

Barefoot Innovation Podcast with Kwame Opong, Director of FinTech and Innovation at Bank of Ghana

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Jo Ann Barefoot: We have a very special show today because my guest is Kwame Opong, who is the director of fintech and Innovation at the Bank of Ghana. Kwame, welcome to the show.

Kwame Opong: Thank you for having me, Jo Ann.

Jo Ann Barefoot: I'm thrilled that you're here. We're here at the Singapore FinTech Festival, so I'm sure our audience can hear a little bit of background noise. There's, I think, 63,000 people here or something like that. Biggest financial conference in the world. You and I first met last year at this festival, we did a panel together. I remember being so impressed by what you're doing in Ghana, so I'm really excited to have you with us on the show today.

Kwame Opong: Thank you for having me, and it's a lot of good energy and it's always an amazing experience to see what's happening at the Singapore FinTech Festival.

Jo Ann Barefoot: It really is. So let's start by talking a little bit about yourself, what's your own background? Then tell us about the Bank of Ghana and your program that we'll get into the details.

Kwame Opong: Well, thank you very much. So my background is a bit of an interesting one. I basically live in between the financial services and technology. But I'm actually trained as a business major, originally in physics and math and a science major. But the interesting part of how I got into fintech was after working in banking a bit, working in other financial services, insurance, I went into tech in the US for a bit. So I worked in-

Jo Ann Barefoot: That's a great background.

Kwame Opong: ... Hewlett Packard doing enterprise technology related work. So effectively between financial services and big technology, I wound up falling in love with the tech innovations happening in Africa. So I moved back home and got involved in the mobile money revolution and effectively also at some point moved into the policy space and financial inclusion, worked with CGAP and I absolutely loved that experience as well. Ultimately I came to the central bank as an advisor to the governor on fintech and eventually helped set up the fintech and innovation office, which now licenses and supervises the payment service providers, the mobile money operators, as well as the emerging fintech innovation, including projects like the eCedi and some interesting things that are happening in Bank of Ghana today.

Jo Ann Barefoot: What year did you go back to Ghana?

Kwame Oppong: So, I went back to Ghana in 2013.

Jo Ann Barefoot: 2013. Perfect timing to see the whole rise of mobile money.

Kwame Oppong: Precisely. This is my 10-year mark.

Jo Ann Barefoot: Yes. Indeed. Congratulations.

Kwame Oppong: Thank you.

Jo Ann Barefoot: Wonderful. So first of all, tell us about the Ghana market, the Ghana financial consumer or small business. What are the challenges they face? How has your financial sector and your fintech innovators, how are they trying to meet those needs?

Kwame Oppong: Certainly. I think ours is a story similar to every other country if you disaggregate and distill the core elements in there. But it's somewhat peculiar and unique as an African story, in the sense that here you have, Ghana is the first African country to have been independent with a lot of potential, a lot of great education and very ambitious as well, with one of the largest man-made lakes in the world. Many of such initiatives had been undertaken in the late fifties and early sixties. Over the years, I think we've come to a point again where all through the economic ups and downs, there's a certain awakening again of what the potential is for that country, for us as a people. Particularly for what the youth can also demonstrate and contribute to the development of the country.

So we have a financial sector that is made up of about 23 banks today, universal banks. We have some savings and loans companies, some microfinance companies as well. As you look at the structure, you see clearly a segmentation that tries to target from the largest corporate entity, all the way to the smallest consumer in the country at the lowest level of the economic scale. But we continue to have a significant proportion of our consumer base being financially excluded. So it became necessary that we continue to allow, accommodate and explore other vehicles that could drive financial inclusion and bring many of our fellow citizens into the formal financial sector so they can be more productive contributors to economic development as well. So sometime in the early 2000s, the central bank really took a look after a journey of introducing rural banking, microfinance and others.

In 2000, we started looking at payments quite differently and the central bank looked at the idea of putting in place the foundation and fundamentals that allows the introduction of retail payments down the line that can help catalyze growth in the banking sector. That led to the introduction or the passage of a Payment Act in 2003. Subsequent to that, we also introduce an interbank payment. The central bank set up a national switch called GhIPSS, Ghana Interbank Payment and Settlement Systems, which sought to provide the core interbank systems that allows a more efficient retail payment ecosystem from an

interbank perspective. Those were days where banks had to effectively hold funds and liquidity to settle themselves bilaterally, but really they were trapping capital, capital that could very easily had gone into lending to the real sector, particularly MSMEs who formed the bulk of employment base and also constituted mostly majority women. So these were things that were necessary, the creation of GhIPSS, to bring that efficiency.

