CONCEPT NOTE

QUALITY INFRASTRUCTURE AND SPS PRACTITIONERS' DAY

Africa Trade Development Forum (ATDF) 2026 – Day 3

From ATDF Commitments to Delivery: *Financing Safe and Quality Trade Systems and Building a Continental Community of Practice*

Jointly convened by TradeMark Africa (TMA), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) and African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Secretariat, in collaboration with the African Union Commission (AUC) and the institutions of the Pan-African Quality Infrastructure (PAQI).

Date	Wednesday, 25 November 2026
Time	08:00–17:00 Hrs
Location	Golden Tulip Hotel, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Format	Full-day practitioners' working session

1. Background and rationale

Effective quality infrastructure and sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) systems are essential to protecting human, animal and plant health, assuring the safety and quality of traded products, and enabling firms to access and retain regional and international markets. They are also productive assets: they reduce trade costs and risk, support agricultural transformation and industrialisation, and strengthen the competitiveness and resilience of value chains. They are essential for both market access, by helping exporters meet importing countries' technical regulations and SPS requirements, and market success, by enabling them to satisfy buyer expectations on quality and private standards.

The Africa Trade Development Forum (ATDF) 2026, co-hosted by Ethiopia's Ministry of Trade and Regional Integration, the Ministry of Transport and Logistics and TMA under the theme *Building Africa's Exports Through Quality*, brings some 300 delegates together on 23–24 November 2026 to make the case for treating standards, SPS systems and quality infrastructure as economic assets, and to consider commitments to raise the quality and value of goods traded within and from Africa. ATDF has a record of turning dialogue into delivery.

Following the ATDF, a QI and SPS practitioners' working session will take place on 25 November 2026 to launch communities of practice and to chart a road map for implementing the ATDF 2026 commitments. The Practitioners' Day brings together three strands of work.

From commitments to delivery

The high-level sessions set direction; implementation rests with the technical institutions, regulators, conformity-assessment bodies and enterprises that operate SPS and quality infrastructure systems every day.

The Practitioners' Day opens by setting out what ATDF Days 1 and 2 asked of these practitioners and the key messages of the TMA–UNIDO flagship report, so that the rest of the day is anchored in the Forum's outcomes.

Financing safe and quality trade systems

Across Africa, investment has strengthened SPS institutions, standards, laboratories, inspection and certification services, digitisation, traceability and other trade-supporting systems. Important gaps nevertheless remain. Financing is often fragmented, dependent on short-term development assistance and insufficiently connected to national expenditure, investment, agricultural, industrial and trade frameworks.

The 2026 STDF study on *Finance and Investment for Safe Trade Facilitation* points to a central challenge: the constraint is not necessarily the absence of capital, but the readiness of SPS priorities to attract and use available finance. Resources exist through government budgets, development-finance institutions (DFIs), development programmes, climate-finance facilities and commercial markets. Yet technical priorities are not always translated into credible, structured and investment-ready propositions that financiers can assess and support. The study identifies practical actions for governments, DFIs, development partners and the private sector to improve the financing ecosystem for SPS investments.

These findings are corroborated by the AfCFTA Secretariat's 2023 and 2024 studies on SPS and TBT notification and its mapping of existing SPS measures in priority value chains in the State Parties. These studies underscored the need for targeted investment (i) to establish an AfCFTA SPS and TBT notification system as an AfCFTA implementation tool and (ii) to enhance pest surveillance and risk analysis. The SPS mapping study has also prompted the preparation of a costed activity plan to facilitate implementation of Annex 7, Article 6 on Adaptation to Regional Conditions, Including Pest- or Disease-Free Areas and Areas of Low Pest or Disease Prevalence.

For quality infrastructure more broadly – standardisation, metrology, accreditation and conformity assessment – the African Union Commission's Pan-African TBT and Quality Infrastructure Stocktaking 2026 and continental work, led by the PAQI institutions, towards a master plan for quality-infrastructure financing provide a complementary evidence base. Regional conformity-assessment centres supported by Afreximbank show how shared quality infrastructure can be financed and operated at scale.

The financing pathway also depends on the nature of the investment. Core public regulatory functions - such as market surveillance, risk assessment, emergency preparedness, inspection

and official certification - require sustainable public financing. Shared infrastructure and services, including laboratories, digital traceability and export-certification systems, may lend themselves to cost-recovery, public–private or blended-finance approaches. Commercially viable investments in value-chain compliance, cold chains, logistics, processing and enterprise-level quality assurance may attract private and development finance where a clear business and market-access case exists. Private laboratories, inspection and certification bodies are a growing part of this picture and have their own investment needs.

A Continental Community of Practice (CoP)

Sustained delivery also depends on practitioners learning from one another across countries, institutions and disciplines. Today, SPS authorities, standards bodies, metrology, accreditation and conformity-assessment institutions, regional bodies and the private sector often work in parallel, even though the same institutions, enterprises and products are frequently involved. An SPS Community of Practice was set up in 2022; its experience – what has worked and what could be done differently – offers a starting point.

