

All eyes on Africa

"Please spread the word: Africa is booming," said Mustapha Fasinro, CEO of Nigerian energy trader Linetrade. Fasinro was the guest speaker at an Afrimari event in London. Afrimari – short for 'Africa Maritime' – provides a forum for African maritime interests all over the world.

"The shipping industry needs Afrimari because Africa can no longer be ignored. It is proving to be a mighty economic force," said co-founder Gemina Cooper, a gas broker at Braemar Seascope. "Afrimari is focused on pride, professionalism and equipping its members for Africa's flight."

Afrimari was created at Rev Jesse Jackson's 2007 'Economics of Colour' tour in London, where Cooper struck up a conversation with charterer Temi Binitie. "It occurred to us both that there wasn't an organisation that served maritime professionals with specialist knowledge on Africa," said Binitie. It took three years for them to make the idea a reality. In March last year dates were set for Afrimari's 'meet and greet' sessions – the last Thursday at the end of each quarter.

They stress that Afrimari is open to individuals of all ages, working or aligned to the maritime, energy or trade-related sectors with a passion for developing African business.



Afrimari co-founders Gemina Cooper (left) and Temi Binitie

[Photo: Colin Whyman]

So far, the shipping industry has been supportive: AET, Braemar Seascope and MOL established strong ties early on in the form of sponsorship. But the group needs more support. "Afrimari requires assistance from the maritime and trade sectors," said Binitie, adding: "We are increasing awareness of a continent many have been intimidated by in the past. Afrimari is a positive addition and companies should be part of our growth."

Both Cooper and Binitie are of West African heritage, and Nigeria is Afrimari's first African base. The main challenge for those who want to do business on the continent is understanding the local mindset, laws and business practices. "Africa is based on relationships first, contracts second. There is a perception of increased risk there, and many of these challenges can be overcome by becoming savvy," said Binitie. She pointed out that if Western

corporations wish to be successful in Africa, it requires an evolution in the way they approach business, in much the same way that those companies have adapted themselves to Chinese business practices.

Afrimari is already drawing the attention of sponsors. "Our slogan is 'connecting future leaders' and we represent the next wave of leadership in African maritime and trade – we're not shy about that. Afrimari provides a focal point for information gathering, expertise-sharing and a solid network base with Africa at its core," Cooper told *Fairplay*.

Afrimari hopes to set itself up as the go-to network for members and industry. "The aim is for Afrimari to have a world-wide presence and for our 'meet and greet' sessions to go global." ■

➔ For more information: www.afrimari.com or email theboard@afirimari.com

Afrimari board members

Temi Binitie

Temi Binitie, a Member of the Institute of Chartered Shipbrokers, is a senior Aframax charterer working at Kuala Lumpur-headquartered shipowner AET. Before moving to the Aframax desk, the maritime law graduate spent 18 months developing the AET clean products fleet in the Atlantic basin.

Gemina Cooper

Gemina Cooper, another MICS, has spent five years at Braemar Seascope. She is a broker specialising in

LPG cargoes, typically loading VLGCs west of Suez.

The past two years have seen Cooper focus on the development of ties with indigenous African companies exporting LPG ex-West Africa

Kayode Awogboro

Head of energy at Ark Insurance Group since 2010. Previously a senior oil and gas broker for HSBC Insurance brokers specialising in risk management for independent energy companies and oil companies operating in Africa.

Louis Mbanefo

Works in business development at Total E&P Nigeria. He has previously worked with FACTS Global Energy as an oil consultant and at Platts, where he covered the European light distillates market.

Bello Tukur

Commercial/chartering executive for Bonny Chartering, a subsidiary of Daddo Maritime Services, a shipping agency in West Africa. Earlier worked at Gibson shipbrokers in London.