

***Bringing AfCFTA Home to the People***

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***During the AfCFTA Hub Ghana Launch & Stakeholders Forum***

Ghana, like most African countries, was built on trade.

Long before we decided to take the name of that illustrious ancient Soninke Kingdom whose capital of Koumbi Saleh was at the heart of the salt and gold trade of the Western Sahara, our forebears had staked the flag of trade in every outpost of this land.

Tekyiman was as far back as the 14<sup>th</sup> century a hub for the kola trade and a crossroads for commerce across the Hausa Diaspora. Between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, Salaga achieved renown across the length and breadth of the Sahara as a major port of business and exchange place for Africa's wealth and ingenuity. The European adventurers who came here in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries were drawn by trade and saw it as the hallmark of our existence.

We have long loved trade. The question is: has trade loved us back? Trade is what forged us, but has it helped us? Has trade done enough for Ghana? Will trade as we have done it all this while take this country to the promised land of transformation and membership of the club of successful countries?

The current fiscal issues facing Ghana, linked indelibly to the still lingering pandemic and the protracted Russia-Ukraine conflict, have many linkages to trade. Much of the inflation now plaguing Ghana found its way here through trade. The forex problem facing us today is a problem only because of trade. Trade is both our making and our unmaking.

That is why when the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (or "AfCFTA") commenced full rollout in January 2021, the posture of many observers was that of cautious optimism. Yes, a Pan-African single market is a longstanding dream among all of us Pan-Africanists. True, many decades have been wasted without Africa getting its act together in the area of economic integration.

But AfCFTA was not the first time the burning desire for a continental market has roused us in our little, fragile, countries and set our hopes on collective greatness. Here in the western

corner of the continent, we have had ECOWAS. We saw the Abuja treaty. Even beyond the confines of Africa, some of us have embraced the WTO, AGOA and the EPAs. We have seen various trade liberalization and economic integration projects come and go.

It is a very fair question then to ask: this time around, what is different? And I will be bold to venture an answer: what is the different this time around is the mindset. The current twin challenges of covid aftershocks and the effects of the Russian Ukraine war on the global economy also present a unique opportunity for us to realise that our destiny is in our own hands and by looking within the continent to deepen our linkages, we can change the narrative and be truly self-sufficient. All the ingredients for our success lie right in front of us and we can't afford to fail. Digital technology provides us with the means.

We are pushing forward with AfCFTA with our eyes wide open. Fully aware of past dashed hopes and the pitfalls of globalization. We are moving forward with AfCFTA knowing full well that without efforts to truly bring down the barriers obstructing integration across Africa, we will get nowhere. We are pressing forward with AfCFTA in the clear knowledge that trade takes capacity and know-how. And we are launching the AfCFTA Hub in Ghana today because we have carefully thought through these matters and woven together a strategy that is both history-aware and future-focused.

The AfCFTA Hub initiative brings together the AfCFTA Secretariat and strategic partners like AfroChampions working hand in hand with committed governments to create a network for accelerating the kinds of regional integration that will really drive the kind of trade that can deliver economic transformation. Countries like Ghana and the six others participating in the Guided Trade pilot to fast-track AfCFTA implementation can then interlink their own systems with the AfCFTA Hub. Coupled with connections to major private sector platforms in the e-commerce, modern retail and logistics sectors, such interlinkages should create a powerful nerve center to facilitate and energise small and medium enterprises and startups into becoming the fuel for propelling AfCFTA implementation and Africa's economic transformation forward.

As a multistakeholder platform bringing together the AfCFTA Secretariat, relevant African Union Commission departments, national government agencies, AfroChampions and private sector platforms through the power and ingenuity of digital technology, the AfCFTA Hub is the principal tool for aligning Ghana's own wide-ranging digitalization policy with the various opportunities presented by AfCFTA.

The Ministry of Communications & Digitalisation, Ministry of Finance and the Ministry and Trade & Industry, together with their departments and allied agencies and institutions, are happy to present the AfCFTA Hub policy directives, implementation strategies and operational models for inputs from all relevant stakeholders. But before we delve into that critical task, we need to clearly establish the country's overall framework for embedding its digital strategy into this exciting AfCFTA opportunity.

