



# BEYOND BORDERS

Accelerating Africa's Trade  
with the World



**DP WORLD**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## AFRICA'S TRADE POTENTIAL

**1.5bn<sup>1</sup>**  
people

**54**  
nations

**\$3tn+**  
GDP



A continent at a turning point: young, connected, resource-rich

Yet only 4%<sup>2</sup> of global trade is from Africa and 10% intra-African trade (vs EU and Asia 60%)

## CHALLENGES HOLDING BACK GROWTH

**\$170bn**  
annual infrastructure need with a \$80bn shortfall<sup>3</sup>

**29%**  
of trade costs is road transport (vs 7% globally)

SMEs face limited finance and weak market intelligence

Reliance on raw commodities, political instability, fragmented customs



## OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

**52.3%<sup>4</sup>**  
AfCFTA could lift intra-African trade by 2035

**70%<sup>5</sup>**  
of sub-Saharan Africa population under 30 = talent and consumer demand

**\$40.49bn**  
E-commerce by 2025<sup>6</sup>

Value-add in agriculture, energy, and digital trade



## DP WORLD'S ROLE IN AFRICA

**50**  
active markets

**30k**  
people

**200+**  
warehouses



**Morocco logistics:**  
70% lower emissions



**Rwanda logistics:**  
truck turnaround cut from 14 to 3 days



**Ivory Coast cocoa trade:**  
\$70m unlocked annually

Enabling trade through ports, rail and road, free zones, trade finance and digitalisation



<sup>1</sup> World Population Review, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/continents/africa> [Accessed 19th February 2026]

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, <https://www.uneca.org/stories/africa%E2%80%99s-economic-outlook-to-remain-solid-in-2026-despite-trade-uncertainty%2C-says-un-report> [Accessed 19th February 2026]

<sup>3</sup> Africa Europe Foundation, <https://www.africaeuropefoundation.org/areas-of-action/new-report-calls-for-unlocking-dollar170-billion-annually-to-meet-africa%27s-infrastructure-needs/> [Accessed 19th February 2026]

<sup>4</sup> The London School of Economics and Political Science, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2023/07/25/the-african-continental-free-trade-area-can-transform-the-economy-of-africa/> [Accessed 19th February 2026]

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, <https://www.un.org/ohrls/news/young-people%E2%80%99s-potential-key-africa%E2%80%99s-sustainable-development> [Accessed 19th February 2026]

<sup>6</sup> Logistics Update Africa, <https://www.logupdateafrica.com/e-commerce/e-commerce-in-africa-unlocking-new-paths-for-economic-growth-1354454> [Accessed 19th February 2026]

# INTRODUCTION: OPPORTUNITIES IN AFRICA

Africa, a continent home to over 1.5 billion people across 54 nations and with a combined, and growing, GDP exceeding \$3 trillion, is fast becoming one of the most dynamic and consequential markets in the global economy.<sup>1</sup>



This burgeoning potential is powered by the convergence of four core forces – youth, innovation, urban dynamism, and digitalisation. All are positioning Africa as a key contributor and player in global growth in the decades ahead.<sup>7</sup>

Trade will be a key part of this trajectory, with an opportunity for African businesses to scale their trading relationships regionally and overseas, and for global enterprises to invest in African markets.<sup>8</sup>

DP World has built significant trade links across the continent by working in partnership with governments, businesses and communities to develop trade-enabling

infrastructure and integrated supply chain solutions. With operations in 84 countries and over 126,000 employees across the globe, the company's presence is rooted in driving economic growth, improving logistics capacity, and enhancing market access for African and global businesses alike.

With many African nations at the cusp of the next generation of young professionals, technology, commerce and innovation, this paper analyses the evolving African trade landscape – its strengths and challenges – and outlines how companies can boost trade across and within the continent for sustainable growth.



