



Creating One African Market

Report of the AfCFTA Business Forum 2020

**With Activities Held on 3, 4 and 8 December 2020 (alongside
the AU 13th Extraordinary Summit on the AfCFTA held on
5 December 2020)**

Theme:

*AfCFTA's Role in post COVID-19 Recovery,
Resilience & Structural Transformation*

INTRODUCTION

The Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Business Forum 2020 was held virtually because of the travel and gathering restrictions put in place by governments as part of their COVID-19 mitigation measures. Held under the theme: *AfCFTA's Role in post COVID-19 Recovery, Resilience & Structural Transformation*, the Forum's objective was to motivate and focus stakeholders towards the AfCFTA as essential to Africa's recovery from COVID-19 and explored how businesses can ready themselves for success in Africa's Free Trade Area.

The virtual event hosted a series of high level speakers who articulated and illustrated the free-trade agreement's importance in mitigating the economic damage of the COVID-19 pandemic and the essential role the AfCFTA has to play in rebuilding the continent. The forum served as a motivator for all stakeholders to intensify their efforts and maintain momentum towards the AfCFTA's successful start of trading in January 2021.

PARTNERSHIPS

Noting that many other initiatives by different economic stakeholders on the continent were in place, the African Union Commission (AUC) and AfCFTA Secretariat sought to partner with other players preparing events around themes related to AfCFTA start of trading so as to give each other support and increase the reach of the message on the imminent start of trading under the AfCFTA. The following events with sub-themes supporting the AfCFTA Business Forum 2020 overall theme were therefore also celebrated as part of the AfCFTA Business Forum 2020 activities:

1. As part of its AFRICAN BUSINESS LEADERS IN DIALOGUE SERIES, the South Africa Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC) in collaboration with the WITS School of Governance held a webinar on *Positioning for Growth: Private Sector as a Driver for the Implementation of the AfCFTA* on 3 December 2020. The webinar was attended by private sector and civil society stakeholders mainly from South Africa. Part of the message of the webinar was to call on more collaboration and cooperation between the private sector across all parts of the continent.
2. , The African Economic Zones Organisation (AEZO) held its 5th Annual Meeting under the theme: *The Role of Economic Zones in Supporting the Implementation of the AfCFTA and Regional Integration* also on 3 December 2020. The meeting also examined the role that African Economic Zones will play in the AfCFTA and how they can contribute to the success of the AfCFTA. The webinar followed by the AEZO Annual General Meeting which took place on the same day.
3. AeTrade organised a webinar on: *Towards an Integrated AfCFTA Market for SMEs, Women and Youth and Large Businesses*, targeted at creating awareness on the

existence of the continental e-platform or market place for trade known as Sokokuu. Delegates at the webinar deliberated on the important contribution that women, the youth and SMEs can play in the implementation of the AfCFTA and why it was critical to ensure they have access to the entire AfCFTA process. The webinar took place in the evening of the 3rd December 2020 and was hosted by the AUC.

4. The US - AUC Business Forum on the African Continental Free Trade Area took place after the Extraordinary Summit on 8 December 2020. In the webinar U.S. private sector representatives received presentations from AUC and AfCFTA Secretariat staff on the latest developments relating to the AfCFTA. Participants discussed the role that international investors can play by producing in Africa for the single AfCFTA market which is much larger than the individual fragmented markets of present day Africa.

Even though the concerned teams organised their events separately, it was useful to share ideas, facilitate the participation of AUC representatives in the different activities and also reinforce the understanding that the AfCFTA is for all African citizens and everyone can play a role in its success. It was also apparent that the private sector were very ready to partner with the public sector to ensure that trade under the AfCFTA is smooth and commercially meaningful.

THE MAIN FORUM EVENT ON THE EVE OF THE EXTRAORDINARY SUMMIT

With sponsorship from Africa Export Import Bank (Afreximbank) and the MTN Group, the AUC and AfCFTA Secretariat once again partnered with Mark Eddo Media, Nigeria, to facilitate the main Forum event which was held on 4 December 2020. The programme included panel discussions interspersed with music and video clips addressing some of the current socio-economic realities on the continent. Goodwill messages were also received from various dignitaries. A social media campaign on the *Start of Trading* under the AfCFTA will continue up to 1 January 2021 as part of the structure of this 3rd AfCFTA Business Forum. The campaign is also running under the hashtag #AFCFTACOUNTDOWN.

