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FEBRUARY
2026

Exporters' Conference

Bulawayo, Zimbabwe
20-02-2026



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ZIMTRADE ANNUAL EXPORT CONFERENCE SPOTLIGHTS VALUE-ADDITION



Team

THE ZIMTRADE Annual Exporters Conference and Awards, held in Bulawayo on February 20, 2026, set the tone

for renewed efforts to grow Zimbabwe's export earnings through value addition and improved product standards.

Running under the theme "Rooted Locally, Growing Globally," the gathering drew Government officials, captains of industry and exporters, who met to map strategies to strengthen the country's presence in regional and international markets.

President Emmerson Mnangagwa, who delivered the keynote address at the official opening, challenged industry to move away from exporting raw materials.

He urged businesses to intensify value addition and beneficiation, particularly of heritage-based products, as part of efforts to grow the manufacturing sector.

President Mnangagwa said Zimbabwe's industrialisation drive must be anchored on the country's natural resources and local enterprise.

He called on companies to invest in processing, technology transfer and innovation to transform domestic products into globally competitive brands.

In support of exporters, ZimTrade revealed plans to establish strategic in-market warehouses aimed at easing distribution and storage challenges in key markets.

The first facility, in Kasumbalesa, Zambia, currently under development is expected to provide a gateway into the Democratic Republic of Congo and the wider COMESA region.

The development is set to lower logistical costs and improve market access for local producers.

Further developments are earmarked for other markets in Africa and Europe, with plans to further expand the initiatives to Middle-East and Asia.

During the Exporters Conference, ZimTrade signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Standards Association of Zimbabwe (SAZ), which is designed to improve the quality of locally goods, in response to the standards and demands of international markets.

The partnership is expected to bolster the country's quality infrastructure and support the creation of heritage-based national brands that clearly communicate the distinct identity and standards of Zimbabwean products.

The Exporters' Conference adopted a raft of resolutions designed to accelerate sustainable export growth.

Delegates called for increased investment in research and development, as well as stronger protection of intellectual property to safeguard heritage-based products.

High-potential service sectors, including information and communication technology, professional services and the creative industries, were identified as critical frontiers for export expansion.

Participants also stressed the need for greater regulatory alignment and wider use of digital trade platforms to broaden global market reach.

Proceedings closed with the Exporters Awards Gala, where leading firms were recognised for their contribution to export growth, innovation and resilience in a challenging operating environment.



ZimTrade Annual Export Conference & Exporter of the Year Awards



2025



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LOCAL BUSINESSES CAN TAP INTO UGANDA



William Gaviyau

ZIMBABWEAN BUSINESSES

looking to scale into new frontiers are set to gain a significant opportunity at the Zimbabwe-Uganda Business Forum, set for 17 March 2026 in Harare.

The Forum, hosted by ZimTrade, working with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, in collaboration with the Embassy of the Republic of Uganda in Zimbabwe, will include buyers from Uganda actively seeking trade business within the local exporters.

Strategic partnerships with Ugandan firms can ease entry into the market, assist with regulatory compliance and provide on-the-ground market intelligence.

Such collaborations could enable Zimbabwean businesses to respond more effectively to regional demand while strengthening bilateral trade ties.

The forthcoming Zimbabwe-Uganda Business Forum on March 17 is expected to bring together key institutions from both countries.

From Uganda, participants will include the

Uganda Investment Authority, Uganda Private Sector Foundation, Uganda Free Zones and Export Promotions Authority, Uganda Airlines and the Uganda Tourism Board.

Zimbabwean stakeholders will include the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries (CZI), Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce (ZNCC), Zimbabwe Investment and Development Agency (ZIDA) and the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA).

Through policy dialogue, investment promotion and private sector engagement, the Forum is expected to unlock new trade flows, investment prospects and long-term commercial partnerships.

For Zimbabwean companies, the platform offers an entry point into a growing Eastern African economy and a chance to consolidate their presence across Eastern and Southern Africa under existing continental trade frameworks.

Uganda's import demand presents a ready market for Zimbabwean producers seeking to expand their regional footprint.

While overall trade between the two countries has remained relatively modest over the past five years, opportunities lie in the range of goods Uganda continues to source from within the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA).

A significant share of Uganda's imports is supplied by fellow COMESA member states such as Kenya, Egypt, Eswatini and Zambia.

Key products include iron and steel, mineral fuels and precious stones, among others. The trend highlights how regional value chains and preferential trade arrangements are shaping sourcing patterns within the bloc.