The Practitioners' Day on 25 November will build on that experience to shape and launch a continental Community of Practice covering SPS, standards and wider quality infrastructure, and bringing together regulators, standards bodies, public and private laboratories, inspection, certification and accreditation bodies, producers and exporters. Rather than presenting a fixed design, the day invites participants to define the community's purpose, mandate, membership, priorities and coordination together. This gives the ATDF 2026 commitments a practitioner mechanism for sustained exchange and follow-through after Addis Ababa.

2. Purpose

The Practitioners' Day will turn the ATDF 2026 commitments into practitioner-led delivery. It will take stock of what the Forum asked of practitioners; connect African SPS and quality-infrastructure priorities with appropriate financing, investment-preparation and implementation pathways; and shape and launch a continental Community of Practice to sustain the work. It will bring together technical institutions, continental and regional bodies, financing partners, development organisations and private-sector actors to identify priority actions, clarify roles and agree practical arrangements for post-forum implementation.

3. Objectives

The Practitioners' Day will:

1. **Carry forward the outcomes of ATDF 2026** by sharing the key messages of the TMA–UNIDO flagship report and the headline messages of Days 1 and 2 and clarifying what they require of technical institutions and practitioners.

2. **Build a shared understanding of the financing challenge and opportunity** by presenting the findings of the STDF Financing Study, together with the AfCFTA SPS mapping study and the PAQI TBT and Quality Infrastructure Stocktaking, and positioning SPS systems and quality infrastructure as essential trade-enabling and productive infrastructure for consumer protection, market access, agricultural transformation, industrialisation and enterprise competitiveness.
3. **Strengthen engagement between technical, policy and financing communities** and explore how different SPS and quality-infrastructure priorities can be matched with appropriate financing approaches, including sustainable public financing, cost-recovery, blended finance, public–private approaches and commercial finance, as relevant.
4. **Shape and launch a continental Community of Practice** by drawing lessons from the SPS Community of Practice and agreeing, with participants, its proposed purpose and mandate, membership, priority areas, coordination arrangements and first-year deliverables.
5. **Translate ATDF priorities into implementation pathways and agree follow-through** by identifying priority actions and country- or region-led opportunities, potential institutional roles, partnerships and immediate next steps, and generating practical inputs for the ATDF post-forum agenda.

4. Core Discussion Questions

Carrying forward ATDF 2026

i. What do the TMA/UNIDO flagship report and the ATDF 2026 commitments and ask of SPS and quality-infrastructure practitioners, and what must change in how institutions work to deliver them?
ii. Which ATDF priorities can move immediately toward implementation, by whom, and through which financing or technical-assistance pathway?

Financing safe and quality trade systems

i. How can SPS and QI priorities be expressed in the economic, investment and risk language used by ministries of finance, DFIs and commercial financiers?
ii. How can technical diagnostics and prioritisation be converted into structured, investment-ready initiatives?
iii. Which functions should be financed as public goods, and which are suitable for cost-recovery, blended-finance, public–private or commercial models?
iv. What do financiers need to see – project preparation, revenue assumptions, risk allocation and evidence – and how can laboratories, inspection and certification bodies, including private ones, be financed?
v. How can SPS and QI investments be embedded in larger agriculture, industrialisation, climate-resilience, trade-facilitation and value-chain programmes?

vi. How can national efforts connect with continental initiatives, including the AfCFTA SPS and TBT notification system, the costed plan for Annex 7, Article 6 and work towards a master plan for quality-infrastructure financing?
vii. What institutional arrangements are needed to connect technical authorities, economic ministries, financiers and private-sector actors?

Building a continental Community of Practice

i. What can be learned from the SPS Community of Practice – what has worked and what could be done differently?
ii. What should be the purpose and mandate of a continental Quality and Standards Community of Practice, and how should it relate to existing networks, the RECs and the AfCFTA Subcommittees and PAQI institutions?
iii. Who should take part – regulators, standards bodies, public and private laboratories, inspection, certification and accreditation bodies, producers and exporters – and how should it be run and coordinated?
iv. Which priority areas should it focus on first, and what could it deliver by the end of its first year?

5. Expected results and deliverables

By the close of the day 3, participants should share a clear view of what ATDF 2026 asks of practitioners, a better understanding of the economic value and financing requirements of SPS systems and quality infrastructure, stronger connections between technical and financing communities, and an agreed basis for a continental Community of Practice and for implementation follow-through. The Practitioners' Day is expected to:

i. strengthen dialogue between SPS and quality-infrastructure institutions and financing partners;
ii. identify practical opportunities for collaboration on investment-ready SPS and quality-infrastructure initiatives;
iii. generate recommendations and implementation cases to inform the follow-up to the ATDF 2026 commitments;
iv. expand the network of stakeholders committed to improving SPS and quality-infrastructure systems and their financing across Africa;
v. raise awareness of the STDF Financing Study among senior African policy makers and financing institutions; and
vi. bring SPS and quality-infrastructure practitioners, public and private, into a single continental community.

