



## Prepare to adjust the sails

*I had an entirely different editor's column written, but was inspired to change it when I listened to the president of the World Maritime University, Dr Cleopatra Doumbia-Henry's speech at the SAIMI conference mid-November. Quoting William Arthur Ward she said; "The pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; the realist adjusts the sails".*

I'll admit that, in relation to this quote, my original column was bordering on pessimism with a hint of optimism. The truth is, however, we need a healthy dose of realism in the industry and we need to adjust the sails.

Africa as a continent has woken up to the potential of the blue economy at precisely the same time as the rest of the world is seeking to maximise their own hold over the ocean space. We are drafting policies; holding dialogues; engaging experts and raising awareness while the world innovates. We need to stop playing catch-up and position ourselves to leapfrog development with aggressive timelines.

Every conference talks about the disruptors on the horizon. Automation, block-chain, 3D printing, emission controls and many other buzz words are fuelling the opportunistic organisation of conferences and workshops that produce reports and resolutions that are stored in one or other of our many maritime silos. Delegates pat themselves on the back and return to work to await the next move.

Adjust the sails. What if Africa **was** the disruptor in the maritime space? What could that look like?

Speaking on the release of the World Bank report; South Africa Economic Update: Innovation for Productivity and Inclusiveness, Paul Noumba Um (World Bank Country Director for South Africa) said: "Innovation can play a critical role to create jobs through increased productivity, and impact the lives of the poor through providing better products and services."

When last did you hear of a maritime company wanting to benchmark itself against African standards? Leading local companies pride themselves on working to "international standards" – a euphemism to assure potential clients that

they are not working to perceived African standards. Adjust the sails.

We need to write these headlines:

- ✘ Africa ahead of the world in push for 2020 sulphur limits
- ✘ Africa introduces first fully automated regional shipping route
- ✘ Team of African experts perfect collision avoidance system
- ✘ Maritime trainees flock to African institutions
- ✘ African company wins concession for busiest European port terminal
- ✘ African marine expert to head up IMO
- ✘ African port usurps top spot in world productivity ratings
- ✘ New stevedoring system puts African technology on the map

These headlines demand that we go back to basics while at the same time developing highly innovative companies, people, administrators and – most importantly – mentors as well as motivators. It demands that every person; in every job; in every company or government institution asks the question: how should I adjust the sails today?

Instead of offering up unrealistic statistics of how many jobs the ocean economy can deliver by a predetermined date – we need to excite potential new innovators and current players into transforming the industry for future growth.

As a very basic first step, we need to invest in infrastructure and training. We need to make local opportunities viable for local companies by developing long term financing models.

And we need to start counting down the days to when Africa is no longer paying exorbitant fees to expats for their "inconvenience" of living in a third world country where their safety may be compromised because we are desperate for their expertise.

It's time to adjust the sails.

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