As a COMESA member, Zimbabwe is well positioned to plug into these supply chains. Local companies can take advantage of reduced tariffs and improved market access to increase intra-African trade, broaden their export markets and stimulate domestic industrial growth.

Uganda's operating environment further enhances its appeal.

The country has two agricultural harvesting seasons, a relatively liberal foreign exchange regime and a growing population that is driving demand for goods and services.

There are also prospects for in-market production, particularly in agro-processing and manufacturing, with the Uganda Investment Authority offering facilitation and investor support services.

To attend, contact ZimTrade Head Office or Regional Offices in Bulawayo and Mutare for registration.



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ZIM, EGYPT BUSINESS FORUM SET TO BOOST BILATERAL TRADE



Sheron Chingonzo

ZIMBABWE AND EGYPT

are set to deepen economic co-operation as business leaders from the two countries meet at a high-level Business Forum in Harare on March 25, 2026.

The engagement comes as African countries intensify efforts to grow intra-African trade under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), building on momentum from the third Intra-Africa Trade Fair held in Cairo in 2023, where Zimbabwean firms secured export orders and investment agreements.

The Forum is being jointly organised by ZimTrade, the Zimbabwe Investment and Development Agency (ZIDA) and the Embassy of Egypt in Zimbabwe.

The Egyptian delegation will be led by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates, Dr Badr Abdelatty, and will include companies drawn from the energy, mining, infrastructure, construction, agriculture, manufacturing and pharmaceutical sectors.

Deliberations are expected to focus on trade and investment opportunities within the frameworks of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the AfCFTA.

The Forum is designed to move beyond dialogue toward practical outcomes.

The programme will feature technical presentations on trade and investment prospects, as well as sector-focused discussions aimed at unlocking bankable projects and strengthening commercial partnerships.

Egypt's geographic position provides access to North Africa, the Middle East and Europe, making it a strategic entry point for Zimbabwean exporters seeking to expand beyond traditional markets.

With a population of about 119 million and a gross domestic product estimated at US\$395 billion in 2025, Egypt remains one of Africa's largest markets.

Trade between the two countries has largely been concentrated in a narrow range of products, underlining the need for diversification.

Zimbabwe's exports to Egypt reached a peak of

US\$55,8 million in 2020, largely driven by tobacco, before declining to US\$421 000 in 2023 and recovering to US\$7 million in 2024.

In contrast, Egyptian exports to Zimbabwe have grown steadily from US\$16 million in 2020 to US\$39,7 million in 2024, mainly comprising cereals, plastics and pharmaceutical products.

There is scope for Zimbabwe to expand its export basket into the Egyptian market. In horticulture, local producers are scaling up output of citrus, avocados and tea as part of a broader strategy to increase horticultural exports by 2030.

This expansion could position Zimbabwe to supply Egypt's growing demand for fresh produce.

Raw cane sugar and black tea have also been identified as products with room for increased penetration, alongside selected mineral products.

Egypt's strong demand for sesame seeds presents another opening.

Supply chain disruptions in Sudan, traditionally a key supplier to Egypt, have created space for alternative sources, giving Zimbabwean farmers an opportunity to build new trade links.

In the energy and mining sectors, Zimbabwe's lithium reserves offer prospects for value chain partnerships, particularly in processing and renewable energy development, where Egyptian firms have technical expertise and project experience.





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ZIMTRADE PREPARES FOR THE ZIMBABWE – SAUDI ARABIA BUSINESS FORUM



Archford Mabuka

ZIMBABWE and the Kingdom Saudi Arabia are set to strengthen economic cooperation through the ZimTrade–Saudi Arabia Business Forum scheduled for 13 –15 April 2026 in Riyadh.

The high-level engagement, organised by ZimTrade, will convene Government officials, private sector leaders, investors and tourism stakeholders to explore opportunities for deeper collaboration.

The Forum comes at a time when Zimbabwe is intensifying its outreach to Middle Eastern markets, with Saudi Arabia emerging as a strategic partner due to its strong import demand, investment capacity and expanding tourism industry driven by economic diversification reforms.

The Zimbabwe – Saudi Arabia Business Forum is expected to yield tangible outcomes, including new export deals, investment commitments and strengthened institutional collaboration between Zimbabwean and Saudi business support organisations.

The 2026 Business Forum will adopt a holistic approach under the “Visit, Trade and Invest”

mantra, positioning Zimbabwe as a source of quality exports and an attractive tourism destination and investment location.

