

ADRRJ JOURNAL OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

ADRRJ JOURNALS (www.adrri.org)*E-ISSN: 2343-6891 VOL. 17, No. 6 (5), July, 2020- September, 2020***Port Paperless System in Ghana, the Way Forward: GCNET or UNIPASS/ICUMS**James Yaw Osei – Owusu¹, Rosli Mahmood² and Murali Sambasivan³^{1, 2, 3}Putra Business School – University Putra Malaysia.¹Email: jamesyaw.phd_mgt18@grad.putrabs.edu.my; ²Email: rosli@putrabs.edu.my³Email: sambasivan@hotmail.com¹Department of Procurement and Supply Science, Faculty of Business and Management Studies, Koforidua Technical University, Ghana.¹Correspondence: jamesyaw.phd_mgt18@grad.putrabs.edu.myAvailable Online: 30th September, 2020URL: <https://www.journals.adrri.org/>**Abstract**

Ghana has two seaports; Tema and Takoradi and since their inception in 1928 and 1963 respectively, these ports have undergone a lot of reforms all with the aim of making them effective and efficient to compete favourably with other ports in the world and also help increase the revenue of the government. Ghana Community Network (GCNet) introduced by the government of Ghana with their trading partners West Blue in 2003 was solely responsible for the collection of revenue at the two seaports in Ghana. Through the hard work of West Blue, most of the internal processes of doing business at the ports of Ghana were synchronized into one system thus making Ghana ports to go paperless on 1st September, 2017. However, on 30th May, 2020 GCNet was asked to shut down their operations at the ports of Ghana, a new software or system called UNIPASS/ ICUMS owned by Ghana link network services and CUPIA were asked to take over. This did not go down very well with most of the stakeholders involved in the clearing chain at the ports of Ghana thus leading to a whole lot of protests and demonstrations at the ports. This study therefore sought to delve into finding out what the challenges were with respect to using the UNIPASS/ ICUMS and then offer solutions to curtail any future eventualities any time a new software or system is being introduced at the ports of Ghana for clearing goods and doing business.

Keywords: paperless system, seaport, UNIPASS /ICUMS, GCNet

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INTRODUCTION

Ghana has two ports namely Tema port, which is the biggest and located in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana and Tarkoradi port, the smallest located in the Western Region of Ghana (Owusu-Mensah, 2007). Apart from handling domestic trade, Tema port serves as outlet for Ghana's land locked neighbours; Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali (GPHA, 2015). It is the largest port in Ghana and basically merchandise leeway responsible for almost 70 percent of Ghana's overall sea borne trade and 35% of its exports (Owusu, Archibald and Abdul, 2017).

Tarkoradi port on the other hand is responsible for handling exports of minerals from the mines of Western Region in Ghana. In addition, the port handles other bulk exports notably cocoa beans as well as loading and discharging other types of cargo. This port is also responsible for handling large quantities of minerals such as bauxite and manganese as well as ammonium nitrate, limestone, quicklime as well as raw materials and equipment for the mines. In view of this, Ghana's manganese company and the oil and gas companies are the partners of the port (Owusu et al, 2017). Tema and Tarkoradi ports were built in 1928 and 1962 respectively and the Ghana Ports and Harbor Authority (GPHA), is the body given the sole responsibility for overseeing all freight and maritime related activities of the two ports in Ghana (Agobozo, 2017). Since its establishment in 1986, its basic function are to plan, manage, maintain, operate and control all the two ports in Ghana.

One year after the introduction of the port paperless system in Ghana, many articles have been published to outline the benefits that Ghana as a country and the stakeholders in the clearing chain have achieved not excluding all the players within the ports and harbor industry.

