AFRICA TRADE DEVELOPMENT FORUM 2026

BUILDING AFRICA'S EXPORTS THROUGH QUALITY

BUILDING TRUST. UNLOCKING TRADE. GROWING EXPORTS.

23 AND 24 NOVEMBER 2026

ETHIOPIAN SKYLIGHT HOTEL, ADDIS-ABABA

GUESTS:
300 DELEGATES ATTENDING BY INVITATION OR ACCREDITATION

FLYING PARTNER: ETHIOPIAN AIRLINES

WORKING LANGUAGES:
ENGLISH, FRENCH, PORTUGUESE

CO-HOSTS:
ETHIOPIA'S MINISTRY OF TRADE AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION;
MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS;
TRADEMARK AFRICA

1. Introduction

The 2026 Africa Trade Development Forum (ATDF), taking place on 23 - 24 November at the Ethiopia's Skylight Hotel in Addis Ababa, will examine how to build the *trust* that will allow companies in Africa to trade more within the continent and with the rest of the world. It will explore the *quality* required to do so, and the support needed from Governments and regional and international bodies to set and meet clear, harmonised standards for easier market access.

The Forum is targeted and high level, bringing together 300 delegates, by invitation or accreditation. This year's forum is co-hosted by Ethiopia's Ministry of Trade and Regional Integration, and the Ministry of Transport and Logistics, and TradeMark Africa, under the theme *Building Africa's Exports Through Quality.*

Who will be in the room

Political Leadership:
Heads of Government; the African Union Commission; Trade Ministers from within and beyond Africa; and leadership from the Regional Economic Communities including East Africa Community (EAC), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Southern African Development Community (SADC), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

Private Sector:
Industrialists and CEOs of leading exporting African and international firms, together with the leaders of private-sector apex bodies.

The Standards System:
The leadership of global standards institutions, including ARSO, ISO, Codex Alimentarius, IPPC, WOAH (World Organization for Animal Health), alongside heads of National Bureaux of Standards, scientists, and practitioners.

Funding Partners:
Senior representatives of donors, development partners and think tanks.

Africa's Future:
Young entrepreneurs building Africa's export firms.

The Forum will make the case for treating quality standards and the infrastructure that underpins them as economic assets, essential to industrial competitiveness, consumer confidence and regional integration. Delegates will consider a set of proposed commitments to raise the quality and value of goods traded within and from Africa, and the reforms required from governments and businesses to deliver them. The Forum will also launch, *Trust is Trade: Standards as Strategic Infrastructure,* the flagship report developed with UNIDO.

A Forum With a Record

ATDF has a record of turning dialogue into delivery. At ATDF 2024 in Rwanda, participating states endorsed the No Stop Border commitment to dismantle barriers at Africa's land crossings. Eighteen months on, that endorsement has moved to funding commitments and the scoping of pilots on selected corridors. ATDF 2026 is designed to do the same for standards and quality infrastructure.

2. Why Quality and Why Now?

Quality[1] is the currency of competitiveness in international trade. As tariffs fall under the AfCFTA, market access is decided by confidence in products – whether they are safe, whether they meet standards, and whether certification in one country is trusted in another. The systems that supply that confidence, standards[2], sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS)[3] measures and quality infrastructure, deserve the same standing in Africa's trade agenda as ports, roads, borders and digital networks.

Five forces make this urgent.

I. Tougher Global Market Requirements

The WTO trade monitoring update of July 2025 found that import restrictions in force covered **19.4%** of world imports by May 2025, up from slightly over **12%** at the end of 2024, the highest coverage recorded since monitoring began in 2009. Non tariff measures, including standards, technical regulations and SPS measures are increasingly used as prerequisites for market access. Failure to comply raises the risk of consignment rejection, higher inspection costs, and reputational harm. Building resilient quality systems is essential if Africa is to hold and expand its global market share.

II. Competitive and Inclusive Value Chains

Micro, small and medium sized enterprises represent over **80%** of businesses in Africa and employ most women and youth, yet fewer than **20%** participate directly in export markets[4] partly because of the cost and complexity of meeting quality, safety and technical requirements.

As advanced economies shorten and localise their supply chains, buyers are consolidating around fewer suppliers whose quality and compliance they can verify. With this shift, therefore, African producers who cannot demonstrate conforming with technical requirements risk losing their place in traditional markets and being shut out of emerging ones.