This integrated framework reflects a deliberate shift toward showcasing Zimbabwe’s full economic value proposition, enabling Saudi stakeholders to engage across multiple sectors while fostering long-term partnerships that extend beyond traditional trade transactions.

Within the Visit pillar, Zimbabwe will highlight its tourism potential, anchored by globally recognised attractions such as Victoria Falls, diverse wildlife experiences and rich cultural heritage.

Engagements with Saudi tour operators, airlines and hospitality investors are expected to promote destination marketing partnerships, enhance travel linkages and unlock investment into tourism infrastructure, thereby supporting Zimbabwe’s ambition to grow visitor arrivals from the Gulf region.

The Trade component will showcase Zimbabwe’s export-ready sectors, particularly horticulture, fresh and processed foods, leather products, building materials and lifestyle goods.

Previous market intelligence and exporter

engagements undertaken by ZimTrade have identified Saudi Arabia as a high-potential market for Zimbabwean horticultural produce such as berries, citrus and vegetables, supported by strong consumer demand and the Kingdom's reliance on food imports.

The Forum will therefore provide a platform for business-to-business engagements aimed at securing distribution partnerships, supply contracts and market entry collaborations.

The Invest pillar will position Zimbabwe as a competitive destination for Saudi capital seeking opportunities in agriculture, mining, renewable energy, infrastructure and tourism facilities.

As Saudi investors increasingly explore Africa in pursuit of food security, resource diversification and hospitality expansion, Zimbabwe offers a compelling proposition characterised by natural resource endowment, agricultural potential and an

improving investment climate.

The Forum is expected to facilitate project pitching sessions and investment dialogues designed to match Saudi financiers with bankable Zimbabwean opportunities.

The Business Forum builds on growing bilateral engagement between Zimbabwe and Saudi Arabia, underpinned by increasing diplomatic exchanges and private sector interactions.

For Zimbabwe, Saudi Arabia represents a gateway into the broader Gulf region and a high-income consumer market with demand for premium products, while for Saudi Arabia, Zimbabwe provides opportunities in agriculture, mining and tourism that align with the Kingdom's outward investment strategy.

The Riyadh engagement therefore reflects mutual interest in translating political goodwill into commercially viable partnerships.

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5 WOMEN TAKE CENTRE STAGE IN HONEY VALUE CHAIN DRIVE



Runyararo Mukahanana

IN THE communal lands of Masvingo, efforts to transform the honey value chain are taking shape, with a deliberate focus on widening economic space for women and strengthening value addition.

ZimTrade convened a validation workshop from February 9 to 12, 2025, bringing together Agritex, the Ministry of Women Affairs, Small and Medium Enterprises Development, the Forestry Commission and local beekeeping clusters.

The meeting considered and adopted a five-year gender strategy under the ZimBee project.

The ZimBee initiative seeks to industrialise the honey value chain through inclusive participation, innovation and structured market development.

Discussions centred on a Strategic Gender Monitoring and Evaluation framework, a capacity development plan and a Gender Strategy covering the period 2026 to 2031.

The frameworks are intended to address gaps that have limited women's effective participation in apiculture.

Participants examined ways of integrating gender considerations across the value chain, from production and processing to value addition and export readiness.

Practical measures were agreed to incorporate gender-sensitive indicators into project planning and assessment, supported by baseline studies and periodic reviews to track economic outcomes. Deliberations identified priority areas that include strengthening cooperative governance to ensure women are represented in decision-making structures, supporting women-led enterprises to grow into competitive businesses and enhancing technical, leadership and negotiation skills among female beekeepers.

Value addition remains a key focus, particularly in the production of pharmaceutical-grade honey and industrial beeswax.

Addressing constraints related to finance, equipment and technology is expected to enable women to participate more meaningfully in processing and marketing activities.

The workshop also facilitated knowledge sharing between experienced beekeepers and younger participants, combining indigenous practices with climate-conscious production methods.

Such exchanges are expected to strengthen resilience within the sector while improving quality standards required for formal markets.

Alignment with national gender policies and the Sustainable Development Goals positions the project within Zimbabwe's broader development framework.

Cooperation among Government departments, technical agencies and community groups is expected to support implementation.





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ZIMBABWE TARGETS BROADER ACCESS TO CHINESE MARKET UNDER ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP



Luckson Chimundiza

ZIMBABWE IS moving to conclude a Framework Agreement on Economic Partnership for Shared Development with

China, a development expected to widen export opportunities into the world's second-largest economy.

