

Kwabena Ofosu-Appiah, Joseph Agbaga & Robert Baffo Dapaah

GHANA INSTITUTE OF FREIGHT FORWARDERS

TEMA PORT



Who are you and what is your background?

In the middle in the picture is Mr. Kwabena Ofosu-Appiah, current president of Ghana Institute of Freight Forwarders (GIFF) in Tema; to his left is Mr. Joseph Agbaga, immediate past president of the GIFF, and to his right is Mr. Robert Baffo Dapaah, forwarding practitioner and former Head of Education and Training at GIFF, in their offices in Tema.

What is your task?

The Ghana Institute of Freight Forwarders is an umbrella body, an association of about 300 commercial entities engaged in freight forwarding, customs brokerage and transport and allied services.

One of the key corporate objectives is capacity building for both existing and prospective members of our association. The GIFF Academy offers FIATA validated

diploma in international freight forwarding and higher diploma in supply chain management.

What does the port expansion mean for your association?

There are many landlocked countries to the north of Ghana. The port expansion is needed to serve these countries, and for Ghana itself. As you know, we struck oil about 10 years ago. To export this resource we need improvement in infrastructure and other resources to receive bigger vessels such as tankers and Panamax vessels. We expect the turn-around time to be swift and expect a high through-put of cargo.

Containerization and freight concepts such as intermodal and multimodal transport have changed the way cargoes are sent across the world. The advent of door-to-door services, technological advancement have resulted

in unfair and inequitable shares in supply chain services that inure to the benefit of multi-national and big companies. This has resulted in lack of jobs and contracts to small firms like many of our corporate members. In spite of their competency in the industry backed by hands-on-experience by members and their staff, the local small companies no longer have leverage.

These are real issues confronting our association and its members.

How could the work of your association be made better or easier?

The freight forwarding and customs brokerage industry is under-resourced. Unlike our colleagues abroad, and except for a few corporate members, most of the small and medium-sized freight forwarders are unable to access financing from banks in our countries.

We also need to provide hands-on industry experience, so that people can acquire competence. Some of the companies in our association consist of talented people that have trained themselves on the job. But, the Ghanaian people who have knowledge, the human capacity, are often picked by the bigger companies. It is difficult for the smaller companies to find and keep employing such people. Also, the bigger companies have expensive machinery and equipment whereas the companies in our association might not have this and yet need to compete with them. So, they don't get the job.

We need the rail link to connect with the interior and the landlocked countries. If Ghana does not have the money to put the

railway in, then the conglomerates will join forces to do this, as in Cote D'Ivoire. Then they have the captive market for themselves and we are excluded.

Perhaps the local content laws may have to be re-visited to provide more clarity and openness to scrutiny in order for its implementation to achieve the reasons they were enacted. For example, in Philippines trade on the seas is considered international but from the ports every activity in the supply chain services becomes national. A similar law would help our industry.

What do you think of a sustainable port?

You know, people in Africa are very fertile and the population in Africa is growing. For a sustainable future, we need to consciously make the attempt that people get a share in the benefits from development, like the port expansion. This may not look very responsible or make financial sense now, but it does if you project it into the future. Security guarantees a long-term future, but today's situation cannot guarantee a stable future. Africa is tired of only hope. It is now the third generation who is hoping, and they are less patient. Everybody knows on paper what has to be done, but who does the work? You know that he who pays the piper calls the tune. But, people need to be able to have a share in the supply chain.

What do you think Tema and its port will look like in 20 years time?

There will be a drift of people to the port because they think there are easy jobs. But, living in the area of a port is the most expensive in the country. The business model must take into account the needs of

the people. Look at their lifestyle, how they are living, what entertainment or activities they do. If more people come to Tema, where will they go? Where will they live, and where will they do their activities? You could incorporate Meridian Rock into the port. You could have tours. Why not? Perhaps, there is a lack of vision. And, Sakumono Village – what will happen to them? The port is now located where they fish.

Around the RAMSAR site – the Sakumono Lagoon – one recommendation is to get the place dredged, get the silt out and enlarge the opening. You could then use this place for aquaculture, or have boats on it for recreational use, with restaurants around the shores. This would generate income and business for the local and indigenous people. This dredging needs to be done, so that people see it and believe it. Not only saying it, but doing it!

What do you hope?

We hope for a developing country – that people in this area have a job in our industry, linked to the port. But if the large companies take over this won't happen. We are sincerely concerned about this.

The Deputy Minister of Transport presented the report of the MDP group on the port expansion. The port functions as the reception area, but after that the freight has to go out. It is a new approach to think about how a port can benefit the community, thinking about how knowledge can be shared along the line. We want to train students to have broader visions of what they could be doing. We have here the very message to give them the understanding beyond what

they see, to think about the future. When all of us have this understanding we can go beyond transporting the goods.

The knowledge base needs to be transformed. We would like to train groups and equip them with knowledge that they could then use themselves, for example facilitation skills like in the stakeholder workshop. Apart from such communication skills development, we want to equip our course participants with practical knowledge, so that they will have a future in freight forwarding and beyond.