Jo Ann Barefoot: Let me ask you a moment, help us imagine one of these customers. Just what would be a typical woman and her enterprise and what would she be?

Kwame Oppong: Certainly. So in fact, I think my most fond memories are when I used to be a general manager for a mobile money company. So I've been on the technology side, but on the commercial side as well. I would spend a great deal of time with several agents, but most of these agents also were MSMEs who were recruited to be mobile money agents. One of them, [inaudible 00:07:26], who would become at some point almost like an advisor. When you take her journey, here's a person who comes from a very modest background and had managed, through a [inaudible 00:07:42] of hard work to trade various items from petty trading all the way up to having a small shop in a major urban transportation center. It's a bus station of some sort. At that store she sold various items including silverware, pots and pans. When you look at where she had come over the years, this had really given her the opportunity to take care of her children, to give them a better life than she did, and also to be able to help her family members as well.

We're a communal society, Ghana, and generally in Africa. So to be able to add value and help pull others within her extended family out of poverty as well. Similarly, there were others who would have such stories, some of whom, another interesting example, we had a project called the Market Women's Project, and when you interview, some of these women, leave home very early in the morning to come to the markets and they sell. By 8:00, they sell to workers and everyone else who's commuting, they sell to them. Then they raise enough money to send money back home for food for their children by the time they're getting ready to go to school or they're at home.

So they come very early, sell, and send money back. Then during the course of the day as well. Again, they sell a bit, maybe between 10:00 and around 2:00, or 10:00 around to 1:00. Then they save that money, which is quite interesting. So that's where we're targeting them with some savings product. So that's what they save. Then around 4:00 when again, workers have closed from work, they're coming through the market centers, they pass by, buy stuff, foodstuff, produce, then again, the revenue from there is what becomes their capital to buy stock for the next day. Now, these two profiles represent what that striving entrepreneur looks like in Ghana. This goes back to the eighties, so the eighties to the nineties. It remains the case because that is an important ladder of progress and economic progress for many Ghanaians to come out of, or to climb, the economic ladder.

The journey of such people and their lives was never lost on the central bank and in fact, policy makers. Particularly the central bank in this case. If you look at many of the things we've done from the introduction of mobile money to an architecture that says, okay, we've seen this happening in Kenya in the very early 2007, 2008, how do we accommodate it in Ghana in a way that also uniquely reflects the dynamics on the Ghanaian market. So the branchless banking guidelines was introduced and those guidelines effectively says, well, banks can work with mobile money, or with telecom companies at the time, let me clarify, they were telecom companies who had ventured into what was technically banking. So you can partner with them. So the telecom companies are the technology partners and the commercial banks were to provide these services.

So they started operating, there was a launch of MTN, there was a launch of Airtel, there was a launch of Tigo. But then over the years, the operating reality became clear that the mobile money operators, or the telecom companies at the time, were the ones at the forefront of delivering these services. There were some banks who had also independently launched parallel products, but when it came to mobile money, it was largely being led by the telecom companies.

So an engagement with SEAGAP led to a review of the constraints to the policy framework at the time to further enhance it. That led to the development of an electronic money issuer guidelines and an agent guideline that simply says, we see the potential of this concept and we want to be agnostic from a technology and entity standpoint. However, for a non-bank to participate, set up a company that is dedicated to this business and we will license you to operate it. For a bank who wants to also go into that space, will similarly given authorization, since they're already licensed, to deliver these services. That was a really great idea and concept to neutralize and really democratize the idea of the provision of mobile money.

Then subsequent to that, we consolidated, as we were going through this journey, there were some actors in this space that had typically been called aggregators. Interoperability was not quite there yet. At the time, I think it was a Tanzania in 2014, but that hadn't quite happened yet. This was a bit earlier. So what wound up happening is these small tech companies were connecting to the various mobile money platforms and providing aggregation services. So that retailers, individuals, NGOs of the Terra who wanted to be able to access various mobile money platforms and wallets could do so through these third parties. But as we were writing the EMI guidelines, they were also growing in size and scope, providing more services, bill payment at the Terra. So consolidating all the various pieces of legislation and directives and guidelines, we created and launched the Payment Systems and Services Act in 2019, which gave the impetus to the central bank, and frankly to other stakeholders, to have a more coordinated approach to licensing and regulating the broader payment service provision space. So mobile money as well as "fintechs". So, that journey evolved as well.

