

World Trade Organization

LDC success stories

LAUNCH EDITION

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Cover: Fatou Juka Darboe, co-founder and director of Make3D Company Limited, The Gambia. © ITC.

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Foreword



Ambassador Kirsti Kauppi of Finland, Chair of the Sub-Committee on LDCs.
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Strengthening the capacity of least developed countries (LDCs) to trade is an important priority for the international community. Over the years, considerable efforts have been put into supporting LDC integration in global trade. At the same time, LDCs' share in global exports has remained static. LDCs' goods exports still predominantly rely on primary commodities, while services exports, largely driven by tourism, were hit hard by the pandemic.

LDCs and their development partners have been working hand in hand to identify what has been holding LDCs back, what is working well, and what else can be done to boost LDC trade.

The WTO's Sub-Committee on LDCs serves as a forum for sharing experiences on topics of importance to LDCs. We have started exploring thematic discussions of relevance to LDCs, with the view to helping them improve their participation in global trade. In 2022, we discussed initiatives to support small businesses in LDCs and the role of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) for economic growth and development.

This launch edition of the LDC success stories magazine includes stories shared by LDCs at the Sub-Committee and published on the LDC success stories blog. Contributors for this edition range from women entrepreneurs in The Gambia to government officials

from Djibouti, Madagascar and Togo and a representative of TradeMark East Africa.

Ms Fatou Juka Darboe talks about what it takes to run a 3D printing company in The Gambia. Ms Isatou Foon shares her experience of working as a tour guide in The Gambia. Ms Nomenjanahary Saholy Ramiliarijaona from Madagascar highlights how ePhyto solution can ease processes for the safe export of plant products.

Mr Ali Daoud Abdou from Djibouti and Mr Talime Abé from Togo share their national experiences on steps taken to implement the AfCFTA. Mr David Beer from TradeMark East Africa highlights some of the lessons learnt in bringing down trade barriers in the continent to foster trade.

We must learn from these experiences to better support LDCs in fully realizing their trade potential.

H.E. Ms Kirsti Kauppi
Ambassador of Finland
Chair of the Sub-Committee on LDCs

Supporting small businesses in LDCs

The Gambia: Young women use technology and tourism to transform their communities

Contributed by the International Trade Centre (ITC)

Fatou Juka Darboe is the co-founder and director of Make3D Company Limited, the first and only 3D printing company in The Gambia. Isatou Foon is a young tour guide from Janjanbureh, renowned for its historical and cultural heritage. What unites them is their passion to use trade to transform their communities. Both have benefited from the Youth Empowerment Project, an initiative of the International Trade Centre (ITC) funded by the European Union, which aims to unlock the potential of young people in The Gambia to support economic growth.

Creating bespoke solutions

Make3D offers 3D printed products that help companies obtain customised items unavailable in The Gambia. This covers a wide range of products, from branded antibacterial combs for a local barbershop to bespoke lip balm containers for a cosmetics business. The 3D printed items help companies boost sales, optimise resources and respond quickly to emerging needs.

Juka's work also provides health solutions. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Make3D partnered with ITC and the Medical Research Council to produce 3D printed face shields for healthcare professionals. Make3D also produces medical and safety equipment, such as customised prosthetics and orthopaedic legs and braces, working with a group of local surgeons. The company is also developing partnerships in West Africa and Europe to exchange knowledge and advance technology gains.



Fatou Juka Darboe is the co-founder and director of Make3D Company Limited.
© ITC.



Isatou is a trainer in community-based tourism.
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A win-win for tourism

Isatou describes her job as “helping visitors make awesome memories” while visiting her community. She aims to provide her guests with insights into the local culture through a range of sight-seeing activities.

Isatou is a trainer in community-based tourism. She shares her knowledge with other communities to help create tourism products that improve the region's standard of living while preserving the local culture and environment. Her work provides opportunities to the local community, specifically women and youth, as they can find income-generating activities without feeling the need to migrate to urban areas. Isatou is also passionate about encouraging more women to pursue a career in tourism. In addition, she champions the development of inclusive tourism at university level.

When culture meets tech

Tourism and information and communication technology are important sectors in The Gambia and prioritized in the country's National Development Plan. Recognizing that technology can have a transformative impact on many sectors, Juka's company started using 3D printing technology in the tourism sector.

In partnership with the Youth Empowerment Project, her company developed a 3D printed board game around the Ninki Nanka Trail, which provides travellers with the opportunity to learn about the legend of the Ninki Nanka dragon and discover the natural and cultural heritage of communities along the river Gambia.

Juka worked with local communities and tourism professionals to develop the board game. The initiative has helped to support local artisans, with part of the proceeds from sales going back into communities to support community-based tourism initiatives. Juka is passionate about the economic opportunities this creates and how it helps create awareness of her unique culture and to preserve it for future generations.

