



## **GHANA INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS 2024 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**THEME: ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE OF A QUALITY BUILT ENVIRONMENT**

**SPEECH**

**BY**

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## A. Introduction

**Mr. Chairman, the President of the Ghana Institute of Architects**

**Distinguished Invited Guests**

**Past Presidents of the Ghana Institute of Architects**

**Fellows of the GIA**

**Chairman and Board Members of the Architects Registration Council**

**Members of the Ghana Institute of Architects**

All protocols observed,

1. It is a great pleasure to join this very esteem and professional group today at this opening ceremony of the Ghana Institute of Architects Annual General meeting. I personally feel privileged because, growing up as a young boy, I always wanted to be an architect—my parents constantly drummed into my ears and encouraged me to work towards becoming an architect. Up till today, my 94-year-old mom still reminds me that I wasn't supposed to be an economist. I am sure she will be extremely happy when I report to her after this program that I have come closer to my childhood dream.
2. Let me take this opportunity to thank the leadership of this great institute for inviting me to be part of this important event that has brought together distinguished Architects from across the country to discuss issues of national importance under the theme “**Economic Significance of a Quality Built Environment**”.
3. Mr. Chairman, the meeting is taking place at a time population growth, urbanization, and growing demand for energy efficiency, have placed enormous responsibilities on architects to design buildings that are sustainable—maximize space, promote tourism, attract investment, and make use of new and efficient energy resources. I am therefore encouraged that your institute has brought together its members to deliberate on the economic significance of a quality building environment.
4. A quality-built environment has numerous economic benefits including increased property values, improved productivity, enhanced economic growth, reduced maintenance costs,

attracting businesses and talent, increase tourism and revenue, improved public health and enhance quality of life.

5. The Architectural profession has a moral obligation to deliver a quality-built environment ensuring to deliver the numerous economic benefits that can positively impact individuals, businesses, and the society.
6. In a developing country such as ours, this onerous responsibility is even more pronounced in the face of institutional weaknesses and other developmental constraints that plague many developing economies.
7. In my brief remarks this morning I will do three things—First touch on the economic significance of a quality-built environment; why it is important to allow buildings to reflect our thinking; and finally designing to reflect the developmental stage and phase of economic growth.

### **B. Economic Significance of a Quality Built Environment**

8. Mr. Chairman, the work of Architects has evolved from just creating elegant buildings and other physical structures, to leveraging technology to support economic activity and drive growth. In the end, a quality-built environment can have many values for the economy and permit me to just touch on a few of them:

#### **Increased Property Values and Economic Wealth**

9. A well-designed and well-maintained buildings and public spaces can increase property values, attracting businesses, residents, and investments. Quality buildings can command higher rental income, providing a stable source of revenue for property owners.
10. Both theoretical and empirical evidence have established how these factors affect the “rent/property value” gradient function. And all over the world, architects, working together with town planners have used these qualities to steepen this gradient function to improve our communities and help citizens to maintain the values of their properties. Property values have become a major component of wealth of nations and continue to influence the transmission mechanism of both macroeconomic and public policies. Unfortunately, most property developers

have not lived up to these standards in most developing countries. Citizens spend a lot of money on brick and mortar—their entire life savings—but cannot tap any economic benefits from their properties because the environment has completely wiped away all the latent values in their properties.

### **Job Creation and Economic Growth**

11. Building and maintaining quality infrastructure creates employment opportunities in the construction sector.
12. A quality-built environment can stimulate local economic growth through routine maintenance culture. This will attract businesses, tourists, and investments, and ensure that property owners can always fall on such investments in times of difficulties—by creating a lot of derivatives and refinancing opportunities for other critical investments. Sadly, building or buying a property in Ghana has almost become like a sunk cost. Once the money goes into the property, there are very limited opportunities for owners to tap into the appreciating values of these properties to finance other aspects of their lifestyles. While this is not purely the problem of the architects and builders, but also requires creativity from those of us in the finance space, I strongly believe that enhancing our built environment will significantly open this space to leverage the huge potential of its inherent economic benefits.
13. Governments of many developing economies are struggling with domestic revenue mobilization. Meanwhile, a lot of value and resources are locked in brick and mortar all over our economies which cannot be tapped. A well-designed built environments with proper cadastres would allow government to formalize property values and collect the required property taxes to further help to maintain the various amenities which by itself enhances the value of our properties and help our governments to significantly improve our tax revenue. While most advance and emerging market economies have tax to GDP ratios above 30 percent, developing countries, especially low-income countries, are under 15 percent (with Ghana around 13 percent), and property taxes are mostly absent in our economies.
14. This has been one of the major reasons why governments have had to borrow to close the financing gap, and why most low-income countries are saddled with debt burdens that are

strangulating the development of our economies. I am convinced that working together, we can leverage this huge potential and derive huge economic benefits from our built environment.