Now, by this time, consumers had learned very comfortably to move away from things like scratch cards for loading their prepaid mobile phone services. Things like bill payments for utilities were now mostly being done on their mobile applications, typically via USSD, so they dial star, one, something, hash, and then they go through a menu and make payments. Sending money to friends and family was also happening in that same manner. So a base of core users had been formed and the growth was increasing quite significantly. The market was evolving at such a fast pace that it had attracted the attention of both local stakeholders as well as international stakeholders. I believe somewhere around 2017/18, Ghana had been named the fastest growing mobile money markets in the world.

Subsequent to that, again, the Bank of Ghana took a step back looking at how it had evolved internally itself to accommodate the evolving needs of the markets and industry from catering for the payments ecosystem through a unit that existed in the banking department and then ultimately into an office. When mobile money was created, a payment system department to look at the RTGS and the interbank payment system as well as the retail payment more broadly. Now you are at a point where the dynamism of the sector was quite easy to observe and the potential was also quite clear. So, the need to have a nurturing focus on the fintech sector again became important.

The central bank made a decision in 2020, May 4th, which strangely has nothing to do with Star Wars, but just happened to be a date when the fintech innovation office in Bank of Ghana was launched. That office was responsible for the licensing and supervision of the mobile money ecosystem, the payment service providers, as well as all the emerging innovation from non-bank actors, including other areas such as interoperability and the banks digitization and Cashlite agenda. Subsequent to that, the fintech and innovation office being set up, there was a need to really look at a couple of things.

Things move very quickly in this space, obviously, how could we as a central bank be responsive to the industry we regulate beyond the supervision? How could we make sure we could rethink engagements? How could we make sure we could rethink a shared understanding? How could we make sure we could really help promote fintech in a way that is also safe and sustainable? So we started off with a licensing framework that was proportionate. It was a risk-based framework that says, what are the activities that entities in this space are engaged in? Then we configured it to reflect the risk. We categorized them to reflect the risks that they possess inherently, and created a commensurate licensing requirement to effectively simplify how actors can come into the space. But also to ensure that small actors, new college graduates who have great ideas and young people who have great ideas, the young at heart can also come into the space without having to deal with high barriers to entry.

That meant creating a license category, for instance, that had no capital requirement, did not have to require them to have a full board. They could have

an advisory board, and some other waivers that had to be created to accommodate them. But on the other hand, it could potentially also present a risk from a cyber security perspective at Terra. So we architected a licensing regime where such small players had to integrate through a larger player who was required to have things like PCI DSS requirements, compliance, certification. They had to have ISO standards they complied with. So in effect, you are reducing the barrier for entry for some of these great innovators who will potentially get there someday. But at the same time, you are reducing the risk to the broader ecosystem by ensuring that there is a point of intervention because they have to go through a larger, more robust institution who aggregates such traffic or transactions.

Jo Ann Barefoot: Interesting.

Kwame Oppong: Yes, so that actually led to the creation of a license application pack. One of the interesting things until today, and this is not just in Ghana, everywhere I've been to, you notice that the fintech ecosystem has a very different understanding from regulatory requirements and all these things from what the regulator also sees. Frankly, the regulator also looks at the ecosystem, development in there, very differently from how the players also look at it. So we thought we'll put these requirements out there. In fact, it was in the midst of COVID, and I should mention, we did this launch in the midst of COVID during the lockdown in Ghana as well. Very interesting times. We had to really get creative as an innovation office. But one interesting thing that happened is, as part of this, we also created a simplified guide as to how to apply for licenses. Even included a glossary of terms to clarify what we meant by each specific term that could be something that is described differently in other markets, to make sure there was no ambiguity of what our requirements were.

We put this together in a license application pack and had a virtual stakeholder engagement, which had initially been planned as an in-person event. I remember that day so vividly. This is at the height of COVID, we had about 230 participants joining that call that day from all over the world, because you had others who were interested in the Ghanaian fintech markets and therefore were looking to see what the requirements would be. So that's for that first part of how all this came together from a regulatory journey perspective. Now, the view that we took right from the beginning as a central bank is to really be able to have an impact, a real impact on the real economy and in people's lives.

From that perspective, we had to start looking at what are the problems people are facing? Look, let's be frank, whether it's a central bank or a business, everything starts with the consumer. Everything starts with the individual. You had to be human centered, you had to be customer-centric. If we are going to be able to do that, we had to understand the challenges that citizens and consumers in our country were facing. One of it was the cost of sending money. Now we're mindful not to intervene in the commercial business space in a way that makes the sector profitable. But at the same time, we took a view that, in

addition to establishing interoperability, there were some necessary tweaks to the commercials to ensure that we could see broader uptake. So we enhanced the commercials around interoperability to make it a sender pay, i.e. the receiving network pays, switching from a sending network pays.

Then also based on our philosophy, believe that sending on network should not be different, from a pricing perspective, from sending across network. Because if you make it seamless, if you made it a par, there will be enough seamlessness in transaction that you'd see in larger growth in the pie of business that nominally no one is going to lose and you'd actually be gaining, which by the way happened to be what the outcome was. It was heartwarming to hear some agents make that comment in a random public interview years later.

We also looked at things such as crowdfunding, which is really as inherently African as you can imagine. We have the concept of [foreign language 00:23:25] or [foreign language 00:23:26], which is social capital. I help you with your farm or clear your farm, your land so you can grow your produce, but you also help me till my land and clear my farm, my land. So this is how we work.

When it comes to social events and even life events, we contribute to funerals, outdoorings, and outdoorings is a big thing in Ghana. Funerals are an even bigger thing, which is an interesting one. We celebrate the life of those who depart. So, this is just how we live. This somehow had now gained the opportunity of leveraging mobile technology and digital financial services in a way that could protect consumers and ensure compliance with AML and KYC requirements to avoid any money laundering or any other problems, minimize the likelihood of fraud, and really ensure that the initiatives for which some of these contributions will be made, I think the end beneficiaries would actually get them. So the governance as well was accounted for by a policy that we introduced, a crowdfunding policy that really tried to put together a framework that guided the whole sector on how they should go about this, to make sure that the end customer and the beneficiaries actually got the benefits of it.

Jo Ann Barefoot: Where does the country stand today in terms of how many people have access to a payments account? Do you have the percentage?

Kwame Oppong: Yes. So actually if I should mention, as we went along this journey, we went from financial inclusion numbers of about twenties in 2012, then about mid-forties around 2015, well, 2014. Then around 2017, we got to about 58%, the last survey... So I'll take that back, I'll retake that.

So we went from about 20s, to 48%, and then to around 58%. Then now we're at 68% of financial inclusion in Ghana, based on the most recent fintech survey. Because the last one, which was I believe a 2019 fintech survey that was published, I think we saw significant leaps every time. But these have all clearly been as a result of policy interventions that have given the confidence to private sector to further invest their capital, to grow the sector. So when you map out

the introduction of even a discussion about revamping the branchless banking guideline, ultimately into creating the electronic money issuer guideline, you begin to see the uptick from there. That consistent growth at every juncture introducing interoperability showed its own bump as well. So for every major policy intervention we have made, we have seen significant growth.

Jo Ann Barefoot: That's the story, isn't it? That private sector innovation is underway, and the policy framework enabling it and also making sure that it is not doing harm.

Kwame Oppong: Absolutely. One interesting lesson I learned, and to their credit, the former head of banking, Mrs. [inaudible 00:27:24], who pretty much was a godmother of mobile money in Ghana, we call her Auntie Ellie, and her successor, Dr. Settor, and their staff, Clarence Blay, Clarissa, who's recently retired. The lesson I learned and I got the chance to sit at all sides of the table as a player, as a third party intermediary, and now as a regulator, there was something in the DNA of the central bank in Ghana, which was an open-mindedness with which they convened industry around problems or potential opportunities to find a policy direction or policies when that could actually help make a change or give the impact you needed.

That approach has been a lesson that I continue to share with other central banks because we cannot be the single repository of all knowledge and experience. To begin with, we do not deal with customers on a daily basis. Often when you work in a collaborative manner, you are more likely to get the commitment that you would hope. Beyond just entities trying to fulfill a regulatory obligation. You get an actual commitment to a progress. We've actually seen this in our CBDC work as well by engaging industry, the Ghana CBDC eCedi was positioned as an enabler of the ecosystem, and we took the pace to demonstrate that in many ways. We see an ecosystem that is very interested and giving us pressure about when we're launching that, but we're moving at our own pace. But this lesson through the central bank's journey is something I wanted to highlight in here.

Jo Ann Barefoot: I have to comment that, again, we're here at the Singapore FinTech Festival and I've always thought that it is remarkable that this was founded by a central bank, Monetary Authority of Singapore. I don't know of any other central bank that has had the vision, or whatever it is, the thought process to create this. As a result, more than any fintech conference that I know, and I go to any of them, this one has at heart this question of how can we do better for the public using the financial sector, whatever the topic might be. The convening of all these perspectives at the same time, it's just so powerful. You can't do it with any one piece on the puzzle, you have to have it all coming together.

Kwame Oppong: Definitely. I think there are two lessons in there. First, which is what I mentioned earlier, start with the customer. From an innovation perspective, everything starts with the end user in mind. But also from a policy perspective, it takes a village. The need for collaboration cannot be overemphasized. I was glad,

walking through here, seeing central banks, fintechs, our national switches here, third parties are here. That's heartwarming. It's not the case for Ghana alone. I saw Nigeria's group as well. I've seen several countries. You're seeing various actors within these countries showing up.

Now if they're being exposed to the same messaging, the same ideas, it increases the likelihood of collaboration when they go back to their home countries. That's the kind of impact you want. These things are about a conversation. It's really about having a conversation where the shared objective is to make progress. So, ultimately, these conversations build trust. The trust that is built empowers the key actors in the conversation to pursue the same shared agenda. The likelihood of success is much higher. Even if it's just a learning process, it's still valuable. For me, that's the one big take away.

Jo Ann Barefoot:

Let me ask you about the consumer protection side of this. One thing we've seen is this remarkable expansion of financial inclusion in the last 12 to 15 years, through fintech and enlightened regulation. But as we bring millions and millions of people, really we brought over a billion people into the formal financial system worldwide over that time period. One of the things that happens is more vulnerability to harm, scams and fraud and invasion or privacy and data and a lot of things can go wrong. One thing that we're doing is working under the Gates Foundation on consumer financial protection in emerging markets. What are the problems? What are the potential solutions, technology solutions for them? What is thinking on this? What are the big problems that consumers find as they come into these systems and how do regulators prevent harm?

Kwame Oppong:

Well, thank you. This is a very important area that I think AR is working on with the funding from Gates, because we have gone through a journey as a global community where we had focused a lot, and rightly so on, creating access. But after that access is created, now we have to find a way of protecting consumers from bad access and sometimes from they themselves, from making their own choices. So we look at these things from both sides. For instance, in Ghana we have a consumer protection focus guideline, a directive on customer recourse mechanism that pretty much defines the minimum standards we expect from a recourse perspective for customers or financial service institutions, including the payment service providers as well.

Ensuring that you have this in place is just one level of it. That's a minimum requirement. But the point that we make to many of the entities, whether through a licensing process or through a product authorization process, is the fact that this is your consumer. This is where your lifetime value comes from. This is your customer. Your lifetime value comes from them. You have to guard them religiously and jealously. That means protecting them so that they can continue to enjoy the services and innovation that you provide them.

So even when we say this is the minimum, what could you do better than that that protects the consumer from perhaps fraud and all these other issues? Often

it's not only about requirements like PCI DSS and ISO and having all kinds of cyber security mechanisms. There's another issue, things like social engineering, and it takes consumer education. A better educated consumer on a product is a longer-term customer of that product and of that company. So not only is it good from a financial stability standpoint, it's also good from a business standpoint. Often I think, unfortunately, a business is a business and often you have to connect those dots for them. Once they see their self-interest in there, you see a bit more motivation to go beyond checking the box and doing the bare minimum that a central bank or the regulator says you're required to do.

To be able to address this. In Ghana, we had to recently clamp down on almost 119 illegal moneylenders who were providing lending through digital apps from all parts of the world. It was quite disturbing. It took collaboration between ourselves as a central bank, the country now has a cyber security authority, the CSA, we work really closely with them, the economic and organized crime office as well, work with them. Even work with Google to ensure that these entities are taken out of the Play Store. We had an absolutely amazing experience working with Google's Africa team and their policy and legal team, both of them, which culminated in us finding a very simple approach how to even identify some of these unlicensed entities so they don't even allow them on the Play Store so people don't get access to it. So again, to the point about saving people from themselves, because look, a loan is very enticing if you need money desperately.

