known, lack of resources/capital, frequency interference and protection, national aeronautical communication infrastructure strategy and plan have made it difficult to address the problem effectively.

2.8 To resolve air-ground communication challenges, Focus Africa U-Talk 2035 project calls for a collaborative development and implementation of a communication strategy that will ensure investment in continuous and cost-effective communication

infrastructure improvement strategies, investment in new technologies, while taking cognizance of currently available communication infrastructure.

3 ACTION BY THE MEETING

3.1 The meeting is invited to,

a) Take note of the information in this working paper.

b) Undertake a gap analysis on air-ground infrastructure & coverage in the AFI Region.

c) Identify the strategies/plans/ actions/activities to address identified gaps.

d) Develop a regional air-ground communication strategy and action plan and Urge States to develop national air-ground communication strategy and action plans.

e) Identify current and future communication technologies requirements e.g., VHF/HF, SATCOM, CPDLC etc.

f) Study and review satellite-based communication system benefits e.g., Space-Based VHF

g) Develop synergies with strategic stakeholders e.g., RECs, international organizations and align strategies for cost-effectiveness and harmonization based on AFI ANS Master Strategy.

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