

Africa's plan to revive global trade for the continent

Since 2014, world trade has declined by more than US\$3 trillion with Sub-Saharan Africa's combined exports falling by about 40% - from US\$403 billion to less than US\$250 billion.



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Amid an unprecedented global trade slowdown, African policy-makers, negotiators and trade analysts are meeting this week in Mauritius to discuss priorities for reviving world trade and strengthening their trading capacity.

Participants will discuss the most pressing trade and development challenges for Commonwealth African member states, in the light of unfavourable global economic and trade patterns, rising protectionism and growing discontent about globalisation.

The meeting will also be an opportunity for reviewing the current issues for multilateral trade negotiations, especially since the World Trade Organisation is hosting its 11th ministerial conference in Buenos Aires in December.

The regional consultation will take into consideration the outcomes of the Commonwealth Trade Ministers' meeting, held in March this year in London, particularly to explore avenues through which intra-Commonwealth trade and investment opportunities can be enhanced.

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The meeting will also provide a platform for African member states to assess various trade policy options, including UK-Africa trade relations post-Brexit, advancing African integration through the Continental Free Trade Agreement, and priority issues for the upcoming Global Review of Aid for Trade in July.

The Commonwealth Secretariat will launch its new Handbook on Regional Integration in Africa: *Towards Agenda 2063 in Mauritius*. The handbook provides a unique resource on current dynamics, opportunities, challenges and policy options for Africa's regional integration agenda. Agenda 2063 is the African Union's strategic framework for the socio-economic transformation of the continent over 50 years.

Past and present trade negotiators will also convene to finalise a proposal to establish an informal Commonwealth African Trade Negotiators Network.

Brendan Vickers, economic adviser at the Commonwealth Secretariat said: “African countries are engaged in a range of global, regional and bilateral negotiations on trade and trade-related issues. However, one of the major challenges confronting Africa is the lack of capacity to undertake trade negotiations, although many experienced negotiators from Africa are willing to help.

“This network aims to bring these negotiators together and provide a ‘think tank’ for Africa for future trade negotiations. Drawing on the collective experience, knowledge and wisdom of present and past trade negotiators, the network will help set out strategic priorities for Africa’s current and future trade agenda, assess opportunities and challenges, brainstorm particular negotiating and policy issues, and explore ways to unlock any impasse in some of the negotiations.”

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