

Does Africa only have three facilities to repair aircraft?

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To attract investors, Nigeria's Kaduna state wants to repair aircraft. But would its planned facility be only the fourth on the continent, as the state's governor's account tweeted?



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Located in Nigeria's northern heartland, the state of Kaduna aims to boost its economy by attracting more investors. One way it wants to do this is by putting up a centre to service aircraft.

(Note: Another is to attract mining, with state governor Nasir Ahmad El-Rufai previously claiming Kaduna has more gold than South Africa, but we couldn't find proof of that.)

A centre to service aircraft - known in the industry as a "maintenance, repair and overhaul" facility - would help make Kaduna a hub for both passengers and cargo, [authorities said](#). It would also save airlines the millions of dollars that they spend on maintenance abroad, the governor's official handle tweeted in August.

“ When the Kaduna State MRO facility is built, airlines will get to save between \$600,000 to \$1M that they spend on maintenance abroad. <https://t.co/6eJEUqqr8r>— Governor Kaduna (@GovKaduna) August 12, 2017 ”

It is "important to note that in the whole of Africa, there are only three maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) facilities", the governor's account further motivated.

“ Important to note that in the whole of Africa, there are only 3 Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) facilities for aircrafts.— Governor Kaduna (@GovKaduna) August 12, 2017 ”

Does this claim get off the ground?

No word from state officials on source of claim

Africa Check contacted Kaduna state authorities and governor El-Rufai's aide on new media, Maryam Abubakar, for the source of their data, but we received no response.

Michal Swoboda, a freelance aviation consultant based in Poland, told Africa Check that maintenance, repair and overhauls "can be very limited, basic tasks performed at an airport (line maintenance) or complex maintenance checks including structural work (base or heavy maintenance)".

Furthermore, MRO facilities can be in-house (affiliated to airlines) or independent, aviation analyst Daniella Horwitz told Africa Check. She has widely covered aircraft maintenance on the continent.

Such facilities need to be approved by aviation authorities - either the national authority where it is located or general ones such as the European Aviation Safety Agency and the American Federal Aviation Administration, Swoboda added.

Maintenance is tightly regulated by a UN agency, the International Civil Aviation Organisation, as non-compliance can have fatal consequences.

'More pressing priorities' for Nigeria

In Nigeria, the idea isn't a new one. The state of Akwa Ibom is reported to have abandoned the construction of a \$50m aircraft repair area in 2015.

If aircraft checks and repairs were done locally, Nigeria could save \$500m annually and create up to 10,000 jobs, a June 2017 aviation seminar heard.

But John Ojikutu, a member of Nigerian aviation industry think-tank Aviation Round Table and retired Nigeria air force pilot, said that the country's states had more pressing concerns, such as building more schools and hospitals.

No facilities listed for Nigeria or West Africa

Africa Check counted at least 49 providers offering different kinds of aircraft maintenance and repairs in the directory of Airline Update - a website that provides commercial aviation information.

This directory is continuously updated as data is received from the companies, Paul Ellis, a UK-based retired pilot who runs the website, told Africa Check.

It shows South Africa has 15 companies that offer both heavy and light maintenance in at least six different airports. Kenya has seven in at least three airports, while Morocco has six in at least three airports. None is listed for Nigeria or any country in West Africa.

Another directory, that of the industry lobby African Airlines Association, lists nine internationally approved African MRO companies on its website, with seven of these owned by major African airlines. These companies perform base, component, line or engine checks and repairs out of about 15 airports on the continent.

Africa's major hubs in Johannesburg, Nairobi and Addis

"If the Kaduna state government is thinking only of sub-Saharan Africa, and excluding South Africa, and counting just those MROs that provide third-party heavy (base) maintenance, he [the state government] might be correct. Otherwise, not!" Ellis said.

"I do not think it is correct to say there are only three MRO facilities in the whole of Africa," Horwitz told Africa Check. "There are many small MRO facilities all over Africa, but they are not really hubs, as they probably only service one airline and tend to have one hangar."

She said that at the start of 2017, there were three major MRO hubs on the continent: in Johannesburg (South Africa), Nairobi (Kenya) and Addis Ababa (Ethiopia). These are big centres where airlines from other parts of the world come for

aircraft maintenance and which generally have more than one operator for servicing.

Horwitz has flagged a skills shortage and the lack of enough aircraft to sustain major maintenance operations on the continent as key challenges for the region.

Conclusion: Africa has three aircraft maintenance hubs, but many more facilities

Nigeria's Kaduna state said that Africa has only three facilities to repair aircraft, as it made a case for building its own and become a key continental aviation player.

But aviation experts said the continent has more than three, with Africa Check counting nearly 50 firms that provide such services. South Africa, Kenya and Morocco have the highest number.

If Kaduna state were referring to major repair hubs it may have had a stronger case, as experts say there are currently three in the region.

However, the governor's office specifically referred to "facilities", but we will be generous and rate the claim an exaggeration.

Source: Africa Fact Check via All Africa

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