



BLUE SKIES



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Blue Skies Newsletter

Pelican News

President of Ghana opens new factory



His Excellency President John Dramani Mahama has officially opened a new factory for Blue Skies in Ghana. This new state-of-the-art facility is located on the doorstep of the company’s two factories in Dobro near to Nswam and will enable Blue Skies to expand its juice business and launch exciting new products in Ghana and around the world. The

President was joined by a host of dignitaries including Paramount Chief of Aburi traditional area, Nana Otubuo Djan Kwesi II, the British High Commissioner to Ghana, Mr Jon Benjamin, and the Dutch High Commissioner to Ghana, Mr. Hans Docter.

The new factory will create 300 new jobs for Blue Skies, in addition to the 2,500 people who work at the neighbouring fresh cut factory. It will mean Blue Skies will directly provide work for 2,800 Ghanaians, affirming its status as one of the biggest employers in the private sector in Ghana.

The facility has been financed by Blue Skies with support from the Dutch Government’s PSI (Private Sector Investment) Programme.

To mark the occasion and to symbolise the company’s drive for innovation, Blue Skies also officially marked the introduction of three new juice products; Still Lemonade, Sugarcane, Ginger and Lime and Tropicoco; a blend of coconut water, mango and passion fruit.

Founder and Chairman Anthony Pile said “With this new factory we believe we are playing an important part in the bid to crush poverty and to lift this economy and prospects for this great country. We are supporting the important demographic objective of retaining people in the rural areas where there is more opportunity anyway to put this country where it needs to be – agriculturally and economically - out in front.”

Blue Skies wins Fresh Award!



Blue Skies has picked up an FPC Fresh Award for CSR Excellence. The awards were announced on the 4th of June at a gala evening attended by four hundred guests and hosted by comedienne & TV presenter Sue Perkins. The awards are organised by the UK Fresh Produce Consortium and bring together British retailers and suppliers. Blue Skies received its award in the Business Excellence Category in recognition of its commitment to ethical and sustainable business practices through the Joint Effort Enterprise model.

Nigel Jenney, Chief Executive of the Fresh Produce Consortium commented “All the winners and finalists deserve recognition for their achievements. Our industry should be proud of the high standards of excellence which are showcased by the FreshAwards.”



Foundation opens first 2015 projects



The Blue Skies Foundation has commissioned two new projects during a visit by Board members representing Blue Skies, Waitrose and Albert Heijn. This year the Foundation is embarking on twelve projects in Ghana, Senegal and South Africa. Projects include the reconstruction of a condemned classroom block for a primary school, the construction of a KVIP toilet block for a pineapple farming community and the implementation of a campaign to reverse the negative perception of farming among school children. During their visit, the Foundation Board officially handed over a KVIP for Pakro Anglican School and a WC block for a clinic in Nsawam. They also visited a number of other projects which are in progress and due to be completed within the next few months. The team is pictured opening the WC block for Nsawam Clinic.

New airport logistics centre opens in Egypt



We recently opened our own airport office in Cairo, having used a desk in the Venus cargo office for the last 10 years. Our cargo is now managed by the Cairo Airport Cargo Company where we have a secure dedicated cold room in which to load our products. Within the next 2 months we will have Cool Dolly facilities to carry our units in refrigerated trucks to the aircraft. We fly with Egypt Air, Emirates, Lufthansa, Air France and KLM. We look forward to British Airways re-starting wide-bodied aircraft from Cairo in October. *Report by George Hutton.*

In the picture is Philip Gallo (North East Africa Regional Director of Air France-KLM-Alitalia Group), Ahmed Fouad (Vice president of Venus Transport), Osama Hassanein (Blue Skies Egypt Production Manager), Hatem Abdulmeaem (Saudi Arabia Air Lines Cargo Cairo Station General manager), Sameh Hassan (Air France-KLM-Alitalia Group customer Care manager for North East Africa) Mohamed Shalaby (Blue Skies Egypt Logistics Manager), Mohamed Abdulrazik (Blue Skies Egypt GM), Mohamed Hussein (Blue Skies Logistics Team), Abdullah Monzer (Blue Skies Logistics Team), Raed Jreissati (Air France-KLM-Alitalia sales manager north east Africa), Tamer Abdullah (Blue Skies Egypt Logistics Team).

Pictures from Fresh Awards



David, Ally, John, Carrie, Cath, Lorna, Guy, Jenny, Sue and Hilario pose for a group picture at the Awards Dinner.



Ally, Carrie, Guy and Cath



Ally with television presenter and comedienne Sue Perkins.



Lorna showing off our new trophy

Blue Skies Thinking

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The Ethical Audit

This short paper has been inspired by a realisation that much of the material which makes up the basis upon which food retailer ethical audits are conducted on overseas food suppliers to Britain has come from experts in ethical conduct who themselves are influenced by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the British unions. Ethical audit checklists are based on ILO conventions, many of which were written almost a century ago when there was an assumption that employees and management were in opposition, something which exists less commonly today. In 2015 the drive and enthusiasm to find the “right” way to conduct business follows many different forms, and who is to say that any *modus operandi* is better than any other, as long as it works? Surely the most effective measure is whether the company is simply a happy one? It matters less nowadays whether a company is unionised yet an ethical auditor will immediately mark down any business in Africa supplying retailers in UK if they aren't. Given the declining influence of unions in British industrial society and the questionable practice anyway of using a one sided body to measure how fairly a business in Africa or elsewhere conducts itself, is it time we reviewed the objective and content of audits on suppliers from abroad?

