



At the tender age of seven, Dawit Lemma shared his chosen career options with his parents. Having discussed the subject with his best friend, the choice was between being a cowboy or an aviator. Unsurprisingly, both sets of parents nudged their young sons towards aviation, gently pointing out that life as a cowboy was somewhat limited in terms of opportunities.

Today, Lemma's best friend is the chief pilot for an American airline, and he has just been appointed as Chairperson of the African Business Aviation Association. The accomplishment follows years of involvement with the organization, underpinned by a strong, dynamic career within the sector.

«As the child of humanitarian professionals, I was lucky enough to live in a variety of places. I was educated in the United States, where I earned my aerospace degree at Purdue. Subsequently, I worked in a variety of roles, including time as a mechanic, a pilot – I still hold commercial and private licenses – and as the head of my own business, Krimson Aviation, based in Addis Ababa. I think this diverse experience made me realize how great the opportunities are in Africa, which is why I moved from Geneva to Ethiopia just over ten years ago.» From here, Lemma has built a successful aviation company that tailors to medevac, charter, MRO, ground, and trip support for business aviation across East Africa and beyond.

«On day one of Krimson, I reached out to Rady Fahmy, the young AfBAA's CEO, asking how I could be involved. He immediately asked: What can you do for us? Since then, I've been active in promoting and growing the Association, have managed events and membership, and worked my way up to board level.»

In May this year, his fellow board members voted Dawit into his new post. Together with Vice Chair Craig Middleton, who worked for one of the Association's founding members before launching his own consultancy business, they bring immense experience, knowledge, and an impressive global network of contacts. *«Craig and I know each other. We know the board and the intricacies of AfBAA, so we're excited to continue evolving the Association to add real value to our members' activities. We want to advocate on their behalf to address the most pressing issues, ensure that AfBAA is always relevant, and encourage them to get active in the Association too.»* To this end, Lemma and Middleton are already implementing a strategic plan that is sure to add vigor to AfBAA's next chapter.

The strategy is based on five key pillars that aim to generate momentum, raise visibility, and support credibility by acting as a single voice with regulators, industry, and international organizations. A first step for Lemma is to reach out to members to establish what they want the organization to focus on. *«We need to have a two-way conversation. It's essential we understand their needs. We also want to encourage them to participate in the Association to make it a rich resource for all those involved.»* Strengthened communications between the organization and its members is clearly a top priority.

A new governance committee, led by a professional secretariat, will establish streamlined processes to facilitate financial management, membership structure, and adherence to bylaws, thereby maintaining standards and laying solid foundations. *«If we have a strong base, we can more efficiently achieve our goals.»* Part of the team's remit will be to establish AfBAA's first Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) policy.

Aspiring to, reaching, and maintaining international standards will be crucial to the future success of all stakeholders. Lemma suggests that the organization needs to continue working on reducing the negative perceptions that still exist regarding operating in Africa. *«To this end, we're modernizing our marketing and communications activities to highlight the many positive stories and outcomes, while sharing solutions to ongoing challenges across the continent.»*

The introduction of North, South, East, and West AfBAA chapters will support this narrative. Africa comprises 54 nations, each with its own aviation culture, yet it's not just geographical diversity that's being addressed. *«We expect that remotely piloted aircraft system operators (RPAS) and advanced air mobility professionals will also benefit from membership. Most significantly, many of our aviation stakeholders fall within the general aviation sector, and the Association must also support them. The FAA defines business aviation as the use of aircraft for business purposes. In Africa, this refers to remote construction workers creating new communities, mining companies shuttling workers and exploration teams, humanitarian workers providing shelter, care, and medical support, and farmers using aircraft to manage their vast ranches and farms, to name just a few. We want to inspire them all to join so we can help support their distinct needs.»*

So, while Lemma's early cowboy ambitions may have been thwarted, as he takes the reins of AfBAA, he is excited to welcome African farmers who use aviation to support their businesses. *«Finally, cowboys and aviation meet, and I'm so proud and thrilled to be supporting them both,»* concludes Lemma. ■

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