



Africa-UK Trade – DBT Call for Views

The Chartered Institute of Export & International Trade’s response

Introduction

The Chartered Institute of Export & International Trade is delighted to provide a short response to the Department for Business and Trade’s call for views on Africa-UK trade, investment and growth.

The Chartered Institute is responding from the perspective of being a training provider in Africa and having also partaken in some direct trials to support Africa-UK trade.

The Chartered Institute’s purpose is to empower organisations and equip individuals with the expertise to trade effectively, sustainably and competitively. Established in 1935, the Chartered Institute is trusted by governments, businesses and trade professionals around the world as the leading experts in international trade and the foremost association of exporters and importers.

We are committed to professionalising trade through education and training, while partnering with national and international partners to facilitate the acknowledged mutual benefits of free, frictionless and legitimate trade. The Chartered Institute is registered as a charity in the UK and operates globally.

In terms of how the government can support increased Africa-UK trade, there are many avenues which could be explored, but there are three key areas which Chartered Institute will address in this submission, which could bolster trade between the UK and African nations:

- Digital Trade Corridor Development
- Education and Skills
- Opportunities by Nation

With Africa the second-fastest growing region in the world after Asia, with nine of the top twenty countries that experienced the highest rate of economic growth between 2018-2022¹, the world’s future growth potential is heavily weighted towards Africa. It is mutually beneficial for the UK and Africa work together towards shared trade and investment goals.

Digital Trade Corridor Development

Digital trade corridors, as a means of trade facilitation, provide a real opportunity for trade growth between African nations and the UK.

¹ [20 Countries With Highest Rate of Economic Growth in 5 Years](#)

The Chartered Institute has been working with TradeMark Africa and the IOTA Foundation to develop an interoperable, digital supply chain infrastructure – the Trade and Information Pipeline (TLIP). This technology provides the information government needs to identify and communicate the risk around imports more easily, reducing the number of checks it needs to conduct on goods – particularly sanitary and phytosanitary goods which require more intensive inspections than most standard goods.

This technology has been used in a pilot scheme which saw shipments of cut flowers, coffee and tea exported from Kenya to the UK as part of the UK government’s Ecosystem of Trust pilots, led by Cabinet Office. A Cabinet Office assessment paper² was produced which showed that, with the automation of customs declarations using business documentation, industry’s customs data collection costs can be reduced by 40%.

These concepts are now being trialled more extensively, through Border Trade Demonstrators (BTDs) with the Cabinet Office. These demonstrators are a series of projects further exploring interoperability of border data between government and industry.

In order to make this concept one which could be scaled effectively, international collaboration is naturally needed. For example, TLIP Kenya is integrated into the KenTrade Single Trade Window, enabling traders to access and verify consignment declarations and certificates directly from government systems. However, in order to scale more extensively and to provide benefits across Africa, more nations would need to adopt these types of systems.

Education and Training

Across Africa, there is a burgeoning young generation, eager to take advantage of entrepreneurial opportunities. In fact, the World Bank reports that the 15-24 age population in Sub-Saharan Africa is growing steeply in comparison to other continents and that, by 2050, one in three individuals aged 15-34 globally will be African³. There is therefore huge economic growth potential to emerge from Africa in the next few decades. However, The Economist recently reported⁴ that three-quarters of young Africans say they are struggling to find adequate work, impacting upon their ambitions. There is significant opportunity to support the provision of greater education and training to help African entrepreneurs develop the incredible products and services which they will have the opportunity to export all over the world, including the UK.

The Chartered Institute has been working across Kenya, Ghana and Nigeria, partnering with the International Trade Centre (ITC) to deliver international trade training. 76 learners from

² [Ecosystem of Trust Evaluation Report August 2023](#)

³ [A ladder of opportunity: unlocking jobs for today’s African youth](#)

⁴ [Africa’s young “generation hustle” hits the big time](#)

Export Promotion agencies and other international trade stakeholders in the 3 countries have been trained.

This year, we are also working with 5 African institutions of higher learning to jointly deliver further international trade qualifications in Africa from 2025. These are: University of Nairobi, Kenya, the Kenya School of Revenue Administration, the University of Ghana, the University of Professional Studies, Accra and the University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

It is also important to emphasise the need for training and skills for women entrepreneurs across Africa, too. For example, the International Trade Centre's SheTrades Rwanda project supported 90% of women entrepreneurs with new skills in e-commerce and branding, and in providing connections to markets, between 2020 and 2022.⁵ There are a number of African nations which run similar support programmes to support women-led businesses in their countries.

The Chartered Institute has supported various SheTrades initiatives in recent years and there is a remit for both the UK government and trade associations to support projects such as these in order to support the growth of women-led businesses across Africa countries in exporting.

Opportunities by Nation

To fully take advantage of the opportunities of UK-Africa trade, it is important to understand and appreciate the resources and strengths of each nation.

In terms of strengths by nation, there are multitudinous examples. Namibia is a country endowed with natural solar and wind resources and has the potential to become both a competitive producer and exporter of green hydrogen, supporting decarbonisation efforts across the world.