In summary, the Forum programme was structured as follows:

- (a) The forum kicked off with a one on one interview with Mr. Wamkele Mene, the first Secretary General of the AfCFTA where the short history of the newly established African Union institution was discussed and the SG laid out his vision for the AfCFTA and the Secretariat. The session also included a discussion on what 'start of trading' on 1 January 2021 actually entails.
- (b) The second panel was a private sector panel where five renowned leaders in the African private sector deliberated on how African economies can bear the brunt of the

effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Panelists discussed how successful adoption of the AfCFTA market is critical for the continent's recovery. The session attempted to demystify what it takes for businesses to position for success in the AfCFTA, and reflected on what policies and tools are needed to help businesses succeed and thrive. The panelists were:

- Dr. Donald Kaberuka, former AfDB President and Founder of the SouthB Group;
- Mr. James Mwangi, CEO, Equity Bank;
- Mr. Tewolde GebreMariam, Group CEO, Ethiopian Airlines;
- Mr. Paulo Gomes, Co-Founder at New African Capital Partners & Co-Chair, AfroChampions; and
- Dr. Amany Asfour, Interim President, Africa Business Council (AfBC).

(c) The third session was the high level panel comprising Ambassador Albert Muchanga representing H.E. Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat the Chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC); Professor Benedict Oramah President of Africa Export Import Bank (Afreximbank); and Mr. Ralph Mupita the Group President and CEO of the MTN Group. The panel reflected on how fallout from the COVID-19 was having a seismic impact on the socio-economic realities of African countries and why African leadership's commitment to the success of the AfCFTA Agreement was a means to recover from the effects of the pandemic.

During the high level panel session, Professor Oramah, on behalf of the AUC, AfCFTA Secretariat, Afreximbank and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), announced the presentation of an award to H.E. Mr. Mahamadou Issoufou, President of Niger and the Leader and Champion of the AfCFTA for his sterling efforts in supporting and guiding the AfCFTA process. The award would be in the form of a statue that would be erected at the Secretariat in Accra or any other location agreed to by the African Union.

A goodwill message for the AfCFTA start of trading was received from H.E. Mr. Paul Kagame the President of Rwanda. In his message he emphasised the importance of not losing momentum on the implementation of the AfCFTA and also congratulated President Issoufou on receiving the announced award.

(d) The fourth panel session was a "Deep Dive" discussion on Industrialization in Africa and the key role Industrialisation would play in making the AfCFTA a success. The panel comprising Ambassador Albert Muchanga, AU Trade and Industry Commissioner, and Mr. Li Yong, Director General of the United Nations Industrial development Organisation, UNIDO, dived deep into a discussion on Africa's drive toward integration combined with value addition to its natural resources aided by its

demographic dividend of a young and vibrant population. This gives Africa the hope that unemployment would be curtailed by the formation of new industries and companies providing goods to trade on the AfCFTA single market.

(e) A “Future Panel” put together to discuss modern trends in technology and e-commerce rounded off the afternoon. The panel analyzed how the threat of the global COVID-19 pandemic had unleashed an explosion of ingenuity and inventiveness across Africa. The panel also noted how the continent’s innovators, many of whom are young, had taken up the fight against the Coronavirus with both advanced and low-tech ideas and solutions. The panel highlighted that Africa had the creative capital and industriousness to tackle many of its challenges. The panelists were:

- Ms. Ahunna Eziakonwa, Director, UNDP Africa and curator of 50 African Innovators Against COVID-19 magazine;
- Ms. Rebecca Enonchong, Founder, AppsTec;
- Mr. Bright Simons, Social innovator and Vice-President at IMANI;
- Dr. Carl Oshodi, Founder and CEO, AI-Group Inc; and
- Mr. Prudence Sebahizi, Chief Technical Advisor and Head of the AfCFTA Negotiations Support Unit

INTERMISSION CONTENT

Several artistic pieces including music and film were also shared during the forum.