According to a study conducted by 'Eye on Port '(2018), stakeholders within the harbor industry have attested to the fact that one year after the introduction, it has effectively improved the clearing process at the ports and also assisted clearing agents to receive customs classification valuation report (CCVR) in 24 hours duration as compared to 3 days during the previous regime. The report also stated that the long room was no more seen as a busy area for payment of duties and other charges. Human interaction at the ports had also been completely removed and that regulatory agencies responsible for inspections had also been reduced from 13 to 3 as was alluded by Bawumia, the Vice

President of Ghana, even though most of the stakeholders are of the view that the number of regulatory agencies for inspection can be reduced further since the role played by most of them are almost the same. The study outlined certain measures to be put in place in future in order to improve the port paperless system. Some of the measures are; government must ensure that adequate structures are put in place to ensure effective flow of information, reduce clearance time, there is the need to amalgamate shipping lines into the Pre Arrival Assessment Reporting System (PAARS), broad consultation should be done with all players within the ports and harbor fraternity before any new policies are introduced in the future and finally all customs barriers should be removed in order to make Ghana the economic gateway to West Africa.

Fisbean & Ajzen (1975) Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) which depicts that behavioural intention is the fundamental element for any action taken by an individual and the Resource – Based Theory (RBT) developed by Barney (1991) which opines that an organisation resources are the sole motivating factor for ensuring efficiency and competitive edge as well as productivity in the market are considered relevant and suitable theories for this study.

Objectives of the Study

1. The study examines the merits associated with the port paperless system of Ghana.

The port paperless system of Ghana was introduced three years ago and it was reported to have chalked many successes barley a year after its introduction. This study therefore delves into the situation currently to ascertain whether those benefits or merits still holds today.

2. The study delves into examining the challenges associated with the introduction of UNIPASS/ ICUMS.

It is the expectation of stakeholders within the clearing chain that they should be consulted anytime a new policy or software is being introduced at the ports of Ghana in order to avoid any challenges and protests. This study examines the current challenges associated with the introduction of UNIPASS/ICUMS and delves into finding out whether relevant stakeholders were consulted before the introduction of the UNIPASS / ICUMS.

3. Furthermore, the study is an attempt to find answers raised by stakeholders in favour or against GCNET and UNIPASS/ ICUMS.

A lot of stakeholders have raised concerns with regards to support the use of the GCNET or its abolishment at the ports of Ghana. Likewise some have also raised issues against the new UNIPASS/ ICUMS, whilst some have advanced reasons in favour of its introduction. This study therefore attempts to find answers to all the questions raised either in favour of GCNET or UNIPASS.

4. Finally, this study examines some of the measures that can be put in place to help improve the UNIPASS /ICUMS.

UNIPASS /ICUMS has come to stay for business at the ports and harbor sector of Ghana. Therefore this study advances measures that can be put in place by all relevant stakeholders to help the system function very well.

Significance of the Study

Basically 3 reasons accounted for this study. They are; first and foremost the main author is a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) candidate from the Putra Business School in Malaysia and was out collecting data from the ports in Ghana on 'Port Paperless system in Ghana', during interaction with most of the respondents namely freight forwarders and clearing agents, the issue of GCNet and UNIPASS /ICUMS comparison became a bone of contention and most of the respondents insisted that a thorough study should be done on the two system for the government to know that the introduction of UNIPASS /ICUMS has slowed down their businesses making most of the goods they are supposed to clear go to demurrage or rent. The findings from this study will help to contribute to the existing literature on port paperless system as well as those on GCNet and UNIPASS/ ICUMS.

The study was also initiated to outline the benefits associated with the port paperless system of Ghana. The port paperless system has helped in doing business at the ports of Ghana and also assisted in eradicating some challenges associated with numerous port reforms in Ghana. Thus this study was commenced to ascertain the current situation after three years of going paperless and also encouraged a lot of individuals within the ports and harbour fraternity to patronise the use of Ghana ports. It is of no doubt that the findings will help the government of Ghana to address current concerns about its usage and help in streamlining policies to ensure its continuous usage.

Almost all reforms introduced in Ghana come with some challenges at their initial stages, UNIPASS/ ICUMS is of no exception. Therefore this study was initiated in order to enumerate on some of the challenges associated with the UNIPAS/ICUMS and advance measures that can help the government and all other relevant stakeholders benefit from its implementation or use. The findings will therefore help the government and policy makers to formulate and shape out policies that can help the UNIPASS /ICUMS to stand the test of time.

