

# WEST AFRICA PROGRAM BRIEF



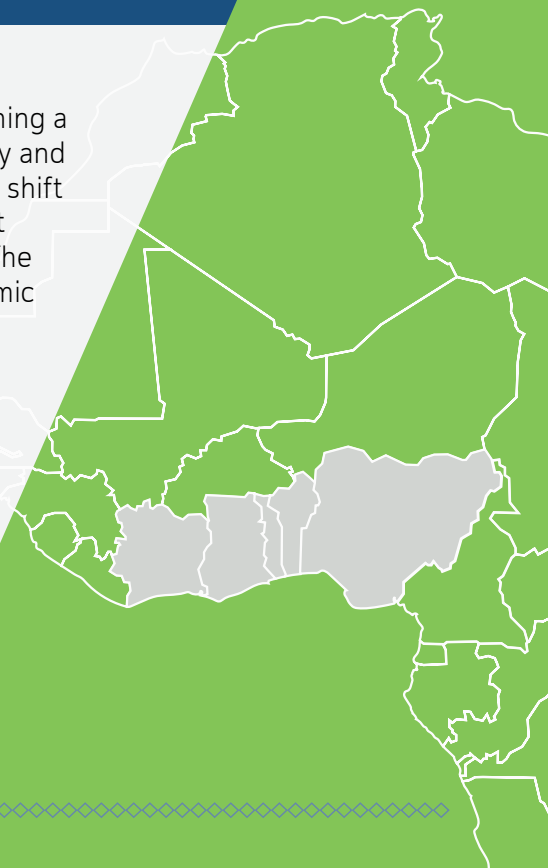
MAY -  
AUGUST  
2026

TradeMark Africa (TMA) is a leading African Aid-for-Trade organisation founded in 2010, with a mission to grow intra-African trade, increase Africa's share in global trade, and make trade more pro-poor and environmentally sustainable. TMA operates on a not-for-profit basis and is funded by: Canada, Denmark, the European Union, Finland, France, the Gates Foundation, Ireland, the Mastercard Foundation, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom. TMA works closely with regional and continental organisations, national Governments, the private sector, and civil society. This four-monthly bulletin captures key highlights of ongoing activities and initiatives within the region.

## About TradeMark Africa's West Africa Programme

In January 2023, TMA officially launched its activities in West Africa by signing a Memorandum of Understanding with Ghana's Ministry of Trade and Industry and establishing its first office in the region. Since then, TMA's continental-wide shift has shaped up with plans underway to set up additional offices across West Africa, with an initial focus on the Abidjan-Lagos Corridor Member States. The West Africa Programme aims to enhance trade competitiveness and economic integration within the region.

It focuses on creating jobs, reducing poverty, reducing trade costs and times, improving infrastructure and regulatory frameworks and promoting sustainability and inclusivity in trade. The programme follows a multi-level approach, and targets increased intra-regional and international trade through working at the continental level with the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Secretariat, at the regional level with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Commission and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA); and at the country level, ultimately fostering a more resilient and prosperous West Africa.



## UPCOMING EVENTS (OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2026)

| Date                | Title of Event                                                                                                   | Objective                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 23-24 November 2026 | Africa Trade Development Forum (ATDF)<br><a href="https://atdf.trademarkafrica.com">atdf.trademarkafrica.com</a> | To convene African heads of government, ministers, regional institutions, development partners and private sector representatives to discuss the quality systems needed to strengthen the competitiveness of African exports. |
| November 2026       | Handing over of Equipment to GUCE in Cote d'Ivoire                                                               | To officially hand over IT equipment and resources to facilitate data exchange in Cote d'Ivoire                                                                                                                               |
| 26-30 October 2026  | Launch of Making Trade Work for Women in West Africa (MTWW) in Nigeria                                           | To officially kickstart the MTWW activities in Nigeria                                                                                                                                                                        |
| November 2026       | Handing over of bilingual signages at Akanu-Noepe and Seme-Krake Joint Border Posts (JBPs)                       | To officially deliver works done on bilingual signages to ECOWAS and JBMC officials                                                                                                                                           |

### Africa Trade Development Forum (ATDF) Convening Africa to Advance Trade Quality and Competitiveness in Africa

In partnership with the Ministry of Trade in Ethiopia, the 2026 Africa Trade Development Forum (ATDF) takes place on **23 – 24 November at the Ethiopia Skylight Hotel in Addis Ababa.**

This biennial continental forum 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, harmonized standards for easier market access.

Seven government ministers have already confirmed their participation. Alongside 300 key representatives from government, the African Union (AU), the Africa Free Continental Trade Area (AfCFTA), private sector, industry, business, development partners and international organizations, we will shape Africa's trade future and unlock opportunities for growth and global competitiveness.