First and foremost, Ghana as a continental leader in ICT innovation and adoption, sees it as an opportunity to export our ICT goods and services across Africa and beyond, and some of those prospects have already materialized. AfCFTA Hub should make it easier for technology startups and other producers of ICT goods and services to find markets across Africa. Our business process outsourcing landscape can be revitalized by AfCFTA as Ghana becomes a hub for call center, data processing, data science and various digital services for businesses all over the continent and beyond.

Secondly, it is absolutely imperative to use digital technology to bolster the competitiveness of all sectors of the economy to enable economic actors in those sectors to expand their markets through AfCFTA. Enhanced productivity through the adoption of tools that can be made available through the AfCFTA Hub platform represents a seismic shift from costly time ineffective traditional capacity building approaches to a new cloud-based model whose time has truly come. The role that the AfCFTA hub can play in aggregating content and tools to capacitate businesses across the country to upgrade their know-how to engage more forcefully in export markets beyond Ghana is limited only by our imagination.

Thirdly, the mechanisms of how we harness AfCFTA itself: the process of trading, financing trade, discovering our market strengths and gaps to fill' the means of settlement, how the goods will leave our warehouses and be received on the other side; and the tools for linking our producers with consumers in other African countries and vice versa, all of these are being digitised and made available to all stakeholders through the AfCFTA Hub. Risk management is also key and the related ProPer Seals platform, currently being deployed by the FDA, plays a critical role.

These three strategies underpin Ghana's quest to make AfCFTA work for us by leveraging our strong advantage in the digital technologies that our government has been systematically developing for five years now. The benefits are all around us, but some claim not to see it and

I can only reiterate that there is a quiet revolution rapidly unfolding before our eyes and it is digital!

It is the reality of a comprehensive end-to-end identity management system interlinked with credit management, human security, business facilitation, enhanced government administration and even the improvement of democracy itself. It is the reality of a new smart working environment across the public services enabled by productivity software and dramatically improved connectivity. It is the reality of the common platform, Ghana Card, SIM Card Registration, Smart Workplace, e-Transform, Obaatanpa, Trancop, digital addressing, fintechs and the revamp of the national fibreoptic network.

With the AfCFTA Hub operationalised, it will become even harder to ignore the massive transformation created by Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo's unprecedented Digital Ghana Agenda. An agenda that when coupled with the big dreams of Pan-Africanism, as finally achieved through AfCFTA, can only launch this beloved country of ours and the entire continent into the dizzying heights of true development. This will give practical effect to our oft repeated phrase that the private sector is the engine of growth as it will propel our SMEs to another level

As the accelerated AfCFTA Guided Trade Initiative commences in pilot form with Ghana and six other proactive African countries taking charge, we shall commence onboarding young entrepreneurs, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), startups and all digital marketplace actors across the country onto the AfCFTA Hub, where they can obtain a free AfCFTA Number.

The AfCFTA Number is the powerful seed of a single continental trust-building system that will complement other AfCFTA-enabling instruments such as the PAPSS, MANSA, Digital Green Corridor and e-Tariff mechanisms developed by the AfCFTA Secretariat, African Union, the 4D Consortium and trusted partners like Afreximbank and AfroChampions. With the AfCFTA number, Ghanaian enterprises will obtain a sure and secure navigational tool as well as a trusted profile to speed up connections across the continent for business.

Together with the AfCFTA Common Transaction ID, the AfCFTA Number will also serve critical anti-fraud and crime-fighting purposes domestically and regionally. It will build confidence in both the entities and individuals who use their services locally and internationally that they have the requisite capability to deliver on their promised services as they would have been properly vetted and certified by the requisite regulators. It will create a true one stop shop

akin to our own Amazon, EBay or Alibaba. It is doable and Ghana, the African Black Star, is blazing the trail once again.

For these and many other reasons, we are announcing directives meant to speed up the adoption of the AfCFTA Number and the AfCFTA Common Transaction ID frameworks in Ghana. Beginning immediately, all persons and enterprises engaged in the business of courier, postal, delivery, logistics, ride-sharing, e-commerce, digital trading and any enterprise of that nature are required to obtain an AfCFTA Number at no cost at [www.afcfta.app](http://www.afcfta.app), which is the AfCFTA Hub Gateway.

