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by Fabio Scala

# Italy-Ghana relations with Ambassador Giovanni Favilli

FurtherAfrica sat down with Giovanni Favilli, Ambassador of Italy in Ghana to chat about the relations between the two countries, its perspectives and some of the exciting business developments happening in the last few years.

## Fabio Scala:

It's great to see you Ambassador and thank you for taking the time to talk with FurtherAfrica today. We've been friends for over a decade, since our days in New York and I know you've served in places like Dubai and Hanoi, but this is your first African experience, how are you enjoying Accra?

## Ambassador Favilli:

After working in Europe, Asia, America and the Middle East, I am glad to be in Africa, which gives me a new perspective in world affairs. [Ghana](#) is often called Africa for beginners, so I guess it is the right place to start. From Dubai, a center of cosmopolitan and smart investors, I saw how the interest in the opportunities in Africa has grown exponentially.

Demographic trends make this the African century. While other continents face ageing populations, over the next 30 years Africa's working age population is expected to double to 1.2 billion and we all know about the wealth of natural resources Africa holds.

However, in the Western world there are still preconceptions, misconceptions, or simply lack of information, about Africa that hinder the private foreign capital investment the continent needs to achieve its potential. That is why I welcome initiatives like [FurtherAfrica](#).

There are vast differences between the 55 states that comprise Africa. A general issue is the lack of infrastructure, buildings, machinery, energy and telecommunications networks, as well as the prevalence of corruption, insecurity and inequality. A point in common is the fact that all countries have growing urban sectors. Future economic growth will be supported by Africa's increasing connection to the global economy and improved governance.

The narrative about Africa has shifted dramatically and repeatedly during the past few decades. Once considered the “*dark continent*” or “*hopeless Africa*”, until 2000, due to its history of poverty, disease, and warfare, the perception of Africa has improved since around 2010, with the widespread use of the term “*Africa Rising*” to describe its transformation in the footsteps of Asia. In 2018 the “*Africa Rising*” narrative is no longer appropriate to describe the current state of the continent.

More nuanced, contextualised and balanced reporting is needed.

Africa is neither absolutely hopeless nor absolutely hopeful. It is not just about Afro-pessimism or Afro-optimism.

Citizens and leaders of Africa have a choice to make and we, as diplomats, have to be able to describe the differences, the opportunities, the risks and the challenges. The move towards a Continental Free Trade Area is certainly a step in the right direction.

Accra has a government that is creating a new narrative, of a Ghana beyond aid, of Africans who take responsibility for their future, of a country trying to become more attractive for foreign investors, interested in creating an economy that does not just export natural resources but processes them and adds value. We welcome this attitude and hope it becomes more and more a reality.

### **Fabio Scala:**

**Italy has a good history of cooperation with Ghana in a number of areas, however I understand that the business and commercial relationship between the two countries is at all time high lately, could you talk to us a little bit about this track record and the latest developments?**

### **Ambassador Favilli:**

A number of factors prove Italy's commitment to Ghana. First, I would mention the exchange of visits at the highest level in the last three years, particularly the one by Prime Minister Gentiloni last November.

Secondly, the oil and gas project by ENI at the Offshore Cape Three Points, the largest single foreign investment in Ghana and the whole Western Africa. After the first oil last year, gas extraction has just started. Two other milestones in Ghana's development were the work of Italian companies: the Akosombo Dam on the Volta River and the Tema Oil Refinery.



*“ENI’s Cape Three Points project is the largest single foreign investment in Ghana and the whole Western Africa.”*

The relationship is also very important on the people-to-people side.

The Ghanaian community in Italy is composed of over 70,000 people who are well integrated and contribute to the cultural wealth and diversity of our country.

Over 4,000 among them acquired Italian citizenship in 2016. In the same year, they sent back 145 million US dollars to Ghana.

There are many footballers, the highest number of Ghanaian players outside Ghana: we just organized a very successful Calcio Trade Ball at Kempinski Hotel, an event celebrating the relationship between Ghana and Italy in football with many football players.

At the same time a number of Italian families have been an integral part of Ghana’s development for more than one century and Italian construction companies are household names in Ghana.

**Fabio Scala:**

I’ve noticed that you’ve been promoting a very active cultural exchange, what can you tell us about that?

**Ambassador Favilli:**

Culture is an important part of our relationship with Ghana. We have just completed our series of screenings on Italian contemporary cinema, we will have the Italian Cuisine Week in November and we promote our language, lifestyle and universities, which attract many Ghanaian students. We gave over 1,600 student visas in the last 5 years.

**Fabio Scala:**

What is your message for Italian investors and entrepreneurs interested in venturing into Ghana?

**Ambassador Favilli:**

Do your homework, carefully choose your partners and staff, be patient and persistent. Ghana has the advantage of political stability and of a relatively predictable business environment. Use it as a hub for further development in the Western Africa. And read our [business guide](#) on the Embassy of Italy’s [website](#)!

**Fabio Scala:**

What would you say are the major barriers to entry and the major opportunities for Italian companies?

**Ambassador Favilli:**

In recent months we have observed a growing trend and a systematic effort to emphasize and boost national involvement, participation and ownership to foreign investment in the country.

While we understand the reasons behind local content and local ownership, we also think that this may render the country and the business environment less predictable and less attractive for foreign investors.

Moreover, the minimum capital requirements for foreign investments are quite high and hinder the access of small and medium enterprises, of which Italy is rich. Small and medium enterprises can still be very beneficial to the country for the employment, added value and training they provide and the contribution they give to the economy and the state coffers. Red tape, corruption, and lack of infrastructures, on the other hand, equally affect both domestic and foreign investors.

Amongst the opportunities, I would mention all those that an innovative and entrepreneurial mind can think of, facilitated by a wealth of natural and human resources, a growing middle class and a safe and stable environment. If I were an investor I would put my money into quality agriculture, taking advantage of the EU policy of no tariffs, no quotas for Ghanaian products, or into sustainable eco-tourism. Ghana, for its security, position and nature, has the potential to become a tourist destination. 🇵🇸