Ghana Community Network (GCNet)

The ports of West Africa including that of Ghana before the late 90's were compounded with several challenges making it difficult for it to synchronize its operations with the rest of the world. Some of these challenges included; delays in clearing goods, falsification of documents, bureaucracy, diversion of state funds into private pockets, lack of transparency, too much paper submission, bribery and corrupt practices leading to low revenue (Bainiah, 2008 ; Amanfu, 2010 ; Caesar, 2010 ; Broni, 2014 ; Nsiah , 2014 ; Agyemang, 2016; Agbozo, 2017).

In an attempt to curtail all the above mentioned challenges Ghana embarked on a single window platform known as the Ghana Commercial Network (GCNet) which was basically a platform designed to enable all the stakeholders associated with international trade present trade related documents in a single entry point in order to satisfy obligatory trade associated documentation.

GCNet was introduced in 2003 and was meant to first and foremost facilitate all documents related to clearing goods and other shipping related documents at the ports of Ghana and thus reduce clearance of goods at the ports from an average of six days to an average of three days and also facilitate ship turnaround times from seven days to three days on average. The GCNet also made it possible for manifests to be submitted easily and also facilitated the flow of information and other related documents to the designated authorities at the ports. Additionally, GCNet made it possible in directing consignments from transit by ensuring that they were not diverted into other markets without the right payment of the required taxes and duties (Bainiah, 2008 cited in Asuliwonno, 2011).

Similarly, Broni (2014) outlined the following as some of the opportunities associated with the introduction of the GCNet at Ghana's ports; real time data, availability, IT knowledge network with neighbouring countries and enhanced communication network. In the view of Agyemang (2016), the introduction of GCNet single window had a remarkable positive influence on international trade facilitation, since it helped in minimizing time for processing documents as well as the documents requested for transaction at the ports of Tema and equally also helped in reducing congestion.

According to Asuliwonno (2011), the GCNet is a private public joint venture between the following; Ghana customs (Government), Ghana Shippers Council (Government), Ghana Commercial Bank (GCB) Government Majority), Societe Generale De Surveillance Switzerland Corporate (Private) and Ecobank Ghana Limited (Private) and its mandate of operation was authorized by the Ministry of Trade and Industry in Ghana.

GCNet with its partners West Blue consulting, now known as customs World of Dubai have been operating at the ports of Ghana since 2003 until it was finally asked to shut down operations on 30th June, 2020 by the government of Ghana, although, its mandated contract is supposed to end in 2023.

There are currently millions of questions being asked by the stakeholders within the port clearing chain of Ghana.

- i. A system that has been able to synchronized most of the manual processes of the ports in Ghana into a paperless system, why has it been shut down?
- ii. An entity whose contract will expire in 2023, why the rush to abrogate its contract?
- iii. A system that has improved the collection of revenue at the ports of Ghana and has helped to increase the revenue of the government, why has it been shut down?

UNIPASS or Integrated Customs Management System (ICUMS).

UNIPASS is owned by Ghana link network services and CUPIA, an entity within the Korea customs. UNIPASS is said to be an upgraded form of the current system and is very reliable and also easy to use. One distinctive characteristic of UNIPASS is that it will ensure end-to-end customs administration system. Ashley (2020) is of the view that the end-end-customs system makes it impossible for any individual to tamper with figures.

In other words UNIPASS is an enhanced complete customs system on its own, that can work within any environment (Technology, Network, 2020).

UNIPASS is categorized into 3 sub divisions, which conforms to world accepted practices, they are; business processing component, support to the business processing component and infrastructure components.

The business processing component part of the system deals with the chronological business frameworks which is usually made up of the single portal and the non – conform business frameworks, interestingly to, this part of the system also has to do with the real frameworks of customs depicting the internet connectivity activities associated with customs operations. Cargo management, duty collection, clearance system, audit investigation, surveillance etc. are some of the activities associated with the business processing component.

Support to the business processing components. As the name suggests provides support to the business processing component of UNIPASS and are composed of high frameworks that facilitates productivity of customs operations. The following are the frameworks associated with the support to the business processing component part of UNIPASS; Customs Data Warehouse (CDW), Performance Management System (PMS), Integrated Risk Management System (IRMS) and Law Compliant System (LCS) .

The last part of UNIPASS is the *infrastructure component* and it deals with the mechanisms put in place for the smooth running and control of customs networks thereby ensuring productivity of information management. IT governance and EWACS are some of the frameworks associated with the infrastructure component.

Valuation, classification and risk management as well as payment were effected by varied bodies under the old system, this paved way for leakages in national revenue and unnecessary delays in the process of clearing cargo at the ports of Ghana.

In the view of Mante –Kodjo (2020), UNIPASS will ensure that the turnaround time is reduced. Additionally, it will also curtail moving from one portal to another to undertake any particular activity and finally, it will also ensure clearance of goods from the ports within 24 hours (GPHA, 2020). In other words UNIPASS is an enhanced complete customs system on its own that can work within any environment (Technology Network, 2020).

Ashley (2020) advanced two benefits associated with the introduction of UNIPASS.

Firstly, it will enhance trading activities within the borders and ports of Ghana, cover all loopholes associated with national revenue lost and also ensure quick customs clearance.

Secondly, UNIPASS / ICUMS has the ability to ensure that economic growth is translated into the Ghanaian economy and also ensure a great potential of the Ghanaian economy in doing business globally so as to gain international recognition by bodies such as the World Bank. The question now is

- i. If UNIPASS / ICUMS will help to ensure quick customs clearance at the ports and boarders of Ghana, why the current hullabaloo?
- ii. If UNIPASS will also help to increase the revenue of the government as compared to the old system of clearance and ensure that all leakages pertaining to national revenue are blocked, why the resistance and so many protests?
- iii. If UNIPASS will help ensure end-to-end customs administration systems, which in its effect will help to avoid tampering of figures, why also the resistance?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following were revealed from the study.

Challenges of UNIPASS

- i. UNIPASS is seen as a policy and not a project. This is because in their view they do not have any project manager pushing or projecting the UNIPASS concept. Whoever is acting as the country project director is not on top of his job.
- ii. There was no piloting or simulation done. Thus in their view the UNIPASS / ICUMS was implemented in a rush.
- iii. No training was done for stakeholders, only two types of training was done for some few stakeholders. The first was done for only some few managers at a hotel in Tema whilst the other one was done at the conference hall of GPHA. After that, stakeholders were asked to book for an appointment for training online. When the booking was done by some stakeholders, they did not receive any feedback.

iv. No segmented training for stakeholders. Stakeholders contest that segmented training started only after the shutdown of GCNET and even that one, only one item was used for the training.

v. The introduction of UNIPASS/ICUMS is not necessary, this is because for now it is adding more cost to the importer. The reason been that for many of its members, the system is not able to release or help them process their bills or document on time thus pushing most of their client's goods or items into demurrage. Only few people can access the complete use of the system and also in some cases the system is so slow and unable to generate the required information to effect processing and payment.

vi. UNIPASS/ICUMS is defeating the entire concept of port paperless system. Here the reason advanced is that because currently the system is not working to perfection, most of the processes have now been resulted to paper documentation, leading to a lot of human interface or interaction and if immediate care is not taken to avert the situation, the usual challenges of corruption, bribery, bureaucracy and many others will pop up again at the ports of Ghana.

vii. UNIPASS/ ICUMS has created loss of income for some players within the shipping and harbor fraternity They argue that because of the slow pace at which the system is currently working coupled with many technical challenges most importers and exporters have decided to halt their businesses for now in order to effectively access how the system works for the next one or two months hence they have no money.

Discussion

At this section the researchers intend to examine whether the study is able to address the many problems that were identified. Prior to the introduction UNIPASS/ICUMS. Some goods were cleared at the ports in 48 hours under the new port paperless system. This statement is seen to be true because most clearing agents are able to receive their CCVR in 24 hours duration as compared to 3 days some previous years ago and even clear some of their goods in 2 hours. This assertion is testified by Ohene (2020), an assistant commissioner for the Accra collections of customs who on 8/04/2020 in a media

engagement attested that 'paperless clearance system in place has enabled some goods to be cleared at Ghana's port within 2 hours'. The study can also confirm that without the introduction of UNIPASS / ICUMS the entire long room at the Tema port was no more a busy area and even with UNIPASS/ICUMS the number of people around the area found was significantly not high.

Additionally, even with the introduction of UNIPASS/ICUMS the Port Paperless System (PPS) had been able to completely reduced human interaction at the ports and also reduced the regulatory agencies responsible for inspections from 13 to 3.