**DP World has built significant trade links across the continent by working in partnership with governments, businesses and communities** 



<sup>7</sup> World Bank, <https://databank.worldbank.org/embed/Sub-Saharan-Africa-/id/df94c6bc#:~:text=Population%2C%20total%20516%2C629%2C688,5>, [Accessed 23rd May 2025]

<sup>8</sup> IMF, <https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2024/11/12/the-clock-is-ticking-on-sub-saharan-africas-urgent-job-creation-challenge#:~:text=As%20the%20rest%20of%20the,15%20million%20new%20jobs%20annually> [Accessed 23rd May 2025]

## AFRICA'S TRADE LANDSCAPE: THE CURRENT STATE OF PLAY

Africa accounts for 4% of global trade<sup>2</sup> – an indicator of the continent's underweight integration into the world economy.<sup>9</sup> Intra-African trade, at only 15% of total trade volumes, is also low and stands in contrast to regions like the European Union (60%), Asia (57%), and North America (35%), where regional integration has been a catalyst for economic growth.<sup>10</sup>

**A complex mix of structural, political and logistical challenges shapes this fragmented trade environment.**

While regions such as Europe and parts of Asia have benefited from decades of regulatory alignment and integrated trade frameworks, such as ASEAN, Africa's trade landscape is shaped by a diverse set of national systems and evolving regional frameworks, which can create complexity for cross-border trade. For instance, although multiple regional economic communities (RECs) – including ECOWAS, SADC and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) – exist to foster integration, their impact has been limited by some enduring challenges.



<sup>9</sup> Afreximbank, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1499938/share-of-africa-in-global-goods-trade/> [Accessed 23rd May 2025]

<sup>10</sup> Afreximbank, [https://media.afreximbank.com/afrexim/African-Trade-Report\\_2024.pdf](https://media.afreximbank.com/afrexim/African-Trade-Report_2024.pdf) [Accessed 23rd May 2025]; Eurostat, [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=International\\_trade\\_in\\_goods\\_by\\_partner](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=International_trade_in_goods_by_partner) [Accessed 23rd May 2025]; McKinsey, <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-asia/asia-the-epicenter-of-global-trade-shifts> [Accessed 23rd May 2025]; Business Daily Africa, <https://www.businessdailyafrica.com/bd/opinion-analysis/columnists/rethinking-trade-and-development-4914464> [Accessed 23rd May 2025]



**Political instability and governance issues across many African countries further complicate Africa's trade ambitions**

A key example is infrastructure issues which are common to many African countries. Poor road and rail connectivity, congested ports, and unreliable energy supply increase the cost and time required to move goods across the continent. According to the African Development Bank, Africa needs up to \$170 billion<sup>3</sup> annually in infrastructure investment yet faces a financing gap of as much as \$108 billion.<sup>11</sup> For context, road transport accounts for 29% of the cost of traded goods in Africa – compared with just 7% elsewhere.<sup>12</sup>

Trade is also constrained by a high tariff and non-tariff barriers. Cumbersome customs procedures and inconsistent product standards create a fragmented regulatory landscape that hinders cross-border commerce. These frictions disproportionately affect small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which form the backbone of many African economies which struggle with limited access to credit and high interest rates.<sup>13</sup>

Another barrier is the limited level of industrialisation across many African countries. This means that many

economies export raw commodities – such as oil, minerals, and cocoa – while importing manufactured goods. This limits opportunities for value addition and exposes economies to volatile commodity prices. For example, while West Africa produces the majority of the world's cocoa, much of it is exported unprocessed, meaning producers lose out on the higher-value end of the chocolate supply chain.<sup>14</sup>

Differences in regulatory maturity, policy consistency, and institutional capacity across African markets can further complicate trade ambitions. This is especially challenging for landlocked countries. Without direct access to seaports, they face bottlenecks in the form of higher logistics costs and border delays – particularly when geopolitical tension strikes. This results in trade costs that are, on average, 1.5 times higher than those of coastal nations.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, there is a significant gap in market intelligence. Many African businesses lack access to reliable information and data about demand trends and pricing. This limits their ability to identify new opportunities and make informed decisions in a competitive global market.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> African Development Bank, <https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/public-private-partnerships-needed-bridge-africas-infrastructure-development-gap-65936#:~:text=He%20noted%20that%20the%20African,been%20primary%20investors%20in%20infrastructure> [Accessed 23rd May 2025]

<sup>12</sup> UN Trade and Development, <https://unctad.org/publication/economic-development-africa-report-2024> [Accessed 27th May 2025]

<sup>13</sup> European Investment Bank, <https://www.eib.org/en/publications/online/all/finance-in-africa#:~:text=Despite%20improving%20market%20conditions%2C%20lack,2022%20in%20sub%2DSaharan%20Africa> [Accessed 23rd May 2025]

<sup>14</sup> The Conversation, <https://theconversation.com/why-ghana-doesnt-get-the-full-value-of-its-cocoa-beans-and-how-this-could-change-158773> [Accessed 27th May 2025]