Other examples include countries like Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa which has a rich technology startup arena, with the number of start-ups tripling in less than two years.⁶

However, it is important to also understand that a number of African nations do feel frustrated regarding the fact they have exported a significant amount of the continent's natural resources, rather than driving domestic economic growth. Therefore, for example, some countries have export restrictions on raw minerals.⁷

It is important for the UK government to therefore understand where there are potential overlapping areas of mutual benefit with individual countries and to seek to engage in kind.

⁵ [SheTrades Rwanda's project results | ITC](#)

⁶ [Leveraging Africa's inner strength to realize its full economic potential](#)

⁷ [African Raw Material Export Bans: Protectionism or Self-Determination? | Global Policy Watch](#)



E-Commerce

E-commerce trade provides another significant opportunity for increasing Africa-UK trade. The E-Commerce Trade Commission is a group which the Chartered Institute chairs and which exists to encourage and support businesses to trade and export online. In a paper⁸ the Commission published with the Social Market Foundation in 2024, the potential of emerging markets as an area of opportunity for e-commerce exporters was explored. However, despite there being opportunities in these emerging markets, there are currently specific challenges for UK small businesses selling into South Africa, China and India.

For example, South African consumers have a preference for South African businesses over sellers from overseas, according to the Commission's Emerging Markets Working Group. Therefore, there is work to be done around highlighting the value of UK products in this specific instance. Similarly, other obstacles such as misalignment of financial systems and challenges regarding overseas exporters selling into South Africa having to undertake lengthy processes in order to register to pay VAT in South Africa pose problems.

Despite this, there are still huge opportunities for e-commerce trade between the UK and other areas of Africa – for example, via MENA (Middle East and North Africa). The total size of MENA's e-commerce market is predicted to be worth \$100bn annually. MENA also benefits from a young population which is looking to maintain or increase e-commerce spending.⁹

It would be worthwhile utilising the E-Commerce Trade Commission's recommendations regarding seizing the opportunities presented by the growth in emerging markets. Specifically, the Commission highlighted three concrete suggestions:

- A pledge to work with industry to identify a number of “high e-commerce potential” developing economies that would be subject to targeted and intensive efforts (e.g. additional trade delegations) to help more UK SMEs penetrate these markets.
- A proposal to work with industry to develop a specific promotion campaign aimed at encouraging SMEs to consider exporting to the “high priority” countries, especially through e-commerce channels.
- A plan to pursue bespoke agreements with “high e-commerce potential” countries to make e-commerce easier by reducing some of the key “at” and “behind” the border costs of trading in goods with them.

Associations

⁸ [Small-business-big-world-Sept-2024.pdf](#)

⁹ [IOE and IT director general Marco Forgiione calls for UK to use e-commerce to engage with MENA region](#)



Aside from the government's direct efforts to improve UK-Africa trade flows, the government can also work with specific associations, with strong relationships with African countries, in order to coordinate efforts. This also applies to associations specific to various UK nations. For example, the [Scottish Africa Business Association](#) works to strengthen business ties between Scotland and Africa, promoting Scottish expertise in various areas including agriculture and energy.

Diaspora

On an even more granular level, leveraging the African diaspora within the UK can also unlock opportunities between the UK and African nations. For example, the Manchester Africa Business Network (part of the [British African Business Alliance](#)) is a UK-based, diaspora-led network in Manchester for business leaders and professionals in business or development organisations. They are able to link up entrepreneurs and businesses between the UK and African nations.

Trade Envoys

The United Kingdom's Trade Envoy programme is another initiative through which to create direct connections between the UK and African nations. Trade envoys complement the work of Ambassadors, High Commissioners and His Majesty's Trade Commissioners in markets by engaging with host governments, leading trade delegations, hosting inward delegations, meeting businesses in the UK and in market and lobbying on market access. In relation to Africa, the following envoys are responsible for these duties:

- Baroness Jane Ramsey: Ethiopia
- Bell Ribeiro-Addy MP: Ghana
- Ben Coleman MP: Kingdom of Morocco and Francophone West Africa
- Calvin Bailey MP: Southern Africa
- Florence Eshalomi MP: Nigeria
- Kate Osamor MP: East Africa
- Dr Rosena Allin-Khan MP: South Africa and Mauritius
- Sarah Olney MP: North Africa
- Yasmin Qureshi MP: Egypt

Last year, the Chartered Institute began a video and article interview series called 'Discovering Trade Envoys' where we highlighted the roles and responsibilities of trade envoys, as well as the opportunities in each country's market. This also served a secondary function to highlight how businesses can engage with envoys to connect directly with contacts overseas.



The Chartered Institute is looking to continue this series with the new intake of trade envoys, and this will be another way in which the trade opportunities between the UK and respective African countries can be highlighted.

Summary

In summary, there are numerous opportunities available for the UK government to both directly, and in partnership with third parties/associations, stimulate trade growth between the UK and African nations.

A revived UK-Africa investment summit, under the new administration, would be a strategically wise move in order to deepen both trade and diplomatic links.