It was surprising to discover that ethical audits are often not carried out on UK based suppliers and focussed almost entirely on foreign ones (presumably outside Europe) where there is apparently a risk that retailers could be embarrassed by illegal practices or behaviour not approved by the auditing bodies. Even British companies based outside Europe are audited. When we investigated we saw that a risk assessment company called Maplecroft has led Sedex, the body responsible for collating information on suppliers, to place the whole of Africa as “high” or “extreme” risk. Suppliers rated as operating in a high risk area, apparently mandates retailers to send the ethical auditors in, even though the target business might have awards and credentials on good governance that place it above many British factories and businesses.

The audit fees are met in full by the food suppliers. All preparation, flights, translation, accommodation and transport are further costs borne by the audited company. Sometimes flight times and the extent of the work carried out all mean that the auditor will spend days on the job further adding to cost and pressure on the host company. The annual cost is very considerable. At a time when many governments are looking to reduce the red tape and costs around small and medium businesses, this places an unfair burden on operations in Africa trying to compete with European businesses.

Company culture is firmly put to one side as the audit gets underway and the routine of the inspection is entirely dictated by the auditor. Any deviation or attempt to deviate is viewed as obstructive and marked down to be remarked upon in writing in the final widely published report. Most of the information about the way a company operates comes from the lowest paid people in the business. Interviews are conducted with employees (without anyone else allowed to be there) to see if there is freedom of association, any child labour, wages and benefits regarded as not “best practice”, discrimination, harsh treatment, unfair working conditions and so on.

These meetings are conducted in secret and it is made clear to the staff being interviewed that anything they say will not get back to “management”. But when whatever is said, or interpreted as being said, is reported widely on the internet for all customers to read on Sedex, without any real opportunity for the company to defend its position or to challenge the evidence, the whole practice in itself, ironically, seems harsh, unfair and very unethical.

It should be said that the auditors themselves do try to be as friendly as possible and often feel embarrassed that they are judging a company's practices in a country with a culture they know little or nothing about. They will normally make comments in the report about good practices, but, not surprisingly, the supermarket reader back in UK will only be looking for those parts of the report which might lead to an embarrassment or adverse newspaper report in the future. Is it not time for change? What we need is a dialogue between the supermarkets, the suppliers and the auditing bodies in search of a balanced and fairer and much cheaper system which protects the supermarket and the “good” supplier. The method of the audits is in need of review and the targets should be selected based on reasonable criteria.

Most suppliers will think that their code of practice is actually better than the minimum called for by the supermarkets and many will believe that marking down a company that creates a happy and safe environment in a way that is not envisaged by SEDEX is not just. Many suppliers in Africa will regard the one-sided content of the audit and sense that the West knows best, as more than faintly arrogant. There needs to be an overhaul of the auditing systems so that they work for all and cost much less.

By Anthony Pile

Pictures from factory launch



Paramount Chief of Aburi traditional area, Nana Otubuo Djan Kwesi II addresses the audience.



The President arrives in the pouring rain and is ushered to his seat



Vice president of Honduras Lorena Herrera with Mayors from over 90 countries join the President in opening the factory.



The President delivers his speech



Blue Skies staff line the front of the new factory which has been named the JDM Factory in honour of President John Dramani Mahama

What is the meaning of Soweto, June 16, 1976?



Millions of South Africans celebrate Soweto June 16, which has been declared a Youth Day public holiday, in honour of the heroic and brave youth who fought for Freedom in South Africa. "Youth in Action for Economic Freedom in Our Life Time". Herewith is timeless wisdom from Nelson Mandela, Henry Ford, John Wooden and Benjamin Disraeli on the meaning of youth and economic freedom.

- "Let there be work, bread, water and salt for all." Nelson Mandela
- "We have some salt of our youth in us." William Shakespeare
- "Young people need models, not critics" John Wooden
- "Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty." Henry Ford
- "The foundation of every state is the education of its youth." Diogenes Laertius
- "In youth we learn; in age we understand." Marie Ebner von Eschenbach
- "Youth is, after all, just a moment, but it is the moment, the spark, that you always carry in your heart." Raisa M. Gorbachev
- "Youth comes but once in a lifetime" Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
- "Youth is the trustee of prosperity." Benjamin Disraeli
- "Young men are fitter to invent than to judge; fitter for execution than for counsel; and fitter for new projects than for settled business." - Francis Bacon



Happy Youth Day!

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank our Hero Mr Anthony Pile for building all the factories that exist in the world. All the women in the picture above are celebrating June 16 with pride because they are employed. They are able to provide better education for their children and bring food to their families. As Mr Nelson Mandela itemized "let there be work, bread and water". Mr Pile you are our model, you are a father to many nations, our hero, prototypical we salute you Daddy dearest. *By Waydu Nhlapo, Blue Skies South Africa.*

Photo of the month



Pictured: on 7th of June, Blue Skies celebrates Founder's Day – the birthday of the Blue Skies Founder Anthony Pile. On this year's Founder's Day, 40 Ghanaians turned up at 5am at Anthony's house for an impromptu exercise session!

Blue Skies Triathletes



Well done to Ally Fyvie and David O'Keeffe (pictured) from the UK office who successfully completed the Vitality World Triathlon in London on May 30th.

New health centre opens in Ghana



German Development Agency GIZ together with Blue Skies has commissioned a fully furnished 'CHIPS' compound (Community Clinic) in Dobro for the Nsawam Municipal Health Directorate to render health services to the people within the community and surrounding towns. Facilities in the Centre include weighing scales, delivery beds, refrigerators, stethoscopes, office chairs and table, disinfectors, glucometers and monitors.



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