III. Modernising Quality Infrastructure

Many African standards institutions face budgetary constraints, ageing infrastructure, and thin technical expertise at a time when global compliance is digitising -through tools such as ePhyto systems, and the Trade Logistics Information Pipeline (TLIP)[5], and as new regimes such as the 2024 WTO Agreement[6] on electronic commerce take shape. Strengthening these institutions through regional collaboration, donor support, and private sector participation should be a priority.

[1] A Quality Infrastructure System (QIS) is a combination of initiatives, institutions, organisations, activities and people. It includes a national quality policy and institutions to implement it, a regulatory framework, quality service providers, enterprises, customers and consumers (who include citizens as "consumers" of government services). "Quality" means ensuring that products and services meet the requirements of the customers. (UNIDO)

[2] Standards are documented product requirements, some of which are voluntary, while some - when used in regulations -are mandatory. Although they are invisible to consumers, they define how products are designed, manufactured, tested or labelled.

[3] Sanitary or phytosanitary measures include all relevant laws, regulations, requirements and procedures including, inter alia, end product criteria; processes and production methods; testing, inspection, certification and approval procedures; quarantine treatments including relevant requirements associated with the transport of animals or plants, or with the materials necessary for their survival during transport; provisions on relevant statistical methods, sampling procedures and methods of risk assessment; and packaging and labelling requirements directly related to food safety (WTO).

[4] ITC. 2022. SME Competitiveness Outlook.

[5] TradeMark Africa. 2025. The Trade Logistics Information Platform

[6] WTO, Agreement on Electronic Commerce

IV. Mutual Recognition Agreements

Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) allow countries to accept the results of testing, inspection and certification carried out by competent bodies in other jurisdictions. By cutting duplication, lowering compliance costs and speeding regulatory approval, MRAs build trust, ease intra-African trade and support implementation of the AfCFTA.

V. Accelerating Regulatory Convergence

African exporters contend with regulatory friction on two fronts. Within the continent, standards, testing and certification requirements differ from one market to the next, so a product cleared in one country must often be re-tested and re-certified in another. Beyond it, technical requirements including product standards, testing and certification, are the dominant form of trade restriction, accounting for more than **70%** of restrictions affecting agricultural goods and over **40%** in manufactured goods[7]. The cost of failing to meet them is visible in Europe, one of Africa's largest export markets. The EU imported **€188 billion** of African goods in 2024[8], yet African products accounted for roughly 30% of its food safety rejection. Convergence, the harmonisation of standards across African markets and aligning them with international benchmarks, attacks both problems at once: it cuts the cost of trading across the continent and gives exporters a single, credible route into demanding markets abroad. Without it, the AfCFTA's promise of a single market remains notional; goods cannot move freely across 54 regulatory regimes, whatever the tariff schedule says.

3. Objectives and Outcomes

Establish standards, SPS systems and quality infrastructure, as political and investment priorities for Africa, and crowd in public and private investment behind them.	Agree on the reforms needed to end repeated testing, shorten certification timelines, strengthen laboratories, digitise trade documentation and extend mutual recognition across markets.
Connect evidence from firms, regulators and regional programmes to the decisions facing governments, donors and the private sector.	Launch a public evidence base on standards as strategic infrastructure for African trade, including the flagship report: **Trust is Trade: Standards as Strategic Infrastructure.**

[7] FAO. 2024. Technical Barriers to Trade in Agrifood Sector.
[8] EU. Trade Factsheets. https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/isdb_results/factsheets/

4. TMA's Work On The Quality and Safety of Traded Goods and Services

Protecting high-value horticultural exports

False Codling Moth (FCM) is endemic in parts of Africa, and its detection in export consignments can close the door to high value markets like the EU. The risk was evident in Kenya, where cut-flower export earnings, slipped from about **$567 million** in 2023 to **$556 million** in 2024[9], a decline the 2025 Economic Survey[10] partly attributed to increased interceptions associated with FCM. Ethiopia's floriculture industry, which generated an estimated **$400 million** in exports in 2024–2025, faced a similar risk.

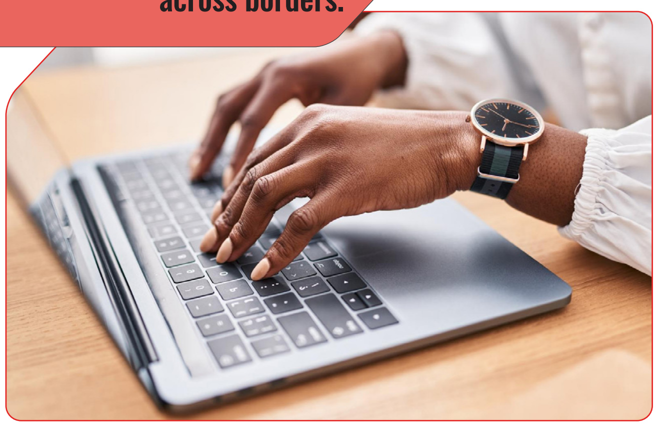
Over the past year, TMA worked with both countries to strengthen their defences at a national scale. This included improving pest surveillance, inspection and certification procedures, training inspectors and growers, and introducing operating standards aligned with international phytosanitary requirements. These measures have helped Kenya and Ethiopia protect access to the EU market and the thousands of jobs that depend upon it. TMA's investment was funded by the EU and the Mastercard Foundation.