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Madagascar: Making trade in plant products quicker and more efficient

Contributed by the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF)

Ms. Nomenjanahary Saholy Ramiliarijaona is Head of Plant Protection at Madagascar's Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock. Since July 2022, she has been overseeing the country's use of ePhytos, electronic phytosanitary certificates that allow plant products to be traded more easily and efficiently across borders. Initiated by the Standards and Trade Development Facility, the so-called ePhyto Solution is currently being used by more than 100 countries. The state-of-the-art system leads to a lower likelihood of loss, damage and fraud compared with using traditional paper certificates.



Ms. Ramiliarijaona tells us more about this new way of trading.
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Why did Madagascar decide to invest in the ePhyto Solution?

Following a training course organized by the United States Department of Agriculture, we decided to look into the ePhyto Solution.

Paper certificates can be falsified or get lost, slowing down export procedures, in particular Customs clearance. They are also time-consuming because traders have to go to inspection offices to request and collect certificates.

This convinced us to invest in the ePhyto Solution. However, implementing the new system was hampered by the outbreak of COVID-19, with frequent power cuts making virtual meetings difficult.

What changes have you seen since launching the ePhyto Solution?

The most obvious change is the speed with which certificates are issued. Using ePhytos reduces processing time. It also increases confidence in the authenticity of the documents.

At the international level, compliance with international standards gives importing countries much more confidence in what we do.

Using computers and other equipment enables our inspectors to work more efficiently, without having to print certificates. The efficiency of the system has also encouraged more women to make certification requests.

Archiving of certificates has also become easier now that documents are digital. All in all, we've seen a real revolution in how we work.


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How many ePhytos does Madagascar exchange per month?

We issue, on average, more than 200 ePhytos per month. That's about 25% of all phytosanitary certificates issued.

How much time is being saved by using ePhytos?

Processing paper certificates used to take about 72 hours, and even up to a week sometimes, depending on the product. Now, it can be done in up to 48 hours.

How is the ePhyto system in Madagascar being financed?

The World Economic Forum through the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation is financing the project, including the purchase of computers, training and information sharing. This is with the active participation of Madagascar's National Trade Facilitation Committee.

An agreement with Madagascar's Agricultural Development Fund is also being finalized.

Can you share any stories from traders about their experiences using ePhytos?

According to the traders, it is now much easier for them. In the past, they had to contend with fraudulent freight forwarders, and they paid exorbitant prices. Now, they work directly with inspectors in a more transparent process.

At the start, traders were a little worried because it's a new system and they had security concerns. Through awareness raising and training, they have gained confidence in the system, with more and more asking to be trained.

What was the most challenging part of implementing the ePhyto project?
We had insufficient staff. So we had to ask our minister to hire more inspectors. Fortunately, many engineers and other technicians within the ministry asked to be transferred to other functions so we were able to add staff at borders.

What was the most rewarding part of implementing the ePhyto system?
The most gratifying thing, above all, was cooperation with donors, whether their support was material or in the form of technical expertise. For example, an expert worked with us to take account of all the steps affecting the total cost of certification. Without these technical experts, we could not have completed this project.

How do you see the role of women in using the ePhyto system?
Women played a big role in the implementation of the project. In the training courses, 138 out of 398 participants were women, representing about 30% of the total. That's already a big number.

Have you seen any impact on the environment, linked to using ePhytos?
Yes, we have seen a reduction in the use of paper. Travel has also been reduced, reducing the use of fuel.

What would you say to other countries considering using ePhytos?
It is in the interest of each country to get on board sooner rather than later. Do not hesitate because the ePhyto Solution is easy, fast and safe. By adopting this solution, you facilitate market access for plant products from your country. Don't be the last to join.

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The role of the African Continental Free Trade Area for economic growth and development

Djibouti: Diversifying the economy and boosting trade

Ali Daoud Abdou is Secretary General of Djibouti's Ministry of Trade and Tourism. Until 2020, he was also Secretary General and Chief Negotiator of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). He outlines below his efforts to help Djibouti achieve its economic objectives and take full advantage of international trade opportunities.



Ali Daoud Abdou is Secretary General of Djibouti's Ministry of Trade and Tourism.
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How do you view continental integration in Africa?

AfCFTA represents a new beginning and a unique opportunity to build on our experience of regional integration over the past 20 years. It offers a way to diversify the economy, boost productivity and stimulate investment. It will help Africa become stronger and more dynamic.

What steps has Djibouti taken so far?

Regional integration is an integral part of Djibouti's Vision 2035, the country's long-term strategy to position itself as a hub for the regional economy. Djibouti is the only WTO member in the Horn of Africa and its adherence to WTO rules and disciplines will facilitate its integration of AfCFTA rules. We want to become a regional hub for trade, finance and telecommunications. Our efforts are anchored in institutional strengthening and coordination.