Furthermore, shipping lines have been amalgamated into PAARS with the introduction of the PPS and with the UNIPASS/ICUMS it is not also different. These findings confirm the work done by 'Eye on Port '(2018) and thus contribute to existing literature.

Broad consultations should be done with all stakeholders before the introduction of any new policy, for this statement the findings were mixed because the study revealed that there was no training done for all members, even though some alluded to the fact that some form of training was done, it was done for only some few mangers within the clearing chain. Additionally there was no piloting or simulation, but Mante -Kodjo a deputy commissioner in charge of policy and programs on 8/04/2020 in a press engagement alluded to the fact that 1500 clearing agents have been trained on the use of UNIPASS/ICUMS. These findings are consistent with the stand of Ghana Institute of Freight Forwarders (GIFF), Tema secretariat and thus conform to literature.

Also, this study can also confirm that as far as customs remain a reckonable agency at the ports of Ghana, there are no barriers associated with its operations at the ports in Ghana. This findings also confirm the work of Agyemang (2016) and thus contribute to existing literature.

There was also an assertion that why should the government shutdown a system that has been able to synchronized most of the manual processes at the ports into a paperless system. This study reveals that the current UNIPASS/ICUMS is also doing same as it was done by the GCNet and in addition has even improved upon the current system by making sure almost all manual processes are integrated into UNIPASS/ICUMS. One typical example is the manifest matching feature under UNIPASS. This feature has made it possible for clearing agents to pay for the duty of their consignment even before the

arrival of the consignment. Under GCNet manifest matching took long time and thus delayed payment of customs duty and clearing goods at the ports.

An entity whose contract will expire in 2023, why the rush to abrogate its contract. In respect of the above statement, the study was not able to gather any appropriate response even through some of the respondents mentioned politics as the main course. The study can confirm with facts and figures that UNIPASS/ICUMS has helped to improve or increased government revenue at the ports even within 30 days of its implementation, that is from 1st June, 2020 to 30th June 2020, contrarily to the assertion why shutdown a system that has improved and well as increased government revenue. According to Ashley (2020) before the introduction of UNIPASS/ICUMS the monthly minimum and maximum revenue collections done by Ghana Customs Management System (GCMS) was pegged at GH800 million and GH 1.2billion and that the monthly revenue averagely collected was estimated to be GH940 million. However, GH490 million was mobilized at the ports within 17 days of the UNIPASS implementation and then a total revenue of GH1.2 billion at the end of June, 2020.

The study can also confirm that UNIPASS/ICUMS has helped to ensure quick customs clearance at the ports due to the inclusion of the 'manifest matching' feature into its system. This feature has ensured fast track of customs duty. As regards to the hullabaloo, the study sees it as normal. In 2003, when GCNET was been introduced, there were similar protests and many demonstration all over the ports of the country. This is normal with the introduction of any new system. The revenue figures outlined by Ashley (2020) in his research work has also testified that all leakages pertaining to national revenue will be blocked to a very large extent with the introduction of UNIPASS/ICUMS at the ports and borders of Ghana.

The study can lastly also confirm that UNIPASS/ICUMS has helped to ensure end- to -end customs administration system. This is because with UNIPASS/ICUMS, CCVR, customs assessment and customs compliance have all been streamlined into the system. Currently, after entering one's input into the system, all what one has to do is to wait for payment of duty and upon payment one moves straight away to clear his/her goods. This system has therefore ensured faster payment of duties, clearance of goods and tracking of goods at the ports.

CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Going paperless at the ports of Ghana has really helped to improve revenue generation at the ports. For instance one month implementation of paperless system from 1st September, 2017 to 30th September 2017, it helped to increase ports revenue from GH 130M in the first week of September 2016 to GH 213 in the same period for 2017. Also one month implementation of UNIPASS/ICUMS at the ports of Ghana, that is from 1st June, 2020 to 30th June, 2020 has led to the realization of GH1.2 billion.

Additionally, going paperless either under GCNet or UNIPASS has also helped to eradicate most of the problems that were initially associated with doing businesses at the ports of Ghana before 2003, namely; corruption, leakages in government revenue, delay in clearing of goods, bureaucracy and cumbersome procedures which were initially characterized with so much paper submission. Evidence to this effect has been shown in the work of (Agyemang, 2016; Agbozo, 2017; 'Eye on Port'; 2018; Ashley, 2020).