Keeping the EU market open for a **$1 billion sector** across two countries

Moving phytosanitary certification online

Mozambique, Kenya and Ethiopia are replacing slow, paper-based phytosanitary procedures with digital certification systems, with each demonstrating a different dividend of going digital. In Mozambique, the full process-from application and payment to inspection and issuance-is now electronic, and a certificate that once took **about 12 days** is now issued in **two or three.** In Kenya, the KEPHIS integrated certification system has cut traders' administrative and transaction costs by **as much as 15%.** Ethiopia has gone a step further, exchanging certificates directly with importing countries through the International Plant Protection Convention's ePhyto Hub, allowing plant-health credentials to be verified before consignments reach their destination, something paper could never do. The cumulative effect is the same in all three, exporters make fewer trips to government offices and face fewer administrative delays, regulators gain better traceability and stronger defences against fraudulent certificates; and trust in exports markets is retained. TMA led the development and implementation of all three systems with funding from the Netherlands, Finland and the UK. More about this story in this Link.

The Digital Dividends
• **Faster** • **Cheaper.**
• **Verifiability across borders.**

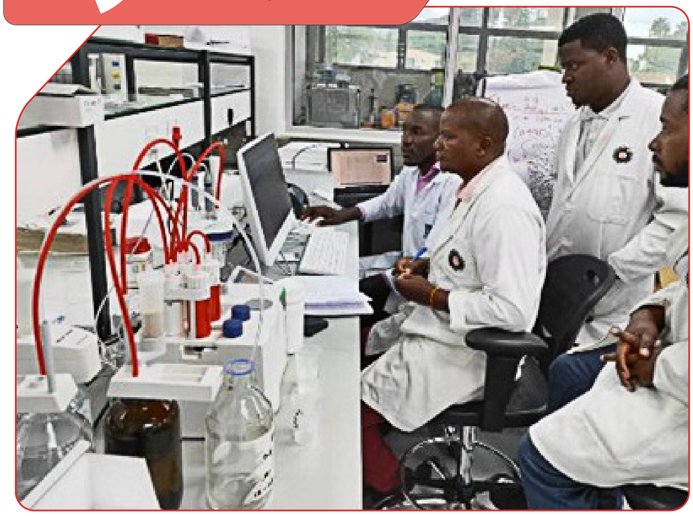


[9] The Standard, on the 2025 Economic Survey (cut-flower earnings Sh73.5bn to Sh72.1bn; FCM rejections). Link
[10] Food Business MEA, 2025 Economic Survey figures ($567m to $556m) Link

Cutting the time and cost of meeting standards

For many East African businesses, proving that a product meets the required standard has historically taken months and imposed costs that smaller firms could scarcely absorb. Following years of investments in modern laboratory equipment's, regulators training and harmonisation of standards, an independent evaluation of TMA's standards portfolio[11], found that the average time required for conformity assessment fell by **about 44%,** from seven months in 2017 to four in 2023 within the region. Median compliance costs declined by more than half. The commercial effects were also visible. **More than 80%** of the firms surveyed reported that improved compliance had increased their ability to sell in existing and new markets, while the number of exporters within the sample rose **14%.** TMA supported the laboratories, regulators, certification services and technical training behind these services across some of EAC partner states – Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya, Burundi, Tanzania.

44% **REDUCTION** in average time required for conformity assessment



Bringing product testing services closer to Ugandan businesses

Until 2019, a trader in Uganda's Gulu or Mbarara regions who needed a product tested often had to send samples hundreds of kilometres to Uganda National Bureau of Standards laboratories nearthe capital Kampala. The journey added time and cost and increased the likelihood that samples would arrive damaged and unusable. The bureau has since decentralised its services, establishing testing capacity in Gulu, Mbale and Mbarara, three of Uganda's prominent regional cities. Laboratory technicians there have been trained to conduct tests that previously could not be done locally, and average turnaround time for analysis has fallen **from 25 days to about 10**[12]. Alongside the laboratories, the bureau directly trained **nearly 2,000 businesses** in standards compliance, while its simplified certification procedures have eased trade with neighbouring markets. By the bureau's own account, demand for certification services now exceeds its capacity – proof that businesses will seek out standards services when those services come within reach, and a case for further investment. TMA financed the laboratories and training with Danish funding, complemented by support from the EU and Netherlands.

