

# Spotlight on Mrs. Jessica Nkansah: Scientist, Auditor, GSA Fish Safety Boss



*Mrs. Jessica Nkansah*

Mrs. Jessica Nkansah, Acting Director of Inspectorate Directorate and National Contact Point for the EU in Ghana, with regard to fish exports, made the leading story of ***The Mirror***, the Graphic Communications Group's weekend newspaper. The story affirms her competence and role in Standardisation in the country.

Below are excerpts from the interview:

At the Ghana Standards Authority (GSA), fish import and export thrives under the leadership of Mrs. Jessica Nkansah, a Scientist and Auditor who stands as a symbol of innovation and strength.

Despite being in a rather male-dominated industry where she has had to work twice as hard to prove herself, she has used that as fuel to drive her mission forward.

With firm hands devoid of fear or favour, she continues to ensure that the set standards of quality in fish and fishery products trading are met.

In a chat with *The Mirror* last week, Mrs Nkansah said: "There are times when I have had to order the confiscation or return of tonnes of fish and other products due to them not meeting standards. Unfortunately, some traders do not conduct any research

into the quality assurance standards set before going into trading,” she noted.

In her over 30 years of practice, she has established herself as a problem solver and team player having helped in the development of quality assurance standards for various products and services. She has also collaborated with the Safe Fish Certification and Licensing Scheme to train, sensitise and certify fishermen and fishmongers. Currently, she said the scheme had certified over 150 traders and trained over 500.

Mrs. Nkansah holds a first degree in Biochemistry with Chemistry from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) and a Master’s Degree in Nutrition and Food Science from the University of Reading in the United Kingdom where she graduated with distinction.

With an eagerness to make a positive impact on the health and lives of both consumers and traders of food, she is currently pursuing her PhD in food science at the KNUST. Mrs. Nkansah is currently the Head of the Inspectorate Directorate of the GSA. Her Directorate is where inspection of products, high risk goods, imported and exported fish and fishery products as well as issuance of export certifications, are carried out.

She is also a certified internal and external auditor with ISO 22000, 45000, 14000 and Hazard Analysis Critical



Control Points (HACCP) certifications.

### **Early childhood**

Talking about her childhood, she said she was born to Dr. Albert Komi Ahafia, a retired lecturer in Nuclear Physics at KNUST and Mrs. Josephine Ahafia, a Home Economics Specialist, Assistant, Director of Education. She is a product of the KNUST Primary School and the Holy Child Secondary School. According to the scientist, her journey into the world of science was inspired by her parents with her three other siblings, all females, also into various science disciplines, two Clinical Pharmacists and a Paediatric Nephrologist.

She has been with the GSA since completing her national service at the organisation. Mrs. Nkansah said that she had been through all the laboratory departments,

including the cosmetics, food and drinks laboratories, as well as the standards development directorate.

### **Personal and family life**

The 54-year-old scientist said she had been married for 23 years to her university sweetheart, Mr. Kwasi Nkansah Jnr, a financial analyst and a farmer. Together, they are blessed with three children, Nana Kwabena, Maame Ama and Owuraku Nkansah.

She described herself as a go-getter, result-oriented, empathetic, problem solver, fun person and an ardent Christian. “It also brings me joy and a sense of fulfilment to counsel, mentor and see people, especially young adults grow in all aspects of their lives.

Currently, I have mentored some young adults who now hold high positions within the

banking and science sectors,” she observed.

“I do not play when it comes to hanging out with my friends or schoolmates. I love their company so much as it brings back fond memories of school days,” she added.

### **Profession and achievements**

The scientist highlighted the need for product inspections in all areas. For instance, she noted that with cosmetics, it is important to test under microscopes and other methods for possible harmful microorganisms and, the presence of certain banned products such as hydroquinone and mercury in some skin-lightening products.

“In toothpaste also, it is pivotal to ensure that the right amount of fluoride and other necessities are present before allowing them on the market,” she said.

Addressing the import and export of fish and fishery products, Mrs Nkansah said it was imperative to ensure adherence to international and local standards.

Some policies she spearheaded have resulted in the elevation of Ghana’s fish export industry on the global stage. We have been able to secure certification (ISO/IEC 17020-2012) through the Deutsche Akkreditierungsstelle (DAkkS), the German accreditation body to ensure export to Europe. “I am proud to say that, since 2012, my department has not had issues with the



import or export of products even though we are audited regularly by some European bodies,” she added.

Beyond the lab coat, the scientist and auditor said she actively engaged with fishing communities and conducted workshops to educate fishermen on best practices and the importance of preserving aquatic ecosystems.

“In my spare time, I also tutor different classes such as students within the Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) related programmes and other courses related to the HACCP organised by the GSA” she said.

### **Plans**

For her plans, she said she was going to have as much rest as possible, pat herself for a good job done in her

personal and professional life and leave the rest to God.

For her parting words, she said: I want to encourage more women to go into Science, Technology, Engineering and Math, for we need all hands-on deck to help maintain the health and well-being of our society.

**Source: The Mirror**