Additionally, some statements made by some stakeholders such Ohene and Mate-Kodjo (2020), have all testified that the initial challenges in doing business at the ports of Ghana before 2003 is now a thing of the past.

To conclude, this study would like to disassociate itself from the statement made by Ashley (2020) that 'UNIPASS/ICUMS is 'the long awaited 'messiah' of Ghana's leaking revenue basket'. The reason being that it is too early to draw such a conclusion even though there are enough signs and signals to show that UNIPASS/ICUMS will help in increasing government revenue at the ports of Ghana.

Additionally, all stakeholders should be trained adequately before the introduction of any new policy or system at the ports of Ghana. The chain in clearing goods at the ports consists of numerous stakeholders and they must all be adequately trained. Piloting, simulation or parallel testing of a system will also help to identify some challenges associated with a new policy or system before it is introduced.

Notwithstanding, these setbacks, the authors do not support quick demonstrations and protests at the ports any time a new policy or system is being introduced at the ports. The reason being that introduction of any new system comes with a lot of challenges initially. GCNet's introduction also saw some initial challenges in 2003. When stakeholders in the clearing chain embark on demonstrations and protests, many people tend to read a lot of

meanings into it and besides in the opinion of these authors the demonstrations and protests should not be done by clearing agents and freight forwarders, the reason been that they do not lose anything when a new system is introduced, whatever costs that will be incurred as a result of delay leading to demurrage or rent, it will be paid by the importer or exporter. They should rather always engage the government and GPHA in healthy discussions providing solutions and better alternatives. This study was conducted in April and June, 2020 when GCNet was been asked to shut down and that was almost at the same time that UNIPASS/ICUMS was being introduced therefore most of the challenges are seen to be normal associated with the introduction of any new system or project.

Ghana has two ports namely Tema which is the largest and Takoradi, the smallest, however this study was conducted at the Tema port.

For whatever the reason might be, some stakeholders were not willing to assist or provide any information especially Customs - GRA at Tema port. On countless occasions the request of the authors to seek their audience in this study was turned down.

Since the study was also conducted only at Tema port, further research can be conducted at both ports to examine the effectiveness of UNIPASS/ ICUMS.

Finally, the covid-19 pandemic also restricted movement at the ports and even prevented interviewing most of the GPHA staff, as management had issued a directive to that effect notwithstanding, this directive, some staff of GPHA were very co- operative in filling some of the questionnaires.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the port of Tema is bigger than that of Takoradi, we recommend that future studies should be conducted to examine the implementation of UNIPASS / ICUMS under the two seaports in Ghana namely, Tema and Takoradi seaports.

Additionally, since UNIPASS/ ICUMS have just commenced operations at the ports of Ghana, we recommend another study into its operations after a year to ascertain whether the challenges outlined in this study still holds. This can be done first and foremost at Tema and secondly at both ports.

Finally, we recommend a longitudinal study into the operations of UNIPASS/ ICUMS at either Tema port or at both ports in the near future.

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List of Abbreviations

1. ACHIA- Association of Customs House Agents in Ghana.
2. CCVR- Customs Classification Valuation Report.
3. CDW-Customs Data Warehouse
4. CUBAG- Customs Brokers Association of Ghana.
5. CUPIA- Customs UNIPASS International Agency
6. FFAG – Freight Forwarders Association of Ghana.
7. GCB – Ghana Commercial Bank
8. GCMS- Ghana Customs Management System.
9. GCNET – Ghana Community Network.
10. GIFF- Ghana Institute of Freight Forwarders.
11. GPHA – Ghana Ports and Harbour Authority.
12. GRA – Ghana Revenue Authority
13. ICUMS- Integrated Customs Management System.
14. IRMS -Integrated Risk Management System
15. IT – Information Technology
16. LSM- Law Compliant System
17. PPS – Port Paperless System.
18. PARRS – Pre Arrival Assessment Reporting System.
19. PMS- Performance Management System.
20. RBT – Resource – Based Theory
21. TRA – Theory of Reasoned Action