**GHANA DEVELOPING COMMUNITIES ASSOCIATION (LBG)**

**PRESS STATEMENT ON THE OCCASION OF THE AFRICAN DECENTRALIZATION AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT DAY – 10TH AUGUST 2023**

Ladies and gentlemen of the press, the Ghana Developing Communities Association (GDCA) is delighted and thankful to you for making time this morning to celebrate this year’s African Decentralization Day with us.

In June 2014, the Heads of State and Government meeting at their Summit in Malabo, Republic of Equatorial Guinea, adopted the African Charter on the Values and Principles of Decentralization, Local Governance and Local Development. This Charter is a genuine unifying instrument adopted by the leaders of African States at the highest level, with a view to encouraging the implementation of decentralized and democratic governance policies in the management of public affairs, in accordance with the stated shared fundamental values of the African Union.

On 10th August every year, AU member States celebrate the African Decentralization and Local Development Day. It is a well-established tradition that the theme of the celebration is aligned with the African Union theme of the year.

Ghana Developing Communities Association (GDCA), a local NGO dedicated to strengthening local governance, joins AU member states in celebrating African Decentralization and Local Development Day. On this momentous occasion, we wish to draw attention to the significant role of local governance in ***"Accelerating the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)"*** – the AU's chosen theme for 2023.

The AfCFTA initiative presents a huge potential for local development. It is argued to be either the largest or the second largest to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), considering the number of members, the potential market population and other factors. For Ghana in particular, hosting the AfCFTA’s Secretariat presents additional opportunity to the country.

In a significant stride towards propelling Ghana's participation in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to new heights, GDCA is glad to share the importance of integrating social accountability into the AfCFTA implementation strategy. This transformative initiative will ensure transparency, inclusivity, and effective progress tracking, thereby expediting the benefits of the AfCFTA for the people of Ghana. The AfCFTA provides a great platform for Ghana's economic advancement, offering access to an expanded market of over 1.3 billion consumers across the African continent. As a nation renowned for its entrepreneurial spirit and diverse economic sectors, Ghana stands poised to reap substantial gains from the AfCFTA. However, the successful realization of these gains requires an unwavering commitment to transparent governance and the active involvement of all stakeholders.

The convergence of African Decentralization and the AfCFTA reflects a unique intersection of governance and trade. As champions for grassroots participation in governance, GDCA acknowledges the following:

1. **Exclusiveness:** Most trade policies initiatives or ideas remain at the continental and national levels without much attempt to bring to the local level to facilitate citizens understanding, acceptance and participation to actualize the objectives of this policy initiatives.
2. **Lack of Information:** In relation to point one above, insufficient information, awareness and understanding of AfCFTA's provisions among businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and member countries’ citizens in general could, and does, limit their ability to take advantage of the trade agreement
3. **Subnational Participation in Trade Policies:** Decentralized entities are not just administrative units; they are crucial hubs for trade and economic activity. We advocate for an inclusive trade policy-making process where local governments are actively engaged, ensuring their unique needs and opportunities are catered for.
4. **Capacity Building at Local Levels:** We stress the need for continuous investment in capacity-building for local governments to engage effectively in intra-African trade initiatives.
5. **Harmonization of Local and Continental Regulations:** A patchwork of local regulations can stifle trade. It's imperative that while local interests are protected, there's a move towards harmonizing standards to facilitate seamless trade across the continent.
6. **Ensuring Equitable Benefits:** We urge policymakers to adopt strategies ensuring all regions, regardless of their current trade capacities, can benefit equitably from the AfCFTA.
7. **Feedback Mechanisms:** Grassroots feedback can provide invaluable insights into the real-world implications of trade policies. We support the creation of robust mechanisms to capture these insights
8. **Addressing Social and Environmental Concerns**: In our push for development, we must never lose sight of our social and environmental responsibilities. Local governance entities are often at the forefront of these issues and should play a pivotal role in shaping trade policies that are sustainable and just.
9. **Financial Governance and Resource Allocation:** With the potential rise in revenues due to increased trade, GDCA emphasizes the importance of transparent and equitable distribution of resources to ensure sustainable development at the grassroots level.

In conclusion, as we mark African Decentralization and Local Development Day, GDCA remains committed to championing the cause of local governance in Ghana. We believe that a decentralized approach, coupled with the massive potential of the AfCFTA, can lead to unparalleled socio-economic growth for our nation and the broader African continent.

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