In the meantime, join the trade quality challenge [here](#), as we prepare to meet in Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia.

**AFRICA TRADE DEVELOPMENT FORUM 2026**

**23 - 24 NOVEMBER**  
ADDIS-ABABA, ETHIOPIA

# THE TRADE QUALITY CHALLENGE

How much do you know about the barriers facing African exports?

**4 QUESTIONS. 4 CHANCES TO PROVE YOUR KNOWLEDGE**

ORGANISED BY

MINISTRY OF TRADE AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION - ETHIOPIA

TRADE MARK AFRICA

MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS - ETHIOPIA

## From Fear to Confidence: Strengthening Capacity for Women and Young Cross-border Traders



For Ms. Labiga Télate, crossing a border is part of everyday business. A cereal trader and businesswoman, she moves grains from Togo into Ghana and Benin, buying in bulk and selling through wholesale and retail markets. For years, each border crossing came with a question: Would she have the right documents? Would she know what was required? Would she be able to move her goods without unnecessary difficulty?

*"I was afraid to cross the borders because I did not know what to expect. It was either our documentation was insufficient or we did not have the right documentation we need," she recalls.*

Labiga says that, faced with these uncertainties, traders sometimes chose informal routes rather than formal border crossings. Even when using formal routes, she recalls difficult interactions with uniformed officials and uncertainty over legitimate payments.

For Labiga, knowledge has begun to change that experience.

In 2026, she joined other cross-border traders in Togo for training on their rights and responsibilities as traders. The training forms part of the **Making Trade Work for Women in West Africa (MTWW)** programme, implemented by TradeMark Africa (TMA) in partnership with CECI to strengthen inclusive and gender-responsive trade across West Africa.

*"I have gained a clearer understanding of the procedures, documentation and protections available to me. I am now more confident navigating my business at the different borders. I am able to question illicit payments and speak up when faced with unacceptable treatment," she says.*

Her experience reflects the change MTWW seeks to advance: helping women traders move from uncertainty to more informed and confident participation in formal trade.



Overview of training sessions with Togolese border officials

The work also extends to the frontline officials who manage trade at border crossings. In July, MTWW brought together **100 border officials in Aného and Lomé, Togo**, for practical training on the AfCFTA Protocol on Women and Youth, Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures, product



traceability and the prevention of gender-based violence (GBV).

By strengthening both trader knowledge and frontline capacity, MTWW is helping create safer, more predictable and more inclusive conditions for women and young people to participate in regional trade.

## ECOWAS-TMA Partnership:

### Making the Common Market Agenda Work at West Africa Borders

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Common Market Agenda remains central to advancing regional integration, improving the movement of goods and services, and unlocking inclusive economic growth across West Africa. Building on this agenda, TMA continues to support ECOWAS and Member States in translating regional commitments into practical solutions that strengthen border operations, reduce trade barriers and improve market access.

#### Advancing Cross-Regional Learning to Strengthen Trade Facilitation



Officials engaged in cross regional learning activities at borders and ports within East Africa

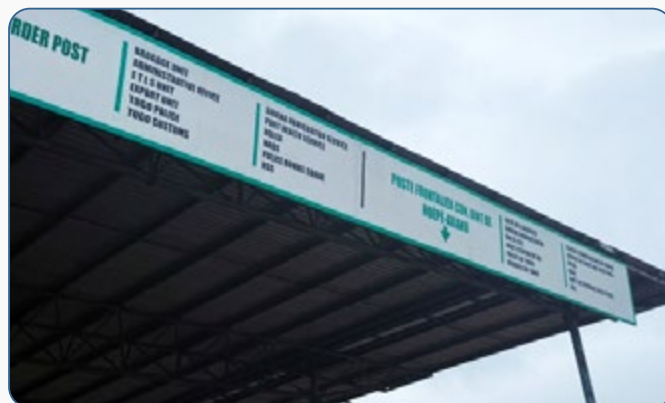
From 6 to 14 June 2026, TMA facilitated an ECOWAS-led study visit to the East African Community (EAC), funded by the Government of Sweden through the Swedish Initiative for Facilitating Trade in Africa (SWIFT). From the Port of Mombasa, along the Northern Corridor, to the Busia One Stop Border Post (OSBP) and at the Kenya Revenue Authority's Command Centre in Nairobi, 18 senior officials from the ECOWAS Commission and the five countries along the Abidjan-Lagos Corridor (ALCo) observed coordinated border management at scale. At Busia, the delegation saw Kenyan and Ugandan border agencies operating under a single Joint Border Committee, backed by clear protocols and a dedicated legal framework, the EAC OSBP Act.