So, that demonstrates what needs to be done. I think there's a lot more that could be done. Education is one, looking at the tools that could be put in place, both public infrastructure level tools that help to protect consumers. That's one. Two, service provider level tools that can help protect consumers. And three, tools that consumers themselves and approaches they can take to protect themselves. So, underneath all of these, I think you can extrapolate for several other models and modules of implementations. But at the high level, this is an idea. Maybe finally, one of the things that we love to love and love to hate, depending on who you're speaking with, is the idea of AI. Artificial intelligence, particularly generated AI, can play a significant role in helping us do this.

The fact that a consumer can access a generative AI, public generative AI tool, to inform themselves or confirm for themselves the legitimacy of an entity, a financial service provider, is a powerful thing. Leveraging speech to text and vice versa. Large language models and natural language processing models that allow all kinds of multi-language processing capabilities to even allow less educated people, people who live in rural areas, to be able to access some of these tools very simply. So that's for preventing fraud.

For me, consumer protection also includes informed usage. Using products inappropriately is just as bad. Making the wrong choice of a product is just as unhealthy, unhelpful, and detrimental to the financial well-being of a consumer. So even leveraging some of these tools as a consumer to make choices about products that are better for them. If you look at the subprime mortgage crisis

that happened in the US, some of these customers did not have to be given subprime mortgages. Should they have had access to such tools in the past, they probably would've pushed back against whichever service provider was in a hurry to dump a mortgage on them without giving them the right type of product. So, we are at a position where thanks to things like AI and generative AI, we can empower consumers and service providers can themselves leverage these tools to ensure that the right products are being delivered to the right customers. The central banks could also ensure that they are doing the right thing, and we can monitor that.

Jo Ann Barefoot: I could not agree with you, I just think there's a whole new world that we're entering into with these new AI tools, with the potential, as you said, for consumers to use them, and regulators to use them, but of course bad too. So it's going to be a bit of arms race. I know we're going to run short on time. I want to go back to what you said about leveraging some help from Google to find these bad actors in the marketplace. Talk about the challenges that are ahead for you, including what are the challenges for central banks and financial regulators in terms of keeping up with these technology changes, finding the needle in the haystack, so to speak, with so much going on so rapidly.

Kwame Oppong: This is a very loaded question, but I'll tell you this. Objectively speaking, from my various experiences interacting with central banks and our own experience, what I see is we have a capacity divide that we need to bridge. We have an orientational divide that we need to bridge. Because even mentally reorienting central banks to embrace some of these new innovations is in itself a bit of a journey that needs to be walked. That chasm needs to be bridged.

Perhaps finally, less orientational, but also ideological, central banks are very conservative institutions and regulators. For decades and perhaps even centuries, they've had an approach to doing things. Suddenly, I remember the fintech revolution is the first major revolution in the financial sector for the last few centuries. So that means if you look at something like central bank digital currency, there is no person alive who saw the introduction of paper notes or coins. But for the first time in our lives it is happening. That means whatever ideology that has been held over the last few centuries, somehow there needs to be a reorienting beyond that. I think these three from the capacity, from the orientational and the ideological. Orientational is more culture of how things are done. But the ideological is very deep often.

Jo Ann Barefoot: You're making a lot of progress on this. What are the secrets to doing that well? Is it just working at it every day, or are there some particular things that help move that? I moderated a panel here yesterday of regulators, and one of the things they said was that the key is not so much technology as mindset among regulators, what's your advice?

Kwame Oppong: They are precisely right as mindset. But what we've done, you can look at it from a cultural perspective. One of the ways you have found people embracing other

cultures is if they're exposed to that other culture. Every time we as a fintech office are involved in any initiative, we open up for other functions, we welcome them into it, we invite them to it. It was the beginning of it. We've made tremendous progress, and you don't see it until you take a step back every now and then to reflect and you realize how far things have come. But it's the idea of being open or being willing to have a shared engagement with other functions within the central banks. See, with more openness comes exposure to information. With more exposure to information comes an understanding. That understanding often leads to not just an appreciation, but sometimes an embrace.

Unfortunately, mostly in my career, I've accepted the idea that I'm going to start from a misunderstood side of things until we eventually work our way to the... I remember the early days of mobile money, you talked to anyone about mobile money and they wouldn't even mind you. At some point, the same person would be telling me, "Yeah, just send mobile money." I'm wondering, okay, great. Thanks for enlightening me to this. But after a while, and after there's that exposure, you begin to see interest, because nothing really is happening. That's where we also, particularly in the fintech side, have to be careful. It's not about speeds and feeds and nuts and bolts of technology, it's about the idea, it's about the lessons, it's about the principles. This is much easier appreciated by attorneys, accountants, economists and everyone else. So they are much easier able to embrace.