The regulation of such enterprises which hitherto has been a grey area will be strengthened by requiring electronic registration with Postal and Courier Services Regulatory Commission, the National Information Technology Agency (NITA) and the Cybersecurity Authority through the digital interface available on the AfCFTA Hub at [www.afcfta.app](http://www.afcfta.app). The various regulatory functions of reporting, complaints management, penalties and fine management, licensing, certification and the like shall be conducted electronically on this platform. As more African countries onboard, as part of the upcoming Guided Trade pilot, the emergence of a one-stop-shop for regulatory compliance across the subregion should make the lives of entrepreneurs and their customers very easy. All one needs to do to find out if any courier company, SME or e-commerce entity is safe to do business with is to check their AfCFTA Number and transaction ID.

With the AfCFTA Number widely adopted and regulatory certification taking place on a unified platform, the process of validating the background of any commercial entity should become highly automated, quick, and hassle-free. It will also enable the different digital marketplaces, platforms, networks and e-commerce systems to collaborate and deliver even higher value for all Ghanaians and citizens of AfCFTA member states.

We see examples of such cross-platform connectivity currently in place in India, where the Open Network for Digital Commerce is accelerating the uptake of e-commerce by eliminating gaps and conflicts among providers. Such multistakeholder interoperable ecosystems are vital for expanding the benefits of digitalisation, e-commerce, virtual marketplaces and e-services to underserved populations in rural areas and among the urban underclasses. We see similar developments in Estonia, Turkey, and Dubai. We intend to become global pacesetters in how government, working together with an intergovernmental authority like the AfCFTA Secretariat and the private sector, can roll out smart networks that deliver benefits for all

consumers, business, agencies and other critical actors. This platform is akin to the PanaBIOS initiative that enabled the safe reopening of our borders and was also the product of multi sectoral and cross continental collaboration. Ghanaian ingenuity and innovation powered both systems, I'm proud to announce.

The purpose of convening this forum, is to refine and enrich this obvious endgame. By making it mandatory for all businesses and enterprises running delivery, courier, logistics, postal, marketplace and digital commerce activities to register electronically with the right and relevant regulators, we expect online service providers such as Uber, Glovo, Bolt, Jumia, Tonaton, Yango, Amazon and others to ensure that all businesses registered on their platforms promptly secure their AfCFTA Number and start taking the necessary steps to integrate their transaction processing systems with the AfCFTA Hub. Done properly, all customers of such businesses and services will be able to verify and validate their regulatory and compliance status, thereby increasing trust in the marketplace, boosting uptake of digital services, suppressing fraud, and increasing the efficiency of doing business in Ghana and beyond.

Because the AfCFTA Hub is also being rolled out in other markets, businesses would find that the benefits of an AfCFTA Number and the AfCFTA Common Transaction Framework extends well beyond Ghana.

The telecom industry, in particular, should benefit from the related policy of deploying the AfCFTA Hub as a common fraud reporting node and blacklist database harmoniser because of this regional element. Without regional solutions, criminals will exploit the gaps among countries to evade apprehension. The NCA, the Ghana Chamber of Telecoms, the Ghana ISP Association and related bodies are strongly urged to speed up the rollout of the AfCFTA Hub across all telecom networks as a common anti-fraud engine, business directory service and AfCFTA Implementation Accelerator. This should make it more difficult for fraudsters to use online sales and mobile money payments for online transactions as a means to defraud the unsuspecting public as more trade moves online.

The rollout of the AfCFTA Hub to ensure that Ghanaian businesses have a trusted profile beyond Ghana, to strengthen the hands of industry and regulators to fight fraudsters who will also like to use AfCFTA to regionalise their nefarious activities, and to facilitate marketplace convergence and regulatory efficiency, thereby accelerating the integration agenda of AfCFTA, is an idea long overdue but one that is finally here. With your inputs and ideas, distinguished stakeholders, we can make it not merely successful but spectacular!

I am very happy, on behalf of the government, to declare the AfCFTA Hub officially launched in Ghana!