

Fresh Air Matters... with Capt. Yaw

Why is it that the well-known expression 'a Prophet is not accepted in his own land' was written so long ago and yet continues to be a major, contributory factor to the lack of development on our continent? It is really embarrassing that so many people in Ghana simply do not want to support the country's industry, or successful young and not-so-young people - sometimes with reasons, but generally simply through 'auto-prejudice' and self-destructive, misplaced, knee-jerk reactions that we should have learned to overcome by now!

Conversely 'A profit from trading in products from somebody else's land' is alive, well and kicking down our own development.

I try wherever possible to support Ghanaian industry – otherwise I must ask myself "Why am I in Ghana?" Working in the leading West African aircraft-building operation, we need a lot of things that simply cannot be procured locally – but procure what we can locally. There are many tasks we sub-contract out of the country on a simple basis 'it cannot be done to the required standard in Ghana – YET'. Notice the 'YET' at the end. We have added so many new areas to our production and training, and are almost monthly bringing another stage of our trade 'home' – bringing the 'Profit' home, however, takes longer.

I do not deny that creating the ability to build aircraft (or anything else) in Ghana is simply not cost-effective in the short term. Far, far, far from it. Investment in terms of time, money and faith in people, and their potential, is not cheap. Money seems to evaporate during the development phase of a business, as does the confidence in people - both staff and customers. BUT, unless we do so, we will never see any 'profit from our own industries'. I know that this is not unique to aviation (far from it), but this is an aviation column, so indulge me whilst I consider my sector of aviation first.

Take for instance the fact that aircraft are generally designed for temperate climates and facilities. No thought is given to the conditions in Ghana when a designer in Europe or the USA thinks about the aircraft at all. Consider the fuel quality needed. Because *they* have easy access to all of the qualities wherever *they* go, the 'Not-really-interested-in-Africa-Aircraft Company and Co' will install a high-compression piston engine that is not adapted to tropical areas – neither for fuel type, nor with consideration for cooling, ease of inspection, prevention of insect nests, etc. The conscientious local aircraft producer will install an engine that can run on readily-available, affordable fuels, with extra cooling, inspection panels, insect avoidance, etc. Furthermore, the local 'spec' machine stands a better chance of being more reliable due to this adaptation – and a more cost-effective investment.

When we train pilots here in Ghana we have very interesting weather, to say the least. For example, aircraft land into wind whenever possible. In most of the temperate climates, the wind will be blowing in one direction all day, and if it changes it will be a one-off. In Ghana, we see dramatic wind direction changes – sometimes four or more per hour – often just for a few minutes. It takes more attention to detail when learning to land in the tropics than the higher latitudes – and really does help us to produce better, more-aware, reactive pilots.

Nonetheless, there is a belief (a clearly misplaced belief) that foreign products and training are always better. Across the industries in Ghana we have many excellent locally-produced or part-produced products, and can provide outstanding training, which is more relevant to the local climate (meteorological, pathogenic and economic) than outside versions. So

when will we invest in ourselves and stop rejecting the possibility of 'recognising our own profit-potential in our homeland'?

All the time that our local industries and training facilities are investing in setting up and are not supported by individuals, business and governmental organisations, we are dooming ourselves to 'rejecting profit from our own land'!

To put this into day-to-day experiences: I went to purchase some pain-killers at a local Ghanaian-owned and run pharmacy. After the young lady raised her head from her arms, where she was carrying out a detailed survey of the inside of her eyelids, she kindly proposed a foreign-produced product. When I insisted that I wanted the Ghanaian product, (made by more than one local company, as it happens), I was treated as a cheapskate, ignorant and misled person of lower than average IQ and in need of explanation. 'So you do not want the correct one'. Yes, I did want the correct one – the correct, well-produced, locally-aware one. The Ghana product is every bit as good as the European one, and I know from experience that the local one is 'correct'. I doubt whether my sarcastic and bombastic commentary (that I am prevented from writing here for legal reasons), made any impact on her 'buy foreign – it is better' neuro-centre. I tried, as I try daily, to find a little fissure in the mental barrier to 'support and grow the Ghana-CAN-do' way of thinking.

I know that Ghana can do – and can do very well. Ghanaians can do – and do do excellently. So why, when a Ghanaian or Ghanaian company achieves some great result (such as a Ghanaian working at NASA, a Ghanaian company winning a contract legitimately, growth in Ghanaian exports, etc) do we hear so many negatives compared to positives?

As a pilot, I hate the expression 'Pull Him Down' – you know we pilots like to stay in the air; but I first heard about the PHD system in Ghana. It really exists everywhere, but it seems to be perfected in developing nations. Only we can change it, if we want to. If we don't, we will want to in the future, and in the future it will be harder to change. So let's change it now – TODAY.

Here is the deal. If you are completely in disagreement with the above – please stop beating down those who are trying to make it, and see if you can be proved right without forcing people to be negative. If you agree with me – even just a little bit - then make sure that you commend a Ghanaian trying to make it, and buy a Ghanaian product twice per week – if not more; and use a Ghanaian training organisation at least twice in a year – and benefit from appropriate, country-relevant training by our home professionals – whenever possible.

I look forward to seeing Ghana's industry portfolio grow (especially in the light aviation and flight training sectors) and its successful, potential-filled employable staff staying in Ghana, making the sky their limit in a country that applauds them and '**Promote Home Development**' – the new Ghanaian PHD to be proud of.

Capt. Yaw is Chief Flying Instructor and Chief Engineer at WAASPS – The Best Flying Experience in West Africa (www.waasps.com)