The delegation identified two immediate priorities for a more coordinated and efficient ALCo:

- Operationalizing and resourcing ALCoMA, with an enabling framework for joint border operations and pre-clearance;
- Advancing border infrastructure and digital systems alongside institutional reform, including scanners, risk-based management and SIGMAT interoperability.

TMA is already working with ECOWAS and the corridor countries to advance border infrastructure, digital systems and risk-based management along the corridor

#### Making Joint Border Posts (JBPs) Work for Trade along the ALCo



Signages at Akanu-Noepe and Seme-Krake JBPs

Closer to home, with support from TMA and funding from the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), ECOWAS is advancing the operationalization of Joint Border Posts (JBPs) across the region. At Sèmè-Kraké and Akanu-Noepe JBPs, TMA supported ECOWAS with the installation of clear, standardized bilingual signages to guide travelers, transporters and other border users through the joint facility and clarify the location and functions of key services. As multiple agencies and processes operate within the same space, clear signages supports the practical functioning of the joint border arrangement and makes facilities easier to navigate.

ECOWAS, with TMA's support, also delivered training for the Sèmè-Kraké Joint Border Management Committee (JBMC). Many participating officials newly posted to Sèmè-Kraké highlighted the value of the training in helping them understand the practical realities of joint border operations and inter-agency coordination.



*Seme-Krake JBMC officials in a group discussion*

#### **Driving Regional Integration**

In parallel, TMA supported ECOWAS with the piloting of a Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) between Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, advancing efforts to reduce duplication in conformity assessment. Greater recognition of compliance requirements across the two markets has the potential to reduce delays and trade costs and make it easier for businesses to access regional markets.

In August 2026, all of the work with ECOWAS was reaffirmed during the ECOWAS-TMA Programme Steering Committee meeting where ECOWAS leadership provided strategic updates and direction for the continued implementation of priority activities. Together, these interventions help translate the Common Market Agenda into practical systems that make cross-border trade more coordinated, predictable and efficient.

### **Strengthening Customs Capacity for Joint Border Posts**



*TMA and Customs Officials during the handing-over*

TMA, with funding support from the UK-FCDO and in collaboration with the Ghana Revenue Authority-Customs Division, developed a **Customs Training Manual** to strengthen the capacity of border officials to effectively manage JBPs. On 1 July, the manual was formally handed over to the Commissioner of Customs during a courtesy call by TMA. The resource has since been integrated into the Ghana Customs Training School, equipping customs officials with practical knowledge to operationalise ECOWAS JBP frameworks and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). This is expected to support better coordination and more consistent application of procedures to contribute to reducing clearance delays and trading costs.

## Ghana and TradeMark Africa Renew Partnership to Advance Trade Priorities

The Republic of Ghana and TMA have renewed their partnership to facilitate trade in the country, a collaboration that was first formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in January 2023. To build on this foundation and advance Ghana's evolving trade priorities, the Minister for Trade, Agribusiness and Industry, Honourable Elizabeth Ofosu-Adjare, MP and TMA Deputy CEO Ms. Allen Sophia Asiimwe signed a renewed the partnership in August 2026. The renewed agreement provides a framework for deeper collaboration on trade facilitation, regional integration, private-sector competitiveness and market access, with a focus on translating shared priorities into tangible results.



**Left:** Hon. Elizabeth Ofosu-Adjare and Ms. Allen Sophia Asiimwe in a symbolic exchange. **Right:** Flanked by officials from government and TMA

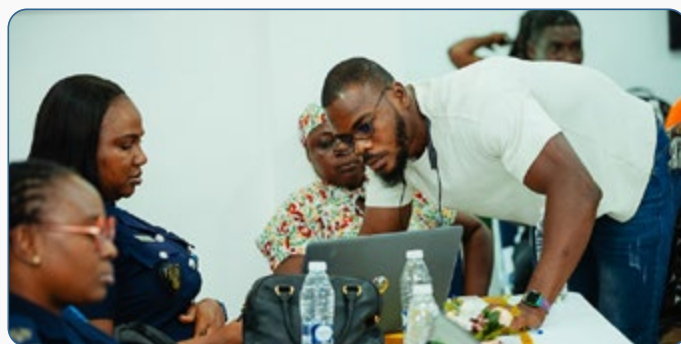
At the centre of this renewed partnership is a co-created Ghana Country Programme (GCP), developed jointly with the Ministry of Trade, Agribusiness and Industry (MoTAI), which provides a jointly owned roadmap for delivery. The programme was shaped by Ghana's Reset Agenda, Feed Ghana, Make Ghana Industrialisation and Export Ghana initiatives, alongside AfCFTA and ECOWAS commitments, TMA Strategy 3 and its West Africa Programme.

