SPEECH DELIVERED BY

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THEME: “ACCOUNTANCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY, TRANSFORMING AFRICA’S ECONOMIES”.

DATE: 24TH MAY, 2022

VENUE: THE DOME, TRADE FAIR

TIME: 9:00 AM

**Mr. Chairman,**

**Special Guest of Honour,**

**Guest of Honour,**

**Invited Guests,**

**Distinguished Members of the Institute**

**The Media,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am grateful for the warmth of your reception and also appreciate the honour done me to be the guest speaker.

Mr. Chairman, as citizens of the Republic of Ghana, we do share a common cause and belief. We all agree that Accountability is about ensuring that governments are answerable to their citizens and deliver on their commitments (political, financial or service delivery).

To allow this, citizens must have a voice, and governments must have the ability and motivation to respond. Accountability relationships can occur at and between various levels – local, national and international. Transparency and accountability are virtues that work together to deliver the needs of the citizenry. They are key ingredients of good governance that can lead to transformation of the economy.

The root word of accountability is “account” or to count from which our profession derives its name. It goes without saying that professional accountants have a major role to play in the transformation of every economy. Accounting has a powerful range of tools which over the years have been applied in the quest to optimize the economic performance of organisations, institutions, and to ultimately transform economies across Africa.

The International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) partnered with the Centre for Economics and Business Research, one of the world’s leading economics consultancies, to conduct a research. The analysis reviewed the accountancy profession in the G20 countries (including each individual country of the European Union). Data was assembled from a range of sources, including the World Bank, World Economic Forum, and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, for the purposes of establishing relationships between economic variables and numbers of accountants and Professional Accountancy Organisation (PAO) members. The findings are as follows:

1. Professional accountants make a significant contribution to the economy at the local, national and global levels. In each measure reviewed, a greater number of accountants correlate to better economic performance.
2. Professional accountants who are members of IFAC member professional accountancy organizations (PAOs) correlate to even stronger performance on the economic indicators.
3. An increase of 500 accountants per million correlates to: an increase of USD 5,073 in GDP per capita.
4. If the 500 accountants are members of IFAC member PAOs, the increase correlates to an increase of USD 11,224 in GDP per capita.

In short, accountants make a significant contribution to their national economies. Accountants who are members of an IFAC member professional accountancy organization make an even greater meaningful contribution. Indeed, the role of accountants in educating, sensitizing and assisting businesses across Africa to understand, appreciate and take advantage of the benefits of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in transforming their economies cannot be gainsaid.

The former President of the Pan African Federation of Accountants (PAFA) Board, Jacobus du Toit, reiterated, “A professional accountant is a key enabler of economic growth. We have gone beyond public financial management to public value management.” PAFA has aligned its objectives to continental strategies including Africa Union Agenda 2063 which highlights Africa’s strategic vision for socio-economic development and transformational change. This is in a bid to influence policies that enable the utilization of Africa’s resources for the benefit of all citizens and to achieve socio economic transformation through the accountancy profession.

Mr. Vickson Ncube, former CEO of PAFA stated that “We have aligned our vision to the goals of Agenda 2063, and we are actively engaged with key stakeholders to offer professional insights and expertise toward achieving the vision for an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in international arena”.

In Ghana, the success of Government’s commitment to reform and bring sanity into the Public Financial Management space with the implementation of International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) as part of its economic transformation agenda will hugely be dependent on the Heads of Finance and Treasury Officers of the Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs). These are largely accountants. They are expected to play key roles in the effective implementation of the various policy reforms aimed at ensuring transparency in the management of the public purse.

I therefore call on all accountants to realize that their functions were not limited only to the disbursement and receipt of funds but that they are part of the overall management team of where ever they found themselves and must work to the attainment of the goals and objectives of the organisation and lead in the economic transformation agenda.

In business, as in life, change is the only true constant. From mitigating unprecedented business disruptors to adapting to new operational paradigms, professionals in all industries find themselves dealing with major changes, many of them driven by emerging technologies.

Accounting is no exception. The profession has moved far beyond mere bookkeeping and payroll, and like its partner procurement, it is taking an increasingly strategic role for forward-thinking businesses. While some pundits say accounting has a dim future in the digital world of tomorrow, technologies such as cloud-based data management, process automation and advanced analytics are actually poised to further elevate accountants in new and empowering ways.

As far back as 2015, industry leaders were sounding the death knell for accountants, convinced emerging technologies, particularly automation, would end in [death by digital](https://www.accenture.com/t20150902T015110__w__/us-en/_acnmedia/Accenture/Conversion-Assets/DotCom/Documents/Global/PDF/Dualpub_21/Accenture-Finance-2020-PoV.pdf) for accountancy as we know it. And as recently as 2019, accountants surveyed by Robert Half on the impact of automation on their profession [expressed concerns](https://www.roberthalf.com/sites/default/files/documents_not_indexed/RH_Future-of-Work19.pdf?utm_campaign=RH-NA-Thought_Leadership-Autoresponder-Email&utm_medium=Email&utm_source=autoresponder&utm_content=https%3a%2f%2fwww.roberthalf.com%2fsites%2fdefault%2ffiles%2fdocuments_not_indexed%2fRH_Future-of-Work19.pdf&sfi=) about being replaced, having fewer opportunities for creative problem-solving and an overdependence on technology in completing daily tasks.