We actively participated in the first phase of AfCFTA negotiations, which allowed us to submit our schedule of commitments for transport, communication, tourism and professional services. This required consultations with and training for businesses working in those sectors.

Partnerships play an important role. With help from the African Union, Djibouti took stock of its laws on services. The World Customs Organization also helped Djibouti migrate to the 2022 harmonized customs system. This was important for preparing our initial tariff schedule for validation. We are now working in close partnership with the Chamber of Commerce to raise awareness among businesses about opportunities and challenges associated with AfCFTA.

Djibouti is currently participating in the second phase of AfCFTA negotiations, which are focusing on intellectual property rights, investment protection and competition policy. At the national level, workshops, training activities and consultations with technical experts are already being rolled out.

What challenges does AfCFTA pose and how is Djibouti addressing them?

The implementation of AfCFTA may cause a loss in customs revenues for Djibouti. In addition, we are worried about our small businesses. We have to look at how much competition they will face and prepare them to make the most of AfCFTA.

Over the past decade, Djibouti has invested a lot in infrastructure to strengthen its role as a distribution centre and gateway to the Red Sea for neighbouring landlocked countries. We have built a free trade zone with processing and transformation capacities. As a member of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Djibouti has also adopted a flexible investment regime and rules of origin which bring new trade opportunities for us and the entire region.

Based on Djibouti's experience, what advice would you give?

First, build on good practices. Regional integration in Africa stretches back 20 years. A lot of work has already been done. For example, Djibouti's

implementation of a simplified regime for cross-border transactions under COMESA helped a great deal to facilitate trade.

Second, coordinate at the national level. For example, we already have inter-ministerial mechanisms on trade facilitation and non-tariff barriers, and we want to give them a more permanent role.

Third, invest in productive sectors. We need to strengthen our productive capacity if we are to actively participate in regional value chains and take advantage of opportunities offered by AfCFTA. In Djibouti, we aim to diversify our economy, with priority sectors ranging from tourism to telecommunications. To achieve this, we need the international community's support and engagement.

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Togo: Making regional rules work for people

Talime Abé is Director-General of the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Local Consumption of Togo, one of the first countries in Africa to put in place a national implementation strategy for the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Mr Abé outlines Togo's achievements and how it plans to implement AfCFTA.



Talime Abé is Director-General of the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Local Consumption of Togo.
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What benefits does AfCFTA bring?

Our aim with AfCFTA is to create a single market for goods and services to bolster Africa's economies. Togo is a gateway to West Africa and has vast potential for facilitating trade with other regions in Africa. We hope to increase intra-African trade, boost economic growth and create jobs for our women and youth.

What steps has Togo taken?

We initially invested in outreach efforts across the entire country to ensure that everyone understands what the agreement means for Togo. We spoke with our parliament, the private sector, civil society, students and journalists.



© Talime Abé / Ministry of Trade, Togo

We have also held many national consultations with various constituencies. These include engaging with women entrepreneurs and cross-border traders as part of preparations for AfCFTA's protocol on women and youth. We are now implementing recommendations resulting from those consultations, such as calling for action on removing obstacles to trade. We are also looking at how to increase awareness of AfCFTA-related trade opportunities among women entrepreneurs and to strengthen their capacity to seize these opportunities.

To support AfCFTA implementation, Togo has put a lot of effort into strengthening the country's institutional framework. We have trained customs officers, freight forwarders and women entrepreneurs on the conditions that goods must meet to be eligible to benefit from AfCFTA. We have also created a national AfCFTA Committee, which forms part of our national committee for international trade negotiations. We have already prepared Togo's schedule of tariff commitments and drafted commitments for five priority service sectors. We have also outlined Togo's non-tariff measures.

What are your future plans?

We will continue with institutional strengthening. We plan to update Togo's national AfCFTA implementation strategy and align it with the Togo 2025 roadmap, a five-year (2020-25) investment project initiated by the government. We will also continue implementing recommendations from our national consultations with women.

We also need support from the international community to fully implement our AfCFTA strategy. Togo needs an export promotion strategy that takes account of various standards and regulations. We also need to strengthen laboratories in charge of quality control for agricultural products for export.

In 2020, Togo was the sixth-largest exporter of phosphates, a natural resource used to produce fertilizers. However, Togo and neighbouring countries continue to import fertilizers from abroad. With the price of fertilizers rising, we plan to produce fertilizers in our own country and supply other markets in the region.

Togo's services have strong export potential so we are working to improve the quality of these services. For example, Togo is an important transport hub. Our latest diagnostic trade integration study identified the need to invest in infrastructure and to improve the regulatory environment for transport and transiting goods.