<sup>15</sup> World Bank, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/620801468168857019/pdf/558370PUBCost1COdisclosed071221101.pdf> [Accessed 23rd May 2025]

<sup>16</sup> Pierrine Consulting, <https://www.pierrine-consulting.com/data-inaccuracy-enhancing-in-africa/> [accessed 26 June 2025]

# ADVANCING AFRICA'S TRADE POTENTIAL

While Africa faces considerable trade challenges, the continent also stands at the threshold of a transformative era. A combination of policy shifts, technological innovation, demographic trends and resources signal strong potential for accelerated trade and investment. If harnessed effectively, these drivers could fundamentally reshape Africa's role in the global trading system.

At the heart of this transformation is the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the most ambitious regional integration initiative in Africa's history. With participation from 54 countries, AfCFTA aims to establish a single market for goods and services, reduce trade barriers, and promote deeper regional integration. If delivered with consistent policy frameworks, it could increase intra-African trade by over 52.3%<sup>4</sup> by 2035.

The AfCFTA is, however, one part of advancing increased trade. Growth also depends on stronger, multimodal infrastructure, simpler and more consistent customs rules, fairer access to finance and improved power networks.

Technology is enabling change. Real-time cargo tracking, and digital payments are helping businesses cut costs and reach new markets. Fintech platforms offer low-cost trade finance and faster cross-border transactions.

Demographics present another powerful tailwind. Africa's youthful population – 70% who are under 30<sup>5</sup> – represents not only a growing consumer market but also a future labour force. This demographic offers enormous potential to drive productivity, innovation, and demand across sectors ranging from manufacturing to digital services.<sup>17</sup>

Africa's natural resources also remain a vital trade asset, though local processing and packaging infrastructure will be essential for job creation, better returns and economic value. The continent has also not reached full agricultural capacity, meaning strategic investments in agribusiness, irrigation, logistics, and value addition could enhance food security while increasing export capacity.<sup>18</sup>

The Berbera Corridor is a strategic trade route connecting Berbera Port in Somaliland to Addis Ababa and the wider Ethiopian market. Within this corridor, DP World's role is to anchor the trade route through the operation and expansion of Berbera Port, the development of the Berbera Economic Zone, and support for logistics infrastructure and end-to-end trade services that strengthen Ethiopia's access to international markets. Together, these investments help position the corridor as an increasingly important gateway for regional trade, industrial activity, and cross-border connectivity in the Horn of Africa.

Together, these trends show that with the right mix of infrastructure, regulation, and collaboration, trade across Africa could rapidly increase – within its borders and with the world. To realise this future, regional trade blocs such as ECOWAS and SADC need to coordinate more closely with AfCFTA to avoid duplication and to streamline efforts. But crucially, public and private sectors must also work together to drive the necessary growth and investment.



**New trade finance tools are helping SMEs cross borders with more confidence**



<sup>17</sup> World Economic Forum, <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2023/08/africa-youth-global-growth-digital-economy/> [Accessed 23rd May 2025]

<sup>18</sup> Science for Africa, [https://scienceforafrica.foundation/media-center/data-driven-agricultural-revolution-africa#:~:text=Africa%20is%20home%20to%2060,African%20Development%20Bank%20\(AfDB\)](https://scienceforafrica.foundation/media-center/data-driven-agricultural-revolution-africa#:~:text=Africa%20is%20home%20to%2060,African%20Development%20Bank%20(AfDB)) [Accessed 23rd May 2025]

## DP WORLD AND AFRICA: PARTNERS IN TRADE



DP World has  
just under  
**30K**  
employees, and  
**200+**  
warehouse  
facilities across  
the continent

DP World's commitment to Africa is deep-rooted and enduring. With operations in 50 markets, just under 30,000 employees, more than 200 warehouse facilities and a logistics fleet of over 7,000 vehicles across the continent, the company has become a critical enabler of trade – both within Africa and between Africa and the world.

This partnership is anchored in strategic investment across hard infrastructure – including ports, roads, and rail – and soft infrastructure, such as customs reform, skills development, and trade facilitation frameworks. By combining its core logistics expertise with digital innovation and financial inclusion, DP World is helping to ease the cost of doing business, improve market access, and create a more integrated trading environment.



## IMPROVING MOROCCO'S AGRI-LOGISTICS FOR GLOBAL TRADE

Morocco is emerging as a key agri-logistics hub, yet overland transport to northern Europe via Spain and France remains costly, unpredictable and emissions-intensive.

