

INFocus

DEALING WITH E-WASTES IN GHANA: THE ROLE OF THE PORTS

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Introduction

How do extremely dangerous e-wastes¹ end up in ports of Africa? What roles do the corporate governance structures of ports play in allowing e-waste, for example, into emerging markets like Ghana and other African countries? It is very important to prevent e-wastes and other dangerous goods from entering Ghana. Ghana can gain a lot as an emerging market if she allows the Global Compact on sustainability to influence her decisions of corporate governance of its ports. The various ISO codes are indeed applicable to African ports just as any ports anywhere in the world. These ISO codes must be treated as practical instruments but not as only theories on paper. It is an undeniable fact that African ports need to adopt best practices such as proactive stakeholder engagement in terms of sustainability in order to compete fairly at the global level. For Ghana to achieve sustainability within its ports, she needs to adopt appropriate technologies and tools that can help regulate the quantum of e-wastes that ends up polluting its environment. The focus of this article is on the West African country Ghana — one of the few with a vibrant maritime industry on the continent.

Ports of Ghana

Ghana has two main ports, the Tema and the Takoradi Ports. Recently both have undergone extensive modernization and expansion. The Ghana Ports and Harbours Authority has expanded its Tema port at the cost of US \$1 billion, funded by APM and its partners Meridian Port Services (MPS), Bolloré Africa Logistics, which was completed in the first quarter of 2020. According

to the current deputy Minister of Finance, Kwaku Kwarteng, “the government had an overall industrialization agenda for the port industry which included three fundamental targets and includes: automating all ports clearance process, eliminating multiplicity of vendors that provide IT, capacity building and other services for MDAs, and also have the Government of Ghana be able to own and control all data gathered through the port clearance process”. He further explained that the government intends to achieve a full automated port clearance process. The Port of Takoradi, located in western Ghana, is also undergoing a major expansion and infrastructure upgrade to increase its handling of cargo and storage capacity and also aimed at accommodating larger vessels. The \$450m project was in two phases: between 2013 and 2016, with the second phase beginning in 2018. While these are well designed and thought of, subsequent governments keep changing the system and so setting it back. For example, the original system employed, GC-NET, was working quite well only for a new administration to change it to UNIPASS², which has had a lot of issues. This is a typical example of what happens most of the time. That is when one government does something, the other wants it overhauled. While this may not be peculiar to Ghana, for a country that has monetary issues, she cannot afford to keep wasting money doing the same thing over and over again. If these things are done properly it would equip the ports with the capacity to deal with illegal e-wastes importation into the country.

¹E-wastes are electronic products nearing the end of their useful lives. For example, computers, televisions, photocopiers etc.

²<https://www.myjoyonline.com/business/aviation/freight-forwarder-bears-teeth-at-government-over-unipass-take-off/>

The E-waste Menace in Ghana

Over the years, Ghana and other third world countries have become a dumping ground for e-wastes. In fact, it is so bad that many diseases have been linked to the attempted burning of e-waste in the country. Many health professionals and stakeholders have advocated for an increased role of ports in dealing with this serious problem. It is proposed that imported products that do not meet a certain standard should not be allowed into the country. Policies have failed to deal with the importation of expired and outmoded machines that at the end become a danger to the environment. First of all, no country should become a dumping ground for other countries' wastes. The Philippines recently returned a huge ton of waste back to Canada and indeed others, paving the way for other countries in that region to follow suite. This same approach could be adopted by the Ghanaian government, but the role of the ports cannot be underestimated in this venture.

Below are some suggestions that are required to make the ports in Ghana equipped and ready to deal with the issue.

- *Building Capacity of Ghana Ports and Harbour Authority (GPHA) leadership on sustainability*

Ports as a corporate organization cannot be treated as an autonomous entity in the social system. The entire world is changing rapidly, and we cannot but agree with the position of the Institute of Democratic Governance, Ghana (IDEG) an NGO in Ghana that *“our future depends on our knowledge and actions. The choices we make today will change our health and the health of our country”*. Together we can “accumulate and share knowledge for sustainable development, promote a free, just and prosperous society in Ghana” and above all find the path that will lead us to a greener, healthier future for generations yet unborn in Africa and the rest of the world. This certainly can only be as a result of an enhanced *“capacity of citizens to influence public policy choices for accelerated growth and equitable development,*

and advance democracy and good governance in Ghana, and the rest of Africa.”(IDEG).