Once finalised, the agreement is expected to deepen economic ties between Zimbabwe and China while creating new avenues for export diversification and industrial expansion.

The proposed agreement follows engagements at the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) held in Beijing in September 2024.

It seeks to ease tariff and non-tariff barriers affecting Zimbabwean products while supporting domestic production and long-term industrial growth.

ZimTrade has been participating in industry consultations, promoting improved access in sectors where Zimbabwe holds competitive advantages.

Progress has already been recorded through product-specific arrangements and phytosanitary protocols that have opened the Chinese market to fresh avocados, blueberries and citrus under duty-free conditions.

Currently, Zimbabwe's exports to China are largely concentrated in tobacco, mineral ores, iron and steel.

However, prospects exist to broaden the export base.

The country's climatic conditions and distinct harvesting seasons enable counter-seasonal supply, offering scope for competitive pricing in agricultural produce.

Products identified for possible expansion include bird's eye chilli, paprika, coffee, tea, macadamia nuts and selected spices.

Opportunities are also emerging beyond primary agriculture.

China maintains strong import demand for essential oils, wood products and cotton, areas where Zimbabwe has production capacity that can be further developed.

Value addition is expected to feature prominently in the partnership.

Moving from raw material exports to processed goods will allow Zimbabwean firms to capture higher returns and strengthen linkages within the domestic economy.

The draft framework aligns with the National Development Strategy, incorporating provisions that support industrial development, technology transfer and manufacturing growth.

Efforts to streamline trade procedures form part of the negotiations.

Reducing administrative and regulatory bottlenecks will improve market entry conditions and enhance the competitiveness of local exporters.



To fully benefit, producers will need to strengthen traceability systems, comply with certification requirements, standardise quality and invest in branding.

Scaling up production to meet volume requirements will also be critical.



4

TRANSFORMING RURAL LIVELIHOODS THROUGH EXPORT AGGREGATION CENTRES



Maxmillan Chikwati

EXPORTING FARM produce in Zimbabwe is often spoken of as a distant aspiration, something reserved for large commercial producers with highly mechanised farms and deep pockets.

Yet the reality is steadily changing. The majority of farmland in Zimbabwe is in the hands of smallholder farmers. They dominate production in many key commodities, especially in horticulture and they contribute significantly to food security, employment, and community stability.

For years, however, their participation in formal export markets has been minimal, not because of lack of potential, but because of structural challenges: limited volumes, inconsistent quality, fragmented marketing, lack of certification, weak infrastructure, and constrained access to finance.

When a farmer is forced to sell to a local trader at the farm gate, the idea of supplying a buyer in Lusaka, Nairobi, Dubai, or Rotterdam can sound like a story told at workshops rather than

a real opportunity.

This is where export clusters become a game changer.

Clusters organise smallholder farmers into vibrant production units. Farmers within a cluster grow products under guided agronomic practices, follow shared standards, and coordinate planting and harvesting to meet specific market requirements.

The cluster model enables them to aggregate volumes, negotiate better prices, and present themselves as reliable, consistent suppliers, rather than one-off, informal actors.

It also makes it far easier to deliver training, introduce quality management systems, and facilitate certification when farmers are organised in this way.

Aggregation centres sit at the heart of making these clusters truly functional. Instead of each farmer trying to grade, cool, and transport produce individually, aggregation centers serve as central points where goods are delivered, sorted, weighed, and prepared for dispatch.

When properly equipped, these centres offer cold

rooms, packing, storage, and sometimes basic grading.

This significantly reduces post-harvest losses and ensures that quality is maintained from field to market.

Kenya's experience offers valuable lessons for Zimbabwe.

There, smallholder horticulture has grown into a major export driver because farmers are integrated into organised value chains built around aggregation centres and export hubs.



District-level facilities provide cold storage, grading, and packaging services, enabling even the smallest of producers to participate. Rather than expecting each farmer to meet every logistical and infrastructural demand alone, the system shares these functions across the chain.

Zimbabwe does not need to reinvent the wheel. Through adopting similar models and aligning them with our own cluster initiatives, we can create a clear route from rural fields to international shelves.

Partnerships are another crucial ingredient in turning the export dream into a lived reality. Organisations such as Takura and Kuminda have been working closely with smallholder farmers to build capacity and connect them to export opportunities.

Through technical assistance, market linkage, and support along the value chain, they help farmers navigate complex requirements ranging from agronomy and quality control to documentation, logistics, and buyer engagement.

These partners often invest in training on standards, facilitate off-take agreements, and help negotiate fairer terms, ensuring that farmers are active players in the export value chain.