### SOLUTION

DP World partnered with the Moroccan Fruit Board to develop a dedicated short sea shipping route from the Port of Agadir to London Gateway, with an estimated four-day transit. An optional Antwerp stop expands access to France, Benelux and Germany.

### IMPACT

This initiative, launched at the end of 2025, is expected to cut Scope 3 emissions by up to 70%, while improving reliability and lowering transport costs, strengthening North Africa's position in global perishables supply chains.



## ENABLING TRADE IN ALL DIRECTIONS

DP World's work in Africa centres on three interlocking trade priorities:

### 1. FACILITATING IMPORTS INTO AFRICA

By simplifying customs procedures and offering market intelligence, DP World is improving trade reliability. This reduces operational risk and complexity for new businesses entering African markets. Further, it ensures supply continuity and reduces the likelihood of global brands exiting African markets - outcomes that ultimately benefit local consumers and economies.

### 2. SUPPORTING AFRICAN EXPORTS TO THE WORLD

Through the creation of new free zones – spaces where businesses can process and package their goods before selling them abroad – DP World is helping African companies make their products more competitive in the local and global market. These zones offer processing, manufacturing, and export services that enhance competitiveness and create jobs. The company is also facilitating new trade corridors between Africa and Europe (via Morocco) and Africa and Asia.

### 3. STRENGTHENING DOMESTIC TRADE

Investment in road networks and hinterland logistics ensures faster, more affordable movement of goods across domestic supply chains. This allows economic growth to reach every corner of the continent.

In advancing this work, DP World focuses on enhancing Africa's trading infrastructure and key capabilities in sectors like automotive, while investing in key areas such as trade finance, digitalisation and economic zones.



## STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS WITH IMPACT



DP World is developing the country's

**FIRST**

deepwater port at Banana in the DRC and has embarked on a

**\$165m**

expansion of its container terminal at the Port of Maputo in Mozambique



DP World operates across 50 African markets, offering not just ports but also road freight, last-mile delivery, contract logistics, and freight forwarding. This extensive reach enables manufacturers and businesses to move goods more efficiently between inland markets and global gateways.

DP World's investment in Tanzania's Dar es Salaam Port exemplifies the company's commitment to enhancing trade in the region and creating world-class facilities across Africa. With an initial investment exceeding \$250 million to upgrade the port, Dar es Salaam is poised to play a vital role in connecting regional businesses to global markets.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), DP World is developing the country's first deepwater port at Banana. The initial phase includes a 600-metre quay with an 18-metre draft, capable of handling the largest vessels in operation. The port will have a container handling capacity of approximately 450,000 TEUs per year and a 30-hectare yard for container storage. This development is expected to significantly reduce trade costs and time, enhancing the DRC's access to international markets.

DP World's US\$1.2 billion deepwater port in Ndayane, Senegal – one of its largest investments in Africa – is designed to transform Senegal into a regional trade leader, unlocking new opportunities for

economic growth, employment and global connectivity.

DP World has also embarked on a \$165 million expansion of its container terminal at the Port of Maputo in Mozambique. This project aims to double the terminal's annual throughput capacity from 255,000 TEUs to 530,000 TEUs. Enhancements include extending the quay length to 650 meters, deepening the berth to 16 meters to accommodate post-Panamax vessels, and increasing reefer container capacity to over 700 plugs. The expansion is set to position Maputo as a key trade and logistics hub for Southern Africa, facilitating larger container volumes and a diverse range of commodities.

Complementing the port's expansion, DP World also operates a dry port in Komatipoort, South Africa, strategically located near the Mozambique border. This facility, licensed by the South African Revenue Service (SARS) as a bonded container depot, offers intermodal and warehouse services. It enables seamless transfer of goods between the Port of Maputo and wider South Africa, providing businesses with efficient trade links to international markets through the Maputo Corridor. DP World has also initiated a dedicated rail service – the Maputo–Harare Rail Link – which connects Mozambique and Zimbabwe, significantly improving trade efficiency between the two countries.



## BOLSTERED AUTOMOTIVE SOLUTIONS

Automotive is a key vertical for DP World globally and is a fast-growing sector across Africa.

In Africa, the business has launched an integrated logistics and market-entry service for automotive OEMs operating in sub-Saharan Africa – addressing market entry challenges in one of the world's fastest-growing auto markets.