It is imperative to note that the sustainability roles of ports in the promotions of transfer of goods from source markets to destination emerging markets such as e-products and mostly e-waste in the context of Africa is the responsibility of all stakeholders most especially those in charge of corporate governance structures of our ports. For successful implementation of sustainability principles in port operations in developing countries, there is a need for a transformational Leadership which emphasizes the relationship of leaders and followers to each other and the importance of value creation in applying sustainability principles. Once the leadership of the ports are trained to accept and practice value creation and rejection of waste, it will definitely be easy to improve the skills of the workers at the ports that will go a long way to aid the end of dumping of the waste in Ghana.

- *Improve the skills of workers at the ports*

When the workers at the ports are properly equipped with the right skills, they are able to detect any abnormality in this regard. First, the workers need to be educated on the dangers of e-waste in the country and the effect on the economy. Secondly, the workers need to be trained in ICT and other related courses which will enhance their ability to communicate and understand the international standard to deal with e-waste. Thirdly, workers need to be exposed to the working practices of other ports around the world. For example, workers from the Tema or Takoradi ports would need to visit some of the world's leading ports such as Montreal, Vancouver, Rotterdam, San Francisco or the Honk Kong to understand how they are dealing with the issue in a sustainable way. This way, they can return and implement learned practices in the Ghanaian ports.

- *Need for extensive digitization*

The ports need to be equipped with the state-of-the-art technologies to detect and return such harmful wastes. Some companies have resorted to disguising

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methods to hide the contents been transported to ports in Ghana. In fact, even if they do make it, sometimes there are people who are bribed to cover it. While some of these are hard to prove, the evidence is in the amount of e-waste that eventually makes it to the refuse dumps in the country, where young men go through the rubbles and constantly burn the waste in search of copper and other precious metals oblivious to the health hazards involved. The ports in Ghana would benefit immensely from recent strides in digital technology like Blockchain, AIS data, machine learning. These would help reduce human involvement in the process of import and exports to the barest minimum. These technologies have been proven in other countries and so will definitely work in Ghana and particularly in the ports to deal with the issue of e-wastes.

- *Enacting of regulations to bar accepting such wastes into the country*

Ports sustainability certainly requires a high level of integrity. There is a critical need for the parliament of Ghana to enact stronger laws to govern the conduct of the port officials and other stakeholders dealing with imports of goods into Ghana. It is worthy to note that in this era of digital operations, the implementation of laws and monitoring of their key performance indexes are made very easy and practicable. There is no specific by-law among the import prohibitions and restrictions of the Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA) prohibiting the importation of e-waste into Ghana. The qualification of such materials allowed into Ghana is left to the subjective judgement of the commissioner of GRA and the staff stationed at the ports. Against this backdrop, goods especially waste that is prohibited in some jurisdictions in the world gets their way to the Ghanaian ports and are eventually allowed to be dumped in the country. It is very important to enact new by-laws, specifically dealing with the prohibition of the importation of e-wastes of certain grades into Ghana and ensure their implementation at the ports in order to prevent the dumping of e-waste in Ghana.

- *Liaise with international organizations to penalize any government or entity involved in the shipping of such goods to Ghana.*

There is also a need to liaise with relevant international organizations in order to make sure that any good leaving one country to another meets the minimum

acceptable international criteria. For example, African countries, including Ghana, can liaise with the appropriate UN organization to make sure that e-wastes are not sent to Ghana. Fines should be imposed on companies and countries that allow this to happen. With these fines in place, countries and for that matter companies, would be deterred from pursuing the policy of dumping e-wastes in other countries. In fact, countries that give contracts to companies responsible for dumping e-wastes should be scrutinized thoroughly.

Conclusion

There has not been a more critical time than now to address the problem of e-waste through the role of ports in Ghana. Enhanced leadership, digitization and the implementation of strong regulations are among the key measures identified to address this menace. Ports as an instrument for combating the e-waste problem cannot be underestimated, but proper management is the only way to make them efficient and effective in this regard. An environment that is free of e-waste means a healthy environment.

voice of professionals



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