Raising awareness about AfCFTA trade opportunities is essential. Ensuring women entrepreneurs have access to these opportunities is our priority. For example, we have launched in Togo the "50 Million African Women Speak" platform, a service aimed at helping African women grow their businesses by providing a one-stop shop for their information needs. We now need to train women entrepreneurs on how to use it.

We also need support to participate in more international trade fairs. These are important for enabling women entrepreneurs to access new business opportunities. In addition, facilitating the interconnectedness of banks across countries will help reduce the risk of theft when entrepreneurs are currently obliged to carry cash.

What lessons have you learned?

First, political will is essential. The government of Togo attaches great importance to regional economic integration and AfCFTA. Second, ensuring all stakeholders in Togo take ownership of AfCFTA is key. To this end, we have a team of negotiators and AfCFTA experts who regularly engage with our business communities. Finally, having a national AfCFTA implementation strategy offers a clear roadmap of the steps we must take to realize the opportunities presented by AfCFTA.

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TradeMark East Africa: Aiming to tear down trade barriers at the pan-African level

Contributed by TradeMark East Africa

David Beer is CEO of TradeMark East Africa (TMEA), an aid-for-trade organization established in 2010 with the aim of promoting prosperity in East Africa through increased trade. He explains TMEA's role in the region and the lessons it has learned in seeking to reduce trade barriers.



David Beer is CEO of TradeMark East Africa (TMEA).
© TMEA.

What is TMEA's role in strengthening African least developed countries (LDCs)' capacity to trade?

Africa's significant growth potential is being constrained by low trading volumes both within the continent and in terms of exports from Africa. Trade infrastructure problems, regulatory environments unaligned with the requirements of export markets, and non-tariff barriers (NTBs) make life hard for exporters, leading to a predominance of primary goods in the export portfolio and a host of lost opportunities to boost intra-African trade. Breaking down these barriers would not only raise the continent's share of global trade but also lift millions of people out of poverty. This has been TMEA's focus for the last decade in East Africa, the Horn of Africa and Southern Africa.

Working with regional governments, regional economic communities and other development partners, we have helped modernize infrastructure, build digital systems to speed up trade in services, harmonize standards and trade protocols, and facilitate government and private sector dialogue to address emerging issues and to support trade policy reform aimed at enhancing trade.

TradeMark has achieved substantial results in driving down the cost and time of trading across borders. For One Stop Border Posts we have supported, the time needed to cross the border has been reduced by an average of 70%. At the ports of Mombasa and Dar Es Salaam, the time has been cut in half.

Dialogue with the private sector has been vital, especially in reducing NTBs. For instance, in 2021 we helped the East African Business Community engage with the Kenyan Government to increase aflatoxin testing capacity for grain at the border with Uganda. This reduced delays, post-harvest losses and operating costs for firms, with the Central Bank of Uganda estimating the country could have lost US$ 121 million in annual revenue if the challenge had persisted.

What are the lessons learned?

While we have learned many lessons from trying to deliver substantive reductions in trade barriers, I can highlight three:

Firstly, an international approach is required. Successful trade facilitation must by its nature happen across borders, but also between countries and regional economic communities (RECs), and between RECs. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) will offer a critical additional tool to achieve this.

Secondly, we believe strongly that an integrated approach is the only way to deliver results. This means ensuring that all the pieces of successful trade facilitation are done together: the hard infrastructure; the digital systems; standards and other protocols; liaison between government and the private sector; and effective trade policy.

And lastly, nothing happens without political commitment. The success of the East African Community (EAC) over the last 15 years has had at its heart a strong drive from its respective leaders. This has provided strong incentives to overcome vested interests within institutions and to proactively solve problems between countries.

What is the future role of TMEA in Africa's trade integration?

The EAC is an example of how integrated support can drive major gains in trade. The AfCFTA provides an opportunity to take these even further and wider, bringing together 55 African Union member states with a combined population of 1.3 billion. TradeMark is supporting AfCFTA implementation within and across regional economic

communities by helping the Secretariat implement its vision. It is also assisting members at the national level and putting in place cross-border trade facilities and digital systems.

Furthermore, global developments mean that trade facilitation for the future must involve helping the continent tackle rapidly changing shifts in consumer habits and preferences on how goods are produced and transported. It must also help Africa become a pioneer in developing green exports and adopt climate resilient infrastructure. We envisage bringing partners together around a US$ 210 million green corridor programme that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions in trade corridors while helping to safeguard the continent's economic future.

Finally, inclusive trade is essential. In East Africa, around 70% of informal trade is conducted by women. As much as 93% of that trade stopped almost overnight when COVID-19 hit. As we have already seen with crises such as extreme weather events, COVID-19 and high commodity prices, the vulnerable can easily get left behind. So trade facilitation must ensure all segments of the economy are covered. One of the initiatives we are most proud of is our award-winning Safe Trade Emergency Programme, which helped restart both informal and formal trade quickly by promoting safe trade compliant with public health requirements.

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