It also draws on ongoing FCDO, AFD and SIDA-supported programmes and focuses on three priorities:

- Strengthening trade institutions and systems;
- Reducing the time, cost and complexity of trade;
- Strengthening Ghanaian businesses to compete and access regional and international markets.

Through joint ownership and stronger accountability, this co-created approach provides joint ownership, clearer prioritisation and stronger accountability, while ensuring TMA support addresses institutional and business constraints and complements existing efforts

## Helping SMEs Become Export Ready



Participants and customs officials during the training sessions

The Ghana National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GNCCI) and TMA are supporting over 100 SMEs, many of them women-led, to become export-ready. This initiative was made possible thanks to the financial support of the Agence Française de Développement (AFD). Through this partnership, GNCCI and TMA have introduced 500 business owners across eight regions to opportunities under the AfCFTA and the interim EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA)

So far, 17 SMEs have taken steps towards export compliance, registering their products with Ghana Customs, the Ghana Standards Authority and the Food and Drugs Authority. The next phase will provide **100 selected SMEs with tailored coaching** on product quality, packaging, certification, regulatory compliance and market readiness- helping businesses move from understanding export opportunities to meeting the requirements to access them.

*"We have the products and the entrepreneurs; our focus now is to equip them to meet international market requirements and take advantage of available opportunities," said the Vice President of GNCCI.*

## Better trade starts with stronger coordination- National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) Convenings in Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire and Nigeria

Across West Africa, TMA is working with National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFCs) to strengthen the institutions and systems that coordinate trade facilitation reforms for the benefit of traders and businesses. In Ghana, Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire, this support is focused on addressing country-specific priorities while contributing to more coordinated and predictable trade along regional corridors.

### NTFC Nigeria



Officials during the NTFC Meeting in Nigeria

As the EU-funded CALAO Programme gets underway, TMA supported the Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment (FMITI) to convene representatives from government institutions, regulatory agencies and the private sector for its NTFC meeting. The meeting provided the requisite platform for stakeholders to identify priority areas for improving Nigeria's trade environment. **Key priorities included digital trade, border efficiency, the National Single Window, standards and certification, logistics, and support for businesses and women traders.** The priorities identified will help align areas of collaboration and guide the implementation of relevant CALAO Programme interventions in Nigeria.

### NTFC Cote d'Ivoire



Officials in a group photo/ Officials receiving certificates of participation

TMA supported the Côte d'Ivoire NTFC in facilitating a meeting to strengthen its technical understanding and implementation of AfCFTA provisions on **customs cooperation, trade facilitation and transit, as well as Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures**, Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) and non-tariff measures. The meeting highlighted the need for greater alignment of national practices with AfCFTA commitments and stronger cooperation and information exchange among trade-related agencies. The Committee identified key areas for improvement, including customs verification processes and access to trade information, national quality and certification systems, operationalization of the Authorised Economic Operator (AEO) programme, and the simplified trade regime for small-scale cross-border traders. The NTFC will follow up on these priorities while ensuring effective coordination among the relevant institutions to support their implementation.



## NTFC Ghana



NTFC appreciating the leadership of previous Gender Sub-Committee



A participant during the NTFC Meeting

TMA, in partnership with UK-FCDO, recently facilitated the NTFC meeting in Ghana, which focused on three major priorities:

1. developing an SOP for perishable goods in line with Ghana's WTO commitments;
2. following up on recommendations from the Time Release Study, particularly on cargo management; and
3. advancing the Trade Information Portal.

The meeting also saw the reconstitution of the Gender Sub-Committee to further strengthen inclusive trade facilitation. This builds on TMA's support to the NTFC during its previous tenure, which included the ECOWAS–UNCTAD maturity assessment to address institutional and operational challenges, working sessions on trade facilitation reforms, joint training of cross-border traders, and annual training for the National Cross-Border Women Traders Association. TMA has earmarked funds to continue supporting the NTFC priorities.

## MEDIA COVERAGE (MAY – AUGUST 2026)

- [Supporting Côte d'Ivoire to Accelerate its Reforms to Become a Regional Hub](#)
- [Official Launch of the COTONI Project in Benin](#)
- [Supporting to improve PWIC in Cote d'Ivoire](#)
- [Making Trade Work for Women in West Africa \(MTWW\)- Training for Kodjoviakope Border Officials](#)
- [MTWW- Training for Akanu-Noepe Border Officials](#)
- [MTWW- Border Officials Training in Togo](#)
- [Renewal of Partnership in Ghana](#)