The Practitioners' Day is expected to generate:

i. an ATDF Day 3 Action Note capturing agreed priorities, actions, responsibilities, indicative timelines and immediate next steps;

ii. priority actions for governments and SPS and quality-infrastructure authorities, DFIs and commercial banks, development partners, and the private sector and industry associations;
iii. an initial implementation and partnership roadmap for selected ATDF priorities;
iv. a record of partner interests and potential areas of collaboration;
v. the launch of a continental Community of Practice, with participants' proposals on its purpose, mandate, membership, priority areas, coordination and first-year deliverables, and agreed next steps towards its formal establishment; and
vi. an agreed follow-up mechanism.

6. Participants

Approximately 100 participants drawn primarily from key institutions and delegates already attending ATDF 2026, complemented by practitioners invited specifically for Day 3, together with international partners. Participation will seek a balanced mix of decisionmakers, practitioners, financiers and private-sector actors, including:

i. **Continental and regional bodies:** the African Union Commission, including the AU Inter-African Phytosanitary Council (AU-IAPSC) and the AU Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR); the AfCFTA Secretariat; and Regional Economic Communities;
ii. **PAQI institutions and standard-setting bodies:** the African Organisation for Standardisation (ARSO), the African Accreditation Cooperation (AFRAC) and the Intra-Africa Metrology System (AFRIMETS), with the Codex Committee for Africa (CCAFRICA);
iii. **National quality infrastructure:** national standards bodies, accreditation services and conformity-assessment institutions;
iv. **National SPS competent authorities:** plant protection organisations, food safety and animal health regulatory authorities;
v. **Financing institutions:** Afreximbank, Trade Catalyst Africa, DFIs and commercial banks;
vi. **Private sector:** exporters, producer organisations, industry associations and apex bodies, women-led trade networks, MSMEs, and private laboratories, inspection, certification and advisory firms;
vii. **Development partners and technical organisations:** including FAO, WFP, CABI, icipe, COLEAD and CropLife Africa Middle East.

TMA, STDF and UNIDO are supporting the participation of selected delegates, including by extending the stay of participants already funded for the preceding ATDF sessions. Other participants may attend on a self-sponsored basis. Participant identification is coordinated by TMA with the co-organisers and participating institutions.

7. Format

The detailed programme is attached separately.

The Practitioners' Day will use a practitioner-oriented format that progresses deliberately from evidence to experience, financing dialogue, community building and agreed follow-up. It will

open with remarks from the co-organisers and the African Union Commission, followed by a recap of the headline messages from ATDF Days 1 and 2 and the key messages of the TMA–UNIDO flagship report.

Part A: Financing safe and quality trade systems.

Moderated by STDF, the first session moves from evidence to investment through presentations of the STDF Financing Study, the TBT and Quality Infrastructure Stocktaking 2026 and the AfCFTA SPS Mapping Study, followed by a perspective on a master plan for quality infrastructure financing and a case study from Afrieximbank on regional conformity-assessment centres, and an open dialogue. A roundtable on financing SPS and quality infrastructure then brings together Afrieximbank, conformity-assessment bodies, exporters' associations, commercial banks, DFIs and Trade Catalyst Africa to discuss what financiers need to see and to agree priority actions for each group of actors.

Part B: Quality and Standards Community of Practice.

Moderated by UNIDO, participants hear from TMA on implementation of its Standards and SPS strategy and the lessons of the SPS Community of Practice, then work at facilitated tables – with ARSO, PAQI, AU-IAPSC, the RECs, TMA and STDF – on the proposed purpose, membership, priorities, coordination and first-year deliverables of a continental community. Rapporteurs report back in plenary, where participants agree key messages, priority actions and next steps and launch the Community of Practice, before closing remarks by the co-organisers and the AUC.

8. Follow-up and sustainability

The forum's value will depend on structured follow-through after Addis Ababa. The organising partners will therefore establish a light, structured mechanism centred on:

i. finalisation and circulation of the ATDF Day 3 Action Note;
ii. confirmation of lead and supporting institutions for agreed priority actions;
iii. further assessment and preparation of selected opportunities;
iv. regular engagement through the Community of Practice;
v. integration of relevant priorities into partner programmes and financing pipelines;
vi. documentation and dissemination of implementation lessons; and
vii. a joint progress review within 90 days of the forum.

The Community of Practice is envisaged to provide the practitioner level mechanism for maintaining engagement, sharing technical knowledge, identifying emerging needs and monitoring progress on agreed actions.