

Ghana's 24-Hour Economy: A Private Sector-Led Strategy for Economic Transformation and Export Competitiveness

At the recent UK-Ghana Chamber of Commerce (UKGCC) Forum held at CalBank PLC's Head Office, Ghana's ambitious 24-Hour Economy initiative was presented as a comprehensive strategy to transform the country's economic landscape through private sector empowerment, improved export competitiveness, and efficient resource utilization.

Navigating Global Trade Uncertainties

Presidential Advisor on the 24-Hour Economy/Accelerated Export Development Programmes, Mr. Augustus 'Goosie' Tanoh, outlined the increasingly challenging global trade environment facing Ghanaian exporters. The narrowing window of opportunity in international markets presents both urgent challenges and strategic possibilities.

Of particular concern is the uncertain future of preferential trade agreements such as the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which currently provides crucial market access to the United States.

Within this context, the 24-Hour Economy framework positions Ghana to strengthen its competitive stance through technological adaptation, quality improvements, and strategic focus on sectors where Ghana possesses natural advantages.

Beyond the Night Economy: A Comprehensive Transformation

Contrary to common misconceptions, the 24-Hour Economy strategy extends far beyond simply encouraging nighttime business operations. According to the 24-Hour Economy Secretariat, the initiative represents a fundamental economic transformation designed to:

1. Increase import self-reliance and reduce vulnerability to external economic shocks
2. Facilitate comprehensive integration of value chains to enhance domestic production
3. Expand the diversity, quality, and volume of Ghanaian goods and services
4. Develop stable production surpluses based on strategic marketing
5. Foster improved attitudes toward production and production relationships
6. Optimize digital utilization of production resources, including human labor, natural resources, and capital

The Head of Strategy, Programme Development and Execution at the 24-Hour Economy Secretariat explained that the core principle involves maximizing productivity by ensuring no idle capacity exists throughout the entire 24-hour cycle.

Private Sector as the Engine of Implementation

A distinguishing feature of the 24-Hour Economy programme is its design as primarily private sector-driven, with the government serving as facilitator rather than controller. This approach strategically positions implementation within existing business structures, making the initiative more resistant to political disruptions.

The programme addresses critical constraints to business growth through seven integrated sub-programmes, including innovative value chain financing options. These financing mechanisms aim to overcome two persistent barriers: prohibitively high financing costs and

onerous collateral requirements. By collaborating with partners to address structural problems, the initiative seeks to enable broader access to affordable capital.

Transparency and trust form the foundation of the programme's relationship with the private sector. By involving business leaders in protocol development and designing collaborative frameworks with onlending institutions, the programme establishes shared ownership and accountability.

Measurement and Accountability Frameworks

The 24-Hour Economy Secretariat is developing robust measurement systems to evaluate progress and ensure accountability. In partnership with Ghana Statistical Services, the programme is creating a comprehensive results framework that will index various components of economic activity to track progress objectively.

This data-driven approach will provide critical feedback on whether interventions are producing positive outcomes, allowing for agile adjustments as implementation proceeds. Streamlining Regulatory Environments.

A significant focus of the programme involves addressing systemic barriers that impede business growth and export competitiveness. The initiative recognizes that over-regulation often breeds inefficiency and corruption, creating unnecessary hurdles for businesses seeking to expand.

Several government agencies, including Ghana Revenue Authority and Ghana Investment Promotion Centre, are already establishing dedicated 24-hour service desks. These coordinated efforts aim to rationalize regulatory requirements, expedite approvals, and create more business-friendly operational environments.

UK-Ghana Partnership Opportunities

The strategic relationship between Ghana and the United Kingdom represents a significant opportunity for mutual economic benefit. The 24-Hour Economy Secretariat is actively engaging development finance institutions, including several in the United Kingdom, for long-term concessionary financing to support the programme.

Beyond financing, the initiative envisions expanded trade and investment in Ghana's agricultural and manufacturing value chains. The historic relationship between the two nations provides a foundation for developing partnerships that leverage complementary economic strengths.

Steven Gray, OBE, United Kingdom Export Finance West Africa Regional Representative and Member of the UKGCC United Kingdom-based Advisory Board, responded by emphasizing the long-celebrated common history and shared values between the United Kingdom and Ghana. He highlighted the UK government's evolving approach to African partnerships, revealing that a consultation process is underway for a new Africa approach that could be announced later this year. This framework aims to transform the traditional donor-recipient relationship into one of equal partnership.

Mr. Gray described this developing approach as "an encouraging and exciting opportunity" and welcomed stakeholders to channel their thoughts and comments on this new framework through the British High Commission in Accra.

Comprehensive Stakeholder Engagement

The Forum featured robust discussions on various aspects of the 24-Hour Economy initiative, including principles of operation, pillars of economic transformation, and proposed institutional and legislative changes. Representatives from UKGCC's member businesses raised important questions regarding manufacturing inflation reduction and export opportunities to specific West African markets.

Participants urged the Secretariat to establish clear benchmarks for tracking progress and ensuring accountability. They also emphasized the importance of developing homegrown Ghanaian equity funds to support domestic investment in the economy.