The service helps automotive OEMs to move aftermarket parts into the region, simplifying the process of entering new markets by combining logistics, compliance and dealer support into a single turnkey offering.

## BETTER FINANCE FOR BETTER TRADE

An ongoing issue in Africa is that traditional lenders hesitate to finance cross-border trade due to a lack of collateral or credit history. Without working capital, SMEs – a significant portion of Africa's economy – can't buy inventory, fulfil orders, or grow. This is especially prevalent in sectors like agriculture, where supply chains are long and seasonal.

In response, DP World Trade Finance was launched, bringing in partners like NedBank, Standard Bank and JP Morgan, to give businesses new ways to access working capital. This reduces financial risk and has unlocked liquidity where traditional banks hesitate.

The platform provides SMEs and large businesses alike with invoice discounting, supply chain finance, and reverse factoring options – without relying on traditional collateral.<sup>19</sup>

In one example, the platform supported a global food company to source cocoa from Ivory Coast – unlocking over \$70 million in new annual trade.<sup>20</sup>

By integrating finance directly into its logistics services, DP World is easing cash flow constraints and enabling businesses to grow at pace.



<sup>19</sup> DP World, <https://www.dpworld.com/cargoes> [Accessed 23rd May 2025]

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.dpworld.com/news/releases/dp-world-trade-finance-and-jp-morgan-collaborate-to-provide-global-working-capital-solutions-in-emerging-markets/> [Accessed 16th June, 2025]

## INVESTMENT IN ECONOMIC ZONES

Central to DP World's global strategy is the development of integrated Economic Zones that foster industrial growth and reduce the cost of doing business. These zones are comprehensive hubs with proximity to major logistics corridors and provide fiscal incentives and customisable facilities, such as warehousing.

A prime example is the DP World Economic Zone in Berbera, located near the Port of Berbera in the Horn of Africa. Developed in partnership with local authorities, the zone is designed to support the area's evolution as a strategic trade and logistics hub for the wider region, including landlocked markets such as Ethiopia. Enabled by special economic zone frameworks, it offers a range of fiscal and non-fiscal incentives, streamlined one-stop registration and licensing, and modern infrastructure including offices, warehousing, and serviced land plots. Supporting a diverse mix of sectors across trade, logistics, manufacturing, and services, and integrated with the expanded port, the zone is contributing to increased trade flows, job creation, and improved market access across the region.

DP World has invested in Rwanda through the Kigali Logistics Platform, East Africa's first inland dry port. Operating under a 35-year

concession since 2019, the 199,000 sqm facility includes ICD and has the capacity to handle around 50,000 TEUs annually, container yards, bonded warehousing capacity of 35,200 sqm, and cold-chain infrastructure. Since launch, it has reduced truck turnaround times from 10 to 14 days to approximately three days, delivering projected annual logistics savings of up to US\$50 million for Rwandan businesses.

Located along the Northern and Central Corridors, the platform connects Rwanda to the ports of Mombasa and Dar es Salaam while serving neighbouring markets including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda and Burundi. In doing so, it strengthens regional trade flows and Rwanda's access to global markets within an interconnected East Africa corridor.

DP World's investment in zones across Africa are establishing vital inland and coastal trade gateways, creating more connections throughout the continent. By integrating physical infrastructure with digital platforms and financial solutions like trade finance, DP World's Economic Zones in Africa are empowering businesses to scale and compete globally, transforming trade into a catalyst for inclusive development.



**DP World's Economic Zones in Africa are empowering businesses to scale and compete globally**





## **CONCLUSION: CHARTING A NEW ERA OF AFRICAN TRADE**

Africa is poised for a trade-driven transformation, with the ingredients to emerge as a powerful global trading force. Realising this potential, however, demands bold, sustained action to remove structural barriers, modernise infrastructure, and foster deeper regional integration.

DP World is playing a catalytic role in this transformation – combining physical infrastructure with digital solutions and trade finance to lower costs, improve efficiency, and expand access to global markets.

Yet trade success cannot be built on investment alone. Lasting progress will depend on meaningful partnerships – between governments, the private sector, and civil society – to shape a fair and opportunity-rich trading future. With unified ambition and strategic action, the continent can chart a bold new course – driving prosperity within its borders and across the global economy.

To learn more of DP World's operations in Africa, and opportunities to trade, please visit [www.dpworld.com/en/supply-chain-solutions/market-access](https://www.dpworld.com/en/supply-chain-solutions/market-access)



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