If you take our example in Ghana for instance, where currently we have internal arrangements where the banking supervision department has someone doing some capacity building for us. We engage them in our mini fintech Fridays we do where we invite others to participate in it. It's just discussions about emerging concepts, sharing some of the ideas we have, learning sessions where we go to other departments to expose what we do to them and the things they see and probably don't really understand. We have some people who've left, just transitioned their careers from various departments, the legal departments, IT department, even the payment system department, we have people from the estates department, all kinds of walks of life. They've come together to this space to appreciate it only because they were exposed to that information and they found use.

The other thing is, same thing with our central bank digital currency initiative, the eCedi. We created a multi-stakeholder committee where even to go into the field to administer surveys and do all the legwork, it was not just the fintech office, you had banking supervision. The research department that does monetary policy, they were there on the ground, not just seeing reports later on, but on the ground. By the time you are done with all of this, that immersion would've changed the orientation towards these ideas. So it's really not just about, just as much as you are creating a shared understanding with industry and other government regulators and agencies, you are also internally building

an awareness and an interest and a desire to participate at some level in what's happening in the fintech space. That's what's held us thus far.

Jo Ann Barefoot: I could listen to you all day. Let me ask if there's anything we haven't talked about that you want to add.

Kwame Oppong: No. So, there's one last thing I wanted to highlight. So our journey has taught us something. It appeared as we traveled around the world, that there are lots of good things that are happening in Africa, including Ghana. These have been as a result of the challenge, the unique challenge, that we face. So we've created solutions to them. But as we did that, we never really realized, we've not been telling our story enough. So the world is missing out on the interesting and inspiring impact and journey that we've been on. Also the opportunity to partner with us in developing from an investment perspective, from a collaboration perspective, in helping move things forward. So we're launching a 3i summit next year. It's called a 3i Africa Summit, 3i being innovation, investment and impact. So that we're bringing people to see the innovation going on in the world, to see the innovation in Africa, the world to participate in the investment opportunity, and make an impact in the world for all of us.

We actually partnered with MAS Elevandi, which has done a phenomenal job with this.

Jo Ann Barefoot: I was about to say, I'm on the board of Elevandi. its amazing.

Kwame Oppong: It's wonderful. I'm always amazed when I get here. So, Elevandi has partnered with us. In Ghana, as a central bank, we're partnered with our development bank, Development Bank of Ghana. They would also be helping. So we're the partners doing this, and we look forward to welcoming all stakeholders from private sector, from public sector, from multilateral agencies, from everyone, investors, fintechs, to come and see a showcasing of fintech in Africa in a way that they may have never seen before. Really, truly appreciate what the potential is and the opportunity is for us to really form a lasting partnership. Also, of course, try some amazing Ghanaian delicacies. Thank you very much.

Jo Ann Barefoot: That's wonderful. I can't thank you enough. Your point about the story in Africa, mobile money was invented in Africa, in Kenya, and today, you see so much innovation, so much opportunity really leap frogged, because you have mobile-first consumer financial markets and they're bringing to them digital thinking as a regulator that is just mapping us to the future, I think.

Kwame Oppong: Absolutely.

Jo Ann Barefoot: So where can people find out more information?

Kwame Oppong: Yes, you can just search for 3i Africa Summit and look it up. We're going to be updating it and sharing more information on this. Also, you can check out the

Bank of Ghana website. We're going to be sharing a lot of information on social media, social media handles throughout this process. It's actually happening on the 13th to 15th of May in 2024. So there's enough time for people to plan and prepare to come in and immerse themselves in, not just the summit itself, but also take a bit of an opportunity for those who've never been to the continent or to Ghana. Take an opportunity to see what an amazing culture, an amazing climate, environment, a tourist destination that it is. I guarantee you, you're going to go back to your respective countries with a lasting memory of what that experience was.

Jo Ann Barefoot: It's wonderful. We'll put all this information in the show notes at recognitioninnovation.org. Kwame Oppong, I can't thank you enough for being my guest today. I've been inspired as well as learned a lot from listening to you, so thank you.

Kwame Oppong: Thank you for having me, Jo Ann. It was a pleasure.