Yet, the events between then and now, including the Covid-19 pandemic, have instead shown that accountants like other professionals, need to worry much more about **adaptation** than replacement.

There is no question that digital transformation has radically changed the playing field. Big data has become a rich resource that needs to be tapped to compete effectively. But for businesses ready to leverage the potential of digital tools, this shift is an opportunity, not a threat.

Consider this: Centralizing data management, particularly through the use of cloud technology, reduces waste and lowers costs considerably by improving communication and collaboration. Standardization and a cohesive data sphere make it easier to capture, access, share and analyse data. Transparency improves as data silos are dismantled, and data quality rises, rather than falls, with data quantity.

Similarly, automation reduces costs and improves efficiency by eliminating tedious and time-consuming manual labour (e.g., data entry, three-way-matching) and reduces human error. It drives straight-through processing, and rather than replacing human accountants, it frees them to focus on strategic tasks requiring creativity, collaboration and ingenuity, services artificial intelligence (AI) cannot, as yet, reliably provide.

What AI *can* do, however, is the "grunt" work of analysis. By rendering raw data into more manageable formats and providing well-developed connections between disparate data sources, artificial intelligence can enter a kind of symbiosis with humans, playing a supporting role by serving up a "what" humans can further refine into "hows" and "whys."

Accountants, for example, can put their uniquely human skills to work transforming the insights extracted from high-quality data into more effective financial planning and reporting. In an integrated environment, they can collaborate with peers from other business units to leverage financial data to drive innovation, build more resilient and agile supply chains and develop business management plans that promote growth while ensuring continuity.

Adding other technologies to the mix only increases the potential value. Virtual, augmented and [mixed reality technologies](https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/deloitte-review/issue-21/augmented-reality-at-workplace.html) will move beyond video games to provide new ways to explore, analyse and share data, pioneer new process optimizations and connect finance to strategic planning. According to a Robert Half survey, [71% of managers](https://www.roberthalf.com/research-and-insights/workplace-research/the-future-of-work) in the U.S. are either already using some kind of virtual reality or planning to integrate it within three to five years.

Blockchain has already earned a reputation for its potential in supply chain optimization, but it has [powerful accounting potential too](https://www.icaew.com/technical/technology/blockchain/blockchain-articles/blockchain-and-the-accounting-perspective). Accounting professionals who understand and can use (and teach others about!) distributed ledger technologies will be in high demand for process development, auditing, records management and more.

Tomorrow's Accountant should be more relevant, strategic and creative than ever.

Both the skill set and the job description for tomorrow's accountant will be greatly expanded, while still hewing to the core competencies of the profession. Supported by technology in a collaborative setting, accounting teams will be populated with both dedicated accounting professionals and subject matter experts from other areas of business.

Tomorrow's accountants may play an advisory role, welcoming business intelligence and procurement professionals and working to chart a strategic sourcing plan. They could leverage data management tools, including augmented reality, to humanize and contextualize spend data for the C-suite to make better decisions based on long-term value rather than return on investment alone.

With more diverse skill sets and greater technical acumen, accountants can bring their own expertise to teams in other business units, providing crucial financial intelligence, refining budgets or ensuring compliance. It is entirely possible organizations will make use of strategic outsourcing to "fill the gaps" in their tech tree or secure the training and tools necessary to add capabilities to their own team.

As a function, accounting may become less about refining one's skill set through certifications and more about core competencies that grow over time, with a focus on lifelong education and skill development required to take on a complex, ever-changing business environment.

Automation and other data-driven technologies are poised to free accountants, not constrain them. Organizations that understand the potential and importance of these technologies and invest in the tools and training required to help their accountants take full advantage will be ahead of the curve. Tomorrow's accountants will play a more creative and strategic role in their companies. As a result, their businesses will not only enjoy more efficient workflows and reap more useful insights from their accounting processes, but help strengthen their own resiliency, agility and competitive footing.

In their paper in 2019 titled “Critical dialogical accountability: from accounting-based accountability to accountability-based accounting”, Dillard and Vinnari indicate that society is demanding that its institutions be accountable for more economic performance, which is what I subscribe is required in transforming Africa’s economies.

In the words of Prof Chris Humphrey, Professor of Accounting, University of Manchester, UK. “An accounting profession that fails to create and maintain space for radical rethinking in terms of sustainability accounting and associated systems of accountability, will soon find that its own social relevance and value is placed in serious question.”

Mr. Chairman, Special Guest of Honour, Distinguished Members of this noble Institute, we have come a long way as a Profession from 1963, the year the Institute was established by an Act of Parliament. We owe our founding fathers a responsibility to make things better than what they could ever imagine. We are on course to achieve the dreams of our forebears and we need to focus on the journey ahead of us. With unity of purpose, we will help transform economies across the continent.

May you have a successful conference.

Thank you and may God bless us all.