### **Improved Public Health and Productivity**

15. Let me at this point touch on the public health and productivity benefits. A well-designed built environment can promote physical activity, reduce air pollution, and improve mental health. There is enough evidence that quality buildings and public spaces can improve worker productivity, leading to increased economic output. And this was one of our motivations at the Bank of Ghana in the design and building of our new head office complex—named the Bank Square. The value of that building clearly goes beyond the cost of the construction.

### **Environmental Sustainability**

16. Energy-efficient buildings can reduce energy consumption, lowering greenhouse gas emissions and energy costs. We also know that quality buildings can incorporate water-saving features, reducing water consumption and wastewater generation.

### **Social Benefits**

17. A quality-built environment can foster social cohesion by creating public spaces that promote community interaction and social connection. And this ultimately can help towards reducing crime rates by promoting natural surveillance and community engagement.

18. **Promoting Tourism:** Tourism has become a major source of revenue in many countries. Well-designed buildings and spaces enhance the cultural landscape, attracting tourism and boosting local economies.

## **C. Allowing Buildings to Reflect Culture and Thinking**

19. Mr. Chairman, this point is very important and critical, and this is how we need to proceed as a nation. Architects by the nature of their work always try to reflect the thinking and character of the people in their communities. It is always said that you can judge the character, social and psychological make-up of a person or an institution from the structure of their building(s). Let me give you a practical example. Last week the Bank of Ghana commissioned its new Head Office:

The Bank Square. The edifice we see today reflects collaborative work between the main designer and the Management of the Bank. The original design had to go through many iterations and the final product symbolizes Ghana's growing influence as an economic powerhouse on the world stage. It reflects the direction of thinking of the policy makers and their outlook for policy making into the future.

20. It will surprise you all to learn that already we have had three requests from central banks in the African region who want to be given a tour of the facility. The country is already gaining from the tourism angle, and also from the peer-to-peer learning and influence.
21. Architecturally, The BANK SQUARE is a bold statement of Bank of Ghana's enduring presence and authority in the financial landscape. Clad in durable stone, the building symbolizes permanence and resilience, much like ancient monuments that have withstood the test of time. This material not only conveys the Bank's stature but also requires minimal maintenance and supporting the building's sustainability goals. This architectural form reflects the Bank's role as a regulatory authority and affirms its importance within the nation's economic framework.
22. My key point here is that buildings speak, and they speak for us. So let us design them to speak what we stand for, what we believe in, and our aspirations and ambitions. And, let us allow our buildings to bring in the positive economic externalities.

### **Architecture and Stage of Development**

23. Mr. Chairman, a country's landscape and infrastructure can at once predict the stage of its development. As we consolidate as a middle-income country, the nation's architecture should serve as a reflection of its level of development including technological advancement, cultural values and social dynamics.
24. The buildings and other structures should embody the cultural identity of the people, particularly their values and traditions. In the world all over, there are bold iconic structures that on their own tell the story of these countries and ensures that these stories shape their determination and aspirations to improve and enhance their quality of life. Ghana should be no different. We need to be bold and courageous to begin to use our built environment to shape the economic

development of our dear country. It is about time we developed ours to symbolize our cultural pride.

### **Conclusion:**

25. As I conclude, I want us all to reflect on how we can begin to think through ways in which we can leverage on advancement in technology to design buildings and other structures that reflect our socio- cultural identity and economic development.
26. The points raised here underscores the necessity for Architects to design and execute projects to the economic benefit of the nation.
27. I am trusting that this year's Annual General Meeting of the Ghana Institute of Architects, and with a well-thought through theme on economic significance of our built environment, will create the platform for extensive engagements.
28. And I strongly believe that if there is a group of professionals who can use the power of their minds and the product of their imaginations to shape the economic development of our dear country Ghana, then it is this group of learned professionals gathered here today as the Ghana Institute of Architects. A group I once dreamt to be part of but couldn't make the cut.
29. I thank you for your kind attention.