At the same time, the conversation about smallholder exports must move beyond raw commodities to focus on beneficiation and deeper value chains.

Selling unprocessed produce is usually the lowest rung of the value ladder; the further a product travels along the chain before leaving the country, the more income and jobs are retained locally.

For smallholders, this means looking beyond simply harvesting and selling fresh goods to exploring opportunities for value addition: drying herbs and vegetables, extracting oils, producing purees and juices, or improving packaging and branding.

When basic processing is located close to production areas, ideally at or near aggregation centres, it stimulates rural enterprise development, creates employment for youth and women, and ensures that a larger share of export earnings remains within farming communities.

To fully realise this potential, some strategic shifts are essential.

First, we must scale up export clusters across provinces with clear governance structures that build trust, transparency, and accountability.

Second, investment in aggregation and export supply hubs should be treated as core trade infrastructure.

These centres need to be designed with export standards in mind, incorporating cold-chain systems, quality control processes, and digital traceability from the outset.

Moreso, certification and compliance support must be tailored to smallholders, using group schemes and cluster-based audits to reduce costs and administrative burdens.

Fourth, financing instruments should recognise the realities of agricultural and export cycles, using clusters, contracts, and value-chain linkages to de-risk lending and attract patient capital.

Ultimately, the narrative must shift.

Exporting as a smallholder farmer should no longer be framed as an improbable dream sold at conferences, but as a structured journey with proven models, and real success stories.





5

ZIMBABWE'S NEXT ECONOMIC FRONTIER: SERVICES EXPORTS



Vellie Dube

GLOBAL TRADE is undergoing a fundamental transformation, with services emerging as the world's most dynamic export

category.

In 2024, global services exports reached US\$8,9 trillion, growing 10 percent year on year and recording the strongest gains in digitally deliverable sectors.

Africa led the world with 16 percent growth, signalling a structural shift in the continent's participation in global value chains.

Data from UNCTAD confirms this momentum, showing worldwide services exports grew 8.2 percent in the first quarter of 2024 alone, with international travel recovering by nearly 20 percent and ICT-related services continuing to expand across all major regions.

Countries that have aggressively developed their digital services industries are reaping substantial rewards include Ireland, which posted around US\$70,5 billion services trade surplus in 2024, driven largely by computer services exports that

reached around US\$329 billion.

For Zimbabwe, this global shift arrives at a critical moment.

Zimbabwe retains one of Africa's strongest human capital foundations.

Universities and technical colleges continue to produce skilled graduates in fields ranging from ICT to engineering, but many remain underutilised due to limited opportunities in traditional sectors such as manufacturing and agriculture.

This mismatch between talent and opportunity creates a strategic opening, for example, export of digitally deliverable services, including software development, customer support, creative services, data processing, and professional support roles. Bulawayo, historically Zimbabwe's industrial centre, is particularly well-positioned to reinvent itself as a regional player in services exports.

With proximity to institutions such as the National University of Science and Technology, Bulawayo Polytechnic, Solusi University, and nearby universities in Gwanda, Lupane, and Midlands, the city possesses a deep pool of trained but underutilised talent.

Collaboration between local IT firms, freelancers, and universities could unlock large-scale participation in the global outsourcing economy and transform Bulawayo from a declining industrial hub into a thriving digital services centre.

Examples from across Africa demonstrate what is possible.

Nigeria's digital economy continues to expand, with ICT contributing approximately 20 percent to GDP in the second quarter of 2024, driven by increased broadband access, cloud adoption, and digital skills initiatives.

The country's IT services market is growing rapidly as businesses invest in outsourcing, cybersecurity, and cloud technologies.

Zimbabwe can adopt similar policy pathways, learning from Nigeria's experience in creating an enabling environment for digital services exports.

To fully harness the potential of service exports, Zimbabwe must prioritize four critical areas.

First, reliable infrastructure is non-negotiable including stable electricity and affordable broadband are prerequisites for global competitiveness in ICT and business process outsourcing.

Second, talent alignment requires urgent attention, with training in digital skills such as coding, cloud computing, analytics, and remote service delivery serving as the cornerstone of any successful services export strategy.

Third, export enablement through institutions like ZimTrade can expand certification programmes, market access support, and service export promotion, creating pathways for local firms to reach international clients.

Fourth, professional mobility agreements that facilitate structured international placements for nurses, teachers, and specialised professionals can generate foreign income while simultaneously easing youth unemployment and building global networks.





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