Musical Intermission: "Stand Together" anthem

The ONE Campaign in partnership with the Nelson Mandela Foundation and MTV Base bring together ten of Africa’s biggest musical artists to perform a powerful rallying call for Africans to unite in the fight against Covid-19. The AfCFTA is about cooperation, unity and integration, the spirit that is needed to win the battle against this pandemic and its effects on our continent. The featured Artists are: 2Baba (Nigeria); Ahmed Soultan (Morocco); Ben Pol (Tanzania); Teni (Nigeria); Yemi Alade (Nigeria); Amanda Black (South Africa); Stanley Enow (Cameroon); Gigi La Mayne (South Africa); Prodigio (Angola); and Betty G (Ethiopia)

Film: Nefartiti – A Single Canvas of African Creativity

AfCFTA’s success cannot be driven by physical infrastructure alone. It is after all about people, their hopes and dreams. Nothing better captures the human passions and forces weaving the continent together than its arts and extraordinarily rich cultures. The video introduced *Nefartiti*, a platform of artistic discovery designed to unearth Africa’s passionate talents in the visual, literary, craft and related domains.

Film: Trusted Travel

Africa has been hard hit by the pandemic-induced travel bans. AfCFTA's original timeline was unfortunately disrupted by this development. In this video, the African Union and its strategic partners, like AfroChampions and the African Tourism Board, demonstrate how innovative public private partnerships can transform even the bleakest crises into opportunity. With the Africa Centre for Diseases Control (CDC) at the helm, a digital bridge was created across labs, airlines and ports to enable full travel resumption without risking a surge in infections.

Film: Global Haven

The story of Trusted Travel does not end with public private partnerships. Agenda 2063 sets a bigger target of an Africa influential on the world stage. Global Haven is a truly international undertaking to digitise COVID-19 travel certificates and implement a global vaccine registry, laying the foundation for the world's first truly global e-health ecosystem. And its roots are purely and proudly African as this video recounts.

ATTENDANCE

Nearly 1800 delegates attended the AfCFTA Business Forum according to the registration records. Many more followed proceedings through live streaming channels.

CHALLENGES FACED

In contrast to previous AfCFTA Business Forum events, the organising team had difficulty securing the participation of Heads of State this time round. It is not clear whether this was due to the event being virtual, or if circulation of invitations was not done on time.

The Heads of State that had been invited to participate in the Forum were the Presidents of Botswana, Ghana, Niger, Rwanda and South Africa. Understandably, apologies were received from the office of H.E. Mr. Nana Akufo-Addo the President of Ghana as the country was preparing for elections that weekend. H.E. President Paul Kagame of Rwanda obliged the Forum by contributing through a powerful recorded message. It is also noted that both H.E. President Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa and H.E. President Mahamadou Issoufou of Niger would have been busy preparing for the Summit on the AfCFTA taking place the following day. H.E. President Mokgweetsi Masisi of Botswana was unable to deliver a plenary address at the AUC/AeTrade webinar.

There were also instances of connection stability reported and some delegates indicated that they would have liked more opportunity to dialogue with the panelists. Many delegates' questions were however addressed during all the forum events.

SUMMARY

The interest from the private sector was overwhelming and senior leaders of industry availed themselves to participate in the forum. This not only signals the seriousness with which the business sector in Africa is taking the AfCFTA, but also augurs well for the start of AfCFTA trading in January 2020.

The AfCFTA Business Forum remains very popular among the business community in Africa and provides the opportunity for the private sector to deliberate on issues related to implementation of the AfCFTA and also to engage policy makers on the same. Organised to take place on the eve of AU Summits on the AfCFTA, the AfCFTA Business Forums take advantage of the political pull of the Heads of State meetings to create an opportunity for private sector, civil society and policy makers to come together and deliberate on the important issues related to progress on the AfCFTA and its implementation.

So far the AfCFTA Business Forums have been organised by the AUC. With the establishment of the AfCFTA Secretariat and Africa Business Council (AfBC) however, future AfCFTA Business Forums will be co-organised by the two bodies. The next AfCFTA Business Forum will be taking place as the first one after *Start of Trading* and is bound to be very lively as business organisations and entrepreneurs will report on issues they have actually practically encountered. This will be an important avenue for the AfCFTA Secretariat to obtain the feedback they need to strengthen the AfCFTA.

Should you wish to watch the AfCFTA Business Forum 2020 again here is the link:

<https://au.int/en/videos/20201204/afcfta-business-forum-2020>

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