**Biashara Africa, AfCFTA In The Right Place To Dare To Invent The Future**

In 2018, mid March, in Kigali Rwanda, 44 of the 55 nations of Africa, signed the agreement to establish the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Now, six years later, in the Kigali Convention Centre, the very spot where the agreement was signed, will play host to the second iteration of the AfCFTA Business Forum, ***Biashara Africa***, what should we expect?

The theme for the forum, certainly does not lack in ambition, ***Dare to Invent the Future of the AfCFTA.*** Quite a challenge for a two day forum. But that is perhaps a little glib, the intention is no doubt to begin the conversation, which will continue long after the forum. The AfCFTA could not have chosen a better place to throw such a challenge.

No country has been a more enthusiastic champion of the AfCFTA, than Rwanda, and few countries on earth, have dared to invent the future, by grasping the challenges of the present, than has Rwanda.

Hosted by the government of Rwanda and the AfCFTA Secretariat, the forum is also billed as “under the patronage of His Excellency President Paul Kagame of Rwanda,” a man for whom, if his leadership is anything to go by, daring to invent the future is nothing out of the ordinary. For those who believe in them therefore, the omens for whatever is decided at ***Biashara Africa,*** could not look more promising.

And it does take courage to dare to realise all the possibilities offered by the AfCFTA, and as always, the greater the promise, the greater the challenges.

As the Secretariat puts it, the forum “will provide an engaging and dynamic platform for continued dialogue between African public and private sectors, multinationals and key stakeholders, regarding the challenges and opportunities in the process of building regional and continental value chains, and establishing reliable supply chain networks, which are essential to unlocking the full potential of intra-Africa trade.”

Almost every word in that paragraph could claim a forum of its own. Creating a dialogue between the private and public sectors, building regional and continental value chains, reliable supply chain networks, the devil is not just in the detail, it is right in front of the eyes of anyone with eyes to see.

But the rewards promise in retrospect, to make every challenge that may now seem insurmountable, seem like nothing.

The world’s largest free trade area, a single market of 1.4 billion people, with a combined GDP of over $3trillion. The African Union (AU) ***Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want***, has the AfCFTA at the top of the list.

Once fully operational, the AfCFTA is expected to help lift 40 million people out of poverty. The continent’s economy will be enriched by 7%, equivalent to $450billion. These are however projections, the actual gains are surely likely to surpass expectations, if Africa resolves the anomaly of barely trading with itself.

While intra-European trade is almost 70% at 68.1%, the Americas 55%, Asia almost 60%, Africa puzzles, as it stands out at an anaemic 16.6%.

A fundamental change that will encourage Africa to look inwards to trade, is surely bound to produce dramatic results.