Nearly 2,000 businesses trained in standards and compliance

[11] AENOR Conocimiento (2025), Standards and SPS Portfolio Evaluation - Final Report, prepared for TradeMark Africa.
[12] Uganda National Bureau of Standards Reports.

5. Flagship Report

ATDF 2026 will launch *Trust is Trade: Standards as Strategic Infrastructure,* a flagship report developed with UNIDO and continental partners. The report distils diagnostics, lessons, and reforms into an actionable blueprint for standards-led trade transformation up to 2030.

6. Programme Structure (Draft)

The Forum's deliberately focused scale is central to its purpose of producing decisions. Day one interrogates the problem; day two commits to the response. The programme will favour candid, purposeful exchanges including:

Fireside conversations and leadership dialogues that will bring decision makers into direct dialogue;	*Hot-seat debates* will test positions under scrutiny; and roundtables and working sessions will produce draft commitments.
On the mic talks that will make clear arguments in less than 15 minutes;	*Facilitated closed-door, off-the-record salons* will create space for candour on the most difficult political, institutional and investment questions;
Podcast recordings will extend the debate beyond the Forum itself.	

PROGRAMME PILLARS

1. The economic impacts of standards
2. Standards and quality as bridges to market access, and increased value and volumes of trade
3. How African businesses can compete and win globally
4. Building Africa's Quality Infrastructure – Innovation, Financing, Technology
5. The 2030 continental priorities

DAY 1 – MONDAY 23 NOVEMBER 2026 - MAIN PROGRAMME

Morning	• Arrival • Official opening ceremony • Welcome address and remarks by Government of Ethiopia and TradeMark Africa • Keynote address by Chief Guest
Mid-day	• High level fire side chat with invited VIPs. • Flagship report launch by UNIDO and TMA
Afternoon	• **Closed door:** Ministers, heads of Regional Economic Communities, and Select Private Sector CEO's • **High level:** private-sector session with leading chief executives and industrialists • **Financing Africa, by Africa for Africa** - Convened by Trade Catalyst Africa • Manufacturing Africa and London School of Economics
Evening	Official Reception

DAY 2 – TUESDAY, 24 NOVEMBER 2026 - MAIN PROGRAMME

Morning	• **Closed door:** International partners round table • **Closed door:** The youth round table • Investing in science, technology and innovations for exports • **High-Level :** An intergenerational conversation • **Side event:** Investment summit with Trade Catalyst Africa
Mid-day	• A bonfire of standards • Food corridors, standards, and digitalisation
Afternoon	• **Closed door:** High level private-sector dialogue-Baraza la Biashara • Ministerial Round Table • Closing Ceremony
Evening	Optional city tours (self-sponsored)

DAY 3 – WEDNESDAY, 25 NOVEMBER 2026 - BY INVITATION

Practitioners Working Session
1. Launch of the communities of practice
2. Road map for implementation of the ATDF 2026 commitments
3. Optional field visits

7. Accreditation and Protocol

Accreditation for all delegates will be managed by the Forum Secretariat, comprising Ethiopia's Ministry of Trade and Regional Integration in Ethiopia, TradeMark Africa and relevant Protocol Department of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Detailed protocol arrangements, including arrival and departure logistics, accommodation options, city transport and security liaison will be issued in a separate Protocol Information Note to confirmed and accredited participants.

TMA does not provide remuneration, honoraria, or cover travel, accommodation, or other related expenses for participants attending the Forum.

Contacts

All correspondence relating to the Forum should be directed in the first instance to:

ATDF 2026 Forum Secretariat, Email: ATDF@TradeMarkAfrica.com

More information: atdf.trademarkafrica.com

Three terms worth knowing - Simply put

Quality infrastructure including standardisation, metrology, accreditation and conformity assessment, provides internationally recognised assurance that products, services, processes and systems meet regulatory and market requirements.

Standards set voluntary requirements, specifications or guidelines for products, processes and services. Where such requirements are made mandatory by governments, they become technical regulations.

Sanitary and phytosanitary systems protect human, animal and plant life or health while ensuring that food and agricultural trade moves safely without unnecessary barriers.

Co-hosted by

Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Ministry of Trade and Regional Integration

TradeMark Africa

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Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS