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ZIMTRADE-BACKED FIRMS SET FOR ZITF 2026



FOR A small-scale honey producer in rural Mutare, the dream of tanding before regional

buyers and showcasing her product alongside established exporters once felt impossibly distant.

When the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair (ZITF) 2026 opens its doors, eight businesses, drawn from youth-led enterprises, women-owned companies, and rural clusters, will take their place at the ZimTrade pavilion.

For these businesses, the journey to the exhibition floor has been one of preparation, mentorship, and transformation, guided by ZimTrade's commitment to ensuring that export growth is inclusive and far-reaching.

ZimTrade will participate at ZITF 2026 under the sub-theme "Exports Driving Connected and Competitive Economies," telling the story of how these businesses have been empowered to drive exports.

The participating companies represent a diverse range of sectors, each bringing a unique story of Zimbabwean ingenuity.

Among them are agro-processors offering honey and chilli products that capture the richness of the country's soils.

Fresh horticultural producers will showcase hydroponically grown strawberries and lettuce chips, demonstrating the innovation emerging from Zimbabwe's agricultural sector.

Leather products and high-end customised clothing reflect the craftsmanship of local artisans, while handcrafted woven baskets speak to traditions passed down through generations.

What unites these businesses is the journey they are preparing to take in international trade.

ZITF will offer a significant platform for them to understand how trade fairs work and a platform for them to sharpen their negotiation skills and expand their businesses locally.

This exposure represents a critical step toward accessing new markets, building buyer relationships, and translating interest into tangible export orders.

ZimTrade has conducted extensive preparatory work to ensure that each exhibitor is ready to engage.

Company visits have been carried out to assess product readiness, branding alignment, and export positioning.

These intensive engagements are designed to identify gaps, strengthen presentation, and build the confidence of entrepreneurs who will be stepping onto a national stage for the first time.

For the honey producer from Mutare, those preparatory visits made all the difference.

“When ZimTrade first came to see my operation, I was nervous,” she recalls.

“I knew my honey was good, but I had never thought about how it looks to a buyer.

“They helped me understand packaging, consistency, and how to tell the story of where my honey comes from.

“Now I feel ready.”

A young leather goods designer from Bulawayo shares a similar experience.

“I have been making products for years, selling to people who find me through word of mouth.

“But preparing for ZITF has forced me to think differently.

“The support from ZimTrade has been hands-on, helping me refine not just what I make, but how I present it.”

The ZimTrade pavilion at ZITF 2026 will serve as a dynamic hub for business-to-business engagements, networking, and knowledge exchange.

For the eight businesses being featured, the impact of this participation offers a platform to demonstrate their capabilities and attract opportunities that might otherwise remain out of reach. .





2 ZIMBABWE LAUNCHES SHETRADES HUB



Tatenda Machirori

ZIMBABWE RECENTLY launched the SheTrades Zimbabwe Hub through a partnership

between ZimTrade and the International Trade Centre (ITC), creating a new platform to support women-led businesses seeking access to international markets.

The hub will provide training, market intelligence and business development support, while linking entrepreneurs to buyers and global value chains.

It forms part of the global SheTrades Initiative, which focuses on removing barriers that limit women's participation in trade and improving their access to economic opportunities.

Women entrepreneurs are expected to benefit from targeted capacity building, improved access to finance and greater exposure to international standards required for export competitiveness.

The facility will also bring together public and private sector players working to promote inclusive trade and strengthen coordination in supporting women-led enterprises.

The SheTrades Initiative, launched by the ITC in 2015, works to connect women entrepreneurs to markets while also addressing structural constraints affecting their businesses.

The Zimbabwe hub is one of more than 20 established globally and among a growing number across Africa, reflecting wider efforts to expand opportunities for women in international trade.

The platform offers a pathway for businesses to move from small-scale production to competitive participation in export markets.

Efforts under the initiative include strengthening business skills, facilitating market access and supporting policy reforms that encourage inclusive participation in trade.

Country hubs play a central role in delivering these interventions at national level, ensuring that support is aligned to local conditions.

In Zimbabwe, the hub builds on ongoing work under the ZimTrade-powered Nest She Exporter programme, which has focused on supporting women in sectors such as processed foods, manufacturing, arts and crafts, essential oils and beauty products.

The programme has prioritised compliance with export standards, product development and market linkages.

Recent developments have highlighted the impact of this support.

Earlier this month, a delegation of 12 Zimbabwean women entrepreneurs travelled to the United Kingdom, where they participated in business-to-business meetings and market visits in London, Bradford and Manchester.

The mission, facilitated by ZimTrade and the ITC, included practical training in branding, packaging and certification.

Participants showcased products derived from local resources, including natural herbs, pointing to the potential within Zimbabwe's natural products sector.

Enterprises that participated in the mission secured promising leads, while others gained insight into logistics, quality requirements and buyer expectations in international markets.

The experience revealed the importance of structured support in helping small enterprises transition into export-ready operations.

The launch of the SheTrades Zimbabwe Hub follows these engagements and is expected to extend similar opportunities to a broader group of women-led businesses across the country.

Zimbabwe's export earnings have continued to grow, reaching approximately US\$9.71 billion in 2025.

Despite this progress, women-led enterprises, which account for more than 60 percent of the workforce, contribute less than five percent to export trade.

This gap has been linked to limited access to finance, insufficient exposure to global markets and fragmented support systems.

Many small businesses face challenges in meeting export requirements or establishing connections with international buyers.

The SheTrades Zimbabwe Hub is expected to address these challenges through coordinated support and stronger linkages to global networks.



3 CHINESE HORTICULTURAL BUYERS PREPARE TO SECURE TRADE DEALS



Dorcas Makotore

ZIMBABWEAN HORTICULTURE

producers will engage Chinese buyers in Mutare from April 8 to 10 during the Zimbabwe–China Horticulture Buyers Engagement organised by ZimTrade.

The three-day programme will centre on direct business-to-business meetings between Zimbabwean producers and Chinese importers, wholesalers and retailers.

The engagements are designed to facilitate export deals and build lasting trade relationships, particularly in high-value crops such as macadamia nuts, citrus, avocados and blueberries.

Farm visits and packhouse tours have been lined up to give visiting buyers a closer look at production systems, post-harvest handling and compliance with export standards.

The tours are expected to provide practical insight into how Zimbabwean producers are managing quality, volumes and traceability, which are all key considerations for entry into the Chinese market.

The event will also highlight investment opportunities within the horticulture value chain. Gaps in cold chain infrastructure, transport logistics and agro-processing continue to affect the

sector’s ability to compete effectively, particularly in distant markets such as China.

Addressing these constraints is seen as critical to sustaining export growth.

The upcoming engagement is also expected to provide a platform for learning and exchange.

Producers will have the opportunity to receive feedback from buyers, while also gaining a clearer understanding of expectations in terms of quality, consistency and supply capacity.

The engagement comes as Zimbabwe intensifies efforts to increase horticultural exports, supported by rising demand for fresh produce in China and improved access to that market.

Macadamia nuts and citrus remain the country’s leading horticultural exports to China.

Attention is now shifting to avocados and blueberries, which have recently secured access to the Chinese market following the finalisation of export protocols.

These protocols, agreed between Zimbabwe and China, set out the phytosanitary and food safety requirements that exporters must meet.

They also provide a structured pathway for local producers to enter the market, covering areas such as pest control, grading, packaging and traceability.

Efforts are also being directed at strengthening the capacity of local producers to participate in export markets.

Experience from recent programmes has shown that production alone is not enough.

Businesses must meet strict international standards, invest in proper packaging and branding, and establish reliable connections with buyers.

Smaller producers, including women-led enterprises, often face additional barriers such as limited access to finance, certification processes and market information.

Addressing these challenges has become a key focus area, with stakeholders calling for more coordinated support systems that can help businesses scale up for export.

Structured engagements such as the Mutare event are increasingly being used to bridge this gap.

Direct interaction between producers and buyers is critical in building trust, understanding market requirements and unlocking new opportunities.

Zimbabwe’s horticulture sector continues to attract interest as global demand for high-quality fresh produce grows.

Expanding exports to China is viewed as part of broader efforts to diversify the country’s export base and reduce reliance on traditional commodities.



3

ZIMBABWE MUST PRODUCE AND TRADE CLOSER TO HOME



ESCALATING TENSIONS

in the Middle East, particularly involving Iran, Israel and the United States, have undoubtedly

unsettled global markets.

While geographically distant, such developments carry direct implications for economies like Zimbabwe that remain closely tied to global supply chains for energy and key industrial inputs.

For example, the Strait of Hormuz, a critical artery for global oil transit, has come into sharp focus and any threat to this route immediately pushes oil prices upward.

Recent movements in Brent crude and the corresponding increase in domestic fuel prices are a clear indication of how quickly external shocks transmit into the local economy.

For Zimbabwe, rising fuel costs translate into higher production expenses, increased transport charges and upward pressure on prices across sectors.

Manufacturing, mining and agriculture all feel the strain.

This is not a new pattern, but the frequency and intensity of such disruptions are increasing.

What is changing is the global trading environment itself.

Supply chains are becoming less predictable, geopolitical tensions are reshaping trade routes, and

access to critical inputs is increasingly influenced by factors beyond pure market dynamics.

In this environment, dependence on distant markets exposes economies to risks that are difficult to manage through domestic policy alone.

This places renewed emphasis on localisation of investment and a stronger focus on trade within Africa.

Localisation in this context is about building productive capacity within Zimbabwe and across the continent.

It speaks to increasing the share of goods that are produced, processed and consumed within regional markets.

This approach reduces exposure to external volatility while strengthening domestic industries and creating more sustainable growth pathways

The place for regional value chains

Regional value chains become particularly important under these conditions.

They allow countries to participate in different stages of production while remaining connected within a continental framework.

Instead of exporting raw materials and importing finished products at higher cost, production processes can be distributed across countries, with each contributing based on comparative advantage

Zimbabwe's economic structure provides a strong basis for this model.

The country has significant mineral resources, a diverse agricultural sector and an industrial base that retains capacity for expansion.

Linking these strengths with regional partners can unlock greater value than operating in isolation.

In the mining sector, there is scope to move beyond extraction towards processing and beneficiation within the region.

Minerals produced in Zimbabwe can feed into regional refining and manufacturing processes, reducing reliance on external markets that may be affected by geopolitical disruptions.

Many inputs, including fertilisers, are imported from outside the continent, leaving farmers exposed to global supply shocks.

Strengthening regional production and distribution systems for such inputs would improve reliability and reduce costs over time.

Manufacturing stands to benefit from access to a broader market and a more integrated supply base.

Firms can source intermediate goods from neighbouring countries, reduce lead times and improve competitiveness.

At the same time, a larger market supports increased production volumes, making investment in industrial capacity more viable.

In periods of global uncertainty, regional value chains provide a degree of stability.

Shorter supply routes, reduced exposure to global shipping disruptions and closer coordination between trading partners all contribute to a more resilient system

Africa's free trade area

This is where the African Continental Free Trade Area becomes central to the discussion.

AfCFTA provides the framework to expand trade within Africa by lowering tariffs, addressing non-tariff barriers and creating a single market.

For Zimbabwean businesses, this opens access to a market of over a billion people, with opportunities to diversify exports and reduce dependence on traditional trading partners outside the continent.

More importantly, AfCFTA supports the development of regional value chains by enabling the free flow of goods, and services.

A larger, integrated market allows countries to specialise and scale production in ways that are not possible within smaller domestic markets.

In the current global context, this is no longer a theoretical benefit, but rather it becomes a practical tool for managing risk.

When global supply chains are disrupted, having established trade links within Africa allows businesses to pivot more easily.

Inputs can be sourced from regional partners, and products can be redirected to alternative markets within the continent.

This flexibility is critical in maintaining production and stabilising revenues.

For Zimbabwe, leveraging AfCFTA requires a deliberate and coordinated approach.

What is important to note is that Zimbabwe is not starting from zero.

Existing trade relationships within the Southern African Development Community provide a foundation that can be expanded under AfCFTA.

The task now is to deepen these linkages and align them with a broader continental strategy.

This requires a shift in mindset.

Africa must increasingly be viewed as a primary market and production base, rather than a secondary option.

For Zimbabwean businesses, this means rethinking export strategies, supply chains and investment decisions.

The benefits extend beyond resilience.

Increased trade within Africa supports industrialisation, job creation and value addition.

It allows countries to retain more value from their resources and reduces the structural trade imbalances that have persisted for decades.

Global disruptions will continue to occur.

Whether driven by geopolitical tensions, economic shifts or environmental factors, uncertainty is likely to remain a defining feature of the global economy.

The response, therefore, must be strategic and not reactive.

Priority areas

Priorities need to align with sectors that support value addition and regional integration.

This includes processing industries, agro-industrial value chains and manufacturing activities that can feed into continental supply networks.

Infrastructure development remains a key enabler.

Efficient transport systems, reliable energy supply and modern border facilities are essential for reducing the cost of doing business across the region.

Without these, the potential benefits of AfCFTA and regional value chains will not be fully realised.

Policy consistency is equally important.

Businesses require a predictable environment to expand, and simplifying customs procedures, aligning standards and addressing non-tariff barriers will enhance the ease with which private sector can operate across borders.

The private sector must also take a proactive role.

Opportunities within African markets need to be actively pursued.

This involves building partnerships, understanding market requirements and adapting products to meet regional demand.

Success within AfCFTA will depend as much on business strategy as it does on policy frameworks.

Access to information also becomes critical. Market intelligence, trade data and insights into regulatory environments will enable businesses to make informed decisions.

In a more integrated African market, competitiveness will be shaped by how well businesses understand and respond to these dynamics.

There is also a financing dimension.



Supporting regional value chains requires capital, for production, processing and trade facilitation.

Financial institutions have a role to play in developing products that support cross-border trade and investment within Africa.



6

CHIMANIMANI AND CHIPINGE FARMERS PREPARE FOR EXPORT CERTIFICATION



Kingston Gwatidza

MORE THAN 400 smallholder farmers in Chimanimani and Chipinge are moving towards organic avocado certification

under a programme implemented by ZimTrade, a development expected to open access to premium export markets.

The initiative is guiding farmers through the requirements for internationally recognised organic certification, including compliance standards, record-keeping and production practices.

It forms part of wider efforts to strengthen export readiness within Zimbabwe’s agricultural sector.

Farmers involved in the programme are being trained to meet strict organic standards, positioning them to supply high-value markets where demand for certified produce continues to grow.

The process is also laying the groundwork for stronger links between smallholder producers and international buyers.

Many international buyers and retailers require proof of compliance with organic standards before entering into supply agreements, making certification a necessary step for exporters.

The focus on organic production further promotes sustainable farming practices, including reduced reliance on synthetic inputs and improved soil management.

These approaches are expected to support long-term productivity while aligning with global market expectations.

ZimTrade’s intervention in Chimanimani and Chipinge is aimed at helping smallholder farmers meet these requirements while improving their ability to compete in global markets.

The programme combines technical support with efforts to strengthen market linkages, ensuring that farmers are better prepared to participate in export trade

In districts such as Chipinge and Chimanimani, agriculture has largely been centred on subsistence farming, with limited integration into formal markets.

Improved access to export opportunities is expected to support income growth and create more stable livelihoods for rural households.

The programme also incorporates value addition through avocado oil production, allowing farmers to move beyond selling raw produce.

Processing avocados into oil reduces post-harvest losses and extends shelf life, making it easier to access distant markets while improving returns.

Avocado oil has become an increasingly sought-after product globally, used in both food and cosmetic industries.

Converting raw avocados into oil enables producers to tap into these markets, where demand is driven by changing consumer preferences and growing interest in natural and health-focused products.

Organic certification is a key requirement in accessing higher-value segments of this market.

Certified organic avocado oil attracts a premium compared to conventional products, particularly in Europe and parts of the Asia-Pacific region, where consumers are placing greater emphasis on quality and sustainability.

Organic avocado oil is also gaining ground in the cosmetics and personal care industry, further expanding its market potential.



This diversification provides an additional buffer for producers, reducing reliance on a single market segment.



7

YOUNG AGRIBUSINESS ENTREPRENEURS GO FROM INFORMAL TO EXPORT READY



Kuda Tirivavi

FOR MANY young entrepreneurs in Bulawayo and Mutare, the journey from growing vegetables or processing value-added products in their backyards to supplying formal markets has always felt like a bridge too far.

Their products are promising, their passion is undeniable, but the gap between a thriving local venture and an export-ready business has often seemed insurmountable.

However, with access to the right information and capacitation, youth-agribusiness has a chance to contribute significantly to the growing global demand for Zimbabwean produce.

Under the Export Readiness Accelerator, part of the Youth Green Transition Project implemented by Hivos in partnership with the Bulawayo Vendors and Traders Association and Green Governance Zimbabwe Trust, young agribusiness owners are gaining the practical tools they need to formalize

their operations and step confidently into the world of trade.

For ZimTrade, being part of this initiative is about recognising the untapped potential in a generation of entrepreneurs who are already producing, and who now need the scaffolding to build sustainable, competitive enterprises.

The need for such support became evident through the stories of the participants themselves.

Here are young people who understand their soils, who know how to grow, and who have built small customer bases through sheer determination.

But when asked to consider supplying a regional buyer, or even a local supermarket chain, many encounter obstacles they were never taught to navigate.

What should the label say?

How do you ensure every batch tastes or looks the

same? What records do you keep to prove your product is safe?

How do you price when you factor in transport, certification, and packaging?

The Export Readiness Accelerator was designed with these realities in mind. It is not a generic business course but a focused, practical programme that walks young entrepreneurs through the exact steps required to move from informal trading to formal market participation.

Sessions cover export procedures, standards and certifications, branding, pricing, logistics, digital marketing, and market entry strategies.

For a young farmer who has never considered what a phytosanitary certificate is, or a small-scale processor who has been selling in unbranded

containers, this knowledge is transformative. It turns ambition into a roadmap.

Ongoing technical support and a dedicated mentorship component ensure that participants receive guidance as they begin applying what they have learned.

Mentors work alongside them, helping to refine product offers, improve business documentation, and identify the most suitable routes to market.

For many young entrepreneurs, this consistent, personal support makes the difference between giving up and growing.

These participants will get a chance to practice what they have learnt when they attend the upcoming Zimbabwe International Trade Fair (ZITF) 2026 under the Hivos banner.

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8

EMPOWERING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS THROUGH SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT



Pelatia Choto

FOR YEARS, Vimbai Caroline Kaitano has built her agribusiness from the ground up.

What began as a small backyard nursery has now grown into Carol's seedlings and vegetables, a lucrative agribusiness.

Her vision for the company is to export seedlings regionally.

However, to do that, she requires market intelligence, the necessary skills to confidently sell her company to international buyers.

Vimbai's experience is one shared by countless female entrepreneurs across Zimbabwe, who are passionate about what they do but are faced with the demands of formal markets which end up discouraging them to grow.

On 19 March 2026, 50 female entrepreneurs in various sectors attended a soft skills training facilitated by ZimTrade and the International Trade Centre, held at Jameson Hotel, for a transformative learning experience.

The training, which is also a part of the She Trades

Hub Zimbabwe, helped participants understand the role of soft skills in shaping business outcomes.

Building your personal development is integral to your business's growth and success.

In today's increasingly competitive business environment the ability to communicate effectively, build strong professional relationships, and confidently present one's business is critical.

Recognising this, the training focused on strengthening the often-overlooked soft skills that are essential for business growth, sustainability, and export readiness.

From the outset, the atmosphere was one of enthusiasm and openness, as participants gathered to learn, share experiences, and build connections.

Through guided discussions and interactive exercises, the participants explored concepts such as emotional intelligence, adaptability, professionalism, and resilience.

These are critical attributes for entrepreneurs

navigating uncertain markets, managing teams, and building lasting business relationships.

Many women entrepreneurs face barriers that go beyond access to finance or markets, including self-doubt and limited exposure to high-level business environments.

Whether engaging with potential clients, negotiating with partners, or presenting to investors, the ability to communicate effectively can significantly influence outcomes.

The training sought to address this by equipping participants with the mindset and tools needed to assert themselves, articulate their value, and seize opportunities with confidence.

Communication and pitching emerged as central themes of the training.

Participants were guided through the fundamentals of clear, purposeful communication, learning how to tailor their messaging to different audiences and contexts.

The pitching component of the training was particularly impactful.

Through practical exercises and peer feedback, participants gained hands-on experience in presenting their businesses with clarity and confidence.

For many, including Vimbai, this was an opportunity to step out of their comfort zones and find their voice as entrepreneurs.

Beyond individual skill development, the training also introduced participants to a range of SheTrades tools and resources that will be available through the SheTrades Hub.

These tools are designed to support women entre-

preneurs in key areas such as market access, business development, and digital engagement.

When leveraging these resources, participants can continue building on the knowledge gained during the training and strengthen their competitiveness in both local and international markets.

What stood out throughout the training was the spirit of collaboration and mutual support among participants.

The exchange of ideas, experiences, and encouragement created a sense of community that is vital for sustained growth.

Women were not only learning from the facilitators but also from each other, drawing inspiration from shared challenges and successes.

The soft skills training is a clear example of how targeted interventions can make a meaningful difference.

Investing in the personal and professional development of women entrepreneurs means individual businesses are strengthened.

The SheTrades Hub itself represents an important step towards creating a supportive ecosystem for women in business.

It provides a platform for ongoing learning, collaboration, and access to opportunities, ensuring that the impact of initiatives such as this training extends beyond a single day.

“What stood out for me was the focus on soft skills, which are often neglected in traditional business programmes,” said Vimbai.

“This training has given me the tools to step into spaces I never thought I could, and I feel truly motivated to take my business to the next level.”





9 STRENGTHENING HERITAGE PRODUCTS FOR EXPORT MARKETS



Nozipho Maphala

ZIMTRADE IS scaling up technical support for producers in the Southern Region as part of a deliberate push to strengthen the development of heritage-based products for export markets.

The interventions, covering handicrafts, honey, fashion and heritage fruit-based beverages, reflect a practical and targeted approach to addressing some of the key constraints that continue to limit the competitiveness of locally produced heritage products in regional and international markets.

While Zimbabwe possesses a rich base of indigenous resources, traditional knowledge systems and cultural production, translating these into commercially viable export products requires sustained support in areas such as product development, design, processing, quality assurance and packaging.

It is against this background that ZimTrade has already intensified capacity-building interventions in the Southern Region in the first quarter, working with international technical partners to improve production standards and positioning more producers for participation in export markets.

One of the recent interventions was the Design, Colour and Trend Workshop for the handicrafts sector, which was held from 16 to 27 March in partnership with PUM Netherlands Senior Experts in Bulawayo.

The workshop brought together participants from the Matabeleland North handicrafts Cluster, Bulawayo Home Industries and other players in the crafts sector.

The training focused on strengthening the ability of producers to interpret international design trends, apply appropriate colour palettes and refine products in line with changing buyer preferences.

It also sought to support producers in using traditional craft skills and heritage-based materials to develop modern, trendy and commercially relevant products that are in demand in export markets.

This is critical in ensuring that Zimbabwe's handicrafts retain their cultural authenticity while responding to contemporary consumer tastes and evolving market requirements.

This intervention is important in a market where handicrafts are increasingly assessed on design

relevance, finish and adaptability to modern consumer tastes.

Statistics show, exports of creative goods reached US\$713 billion in 2022, highlighting the scale of opportunity in global markets for products that combine cultural value with strong design appeal.

For Zimbabwean producers, this reinforces the importance of ensuring that heritage products are developed in a manner that responds to current market expectations while retaining their distinctive identity.

In the apiculture value chain, ZimTrade continues to support producers through the ZimBEE workshops, which are helping to strengthen technical capacity in the honey sector, particularly bee keepers in Nkayi and Lupane.

The workshops are part of broader efforts to improve production systems, quality management and market readiness among beekeepers and honey processors.

This support is important in building a more structured and competitive honey industry, particularly as producers seek to move beyond informal sales into more formal and higher-value markets.

With stronger quality control, improved handling practices and better product positioning, honey remains one of the heritage-linked products with potential for wider market penetration.

ZimTrade is also extending technical support to the fashion sector through an intervention facilitated by SES (Senior Expert Service), aimed at supporting the development of high-quality fashion wear.

The focus is on improving garment construction, finishing, product development and other technical aspects that influence competitiveness in premium and export-facing markets.

This is a significant area of intervention, particularly as Zimbabwean fashion continues to draw from indigenous aesthetics, fabrics and cultural inspiration.

However, access to more structured markets requires products that meet increasingly stringent buyer expectations in terms of quality, consistency and presentation.

The SES support is therefore expected to strengthen the capacity of local designers and manufacturers to produce fashion garments that are both culturally distinctive and commercially competitive.

Further technical support is scheduled for May, when PUM will undertake a specialised intervention for juice manufacturers working with heritage fruits such as baobab.

The intervention is designed to address specific technical challenges that continue to affect the commercialisation of these products, particularly

sedimentation, colour change, fermentation and limited shelf life.

These are critical issues for processors seeking to move heritage fruit beverages into formal retail and export channels, where product stability and shelf performance are essential.

The intervention is expected to assist manufacturers in improving product stability and extending shelf life, thereby enhancing the overall marketability of heritage fruit beverages.

This comes at a time when global interest in baobab continues to grow. Industry reports have shown increasing demand for baobab in international markets, particularly within the health and wellness segment, where it is valued for its nutritional properties and use in functional food and beverage applications.

For Zimbabwe, this presents an opportunity to deepen value addition around indigenous fruits and strengthen export participation through more technically sound processing.

Notably, Midlands State University (MSU) is one of the beneficiaries of this intervention and is strategically positioned to become a resource institution for other local manufacturers.

This creates an important platform for wider knowledge transfer across the sector.

The involvement of MSU also reflects the thrust of Education 5.0, which emphasises innovation, industrialisation and the practical application of knowledge to solve industry challenges.

It further highlights the important role of tertiary institutions in supporting industry through research, product development and technical solutions.

This is in line with the objectives of National Development Strategies 1 and 2, which place strong emphasis on academia-industry linkages, value addition and export-led industrial growth.

Taken together, these interventions demonstrate ZimTrade's continued focus on practical export development.



In addressing real production and product development constraints, and through leveraging technical partnerships with institutions such as PUM and SES, the organisation is helping producers move heritage products from traditional and informal markets into more structured, competitive and export-oriented value chains.



4

UNLOCKING AFRICA'S NEXT SUPERFOOD EXPORT OPPORTUNITY



Pamela Samurete

THE BAOBAB TREE, scientifically known as *Adansonia digitata*, is one of Africa's most iconic and valuable indigenous resources.

Often referred to as the "tree of life," baobab is native to sub-Saharan Africa and thrives in arid and semi-arid regions.

For centuries, rural communities have relied on baobab for food, medicine, and income.

In recent years, however, baobab has gained international recognition due to its exceptional nutritional profile and functional properties.

As of 2026, the global baobab ingredient market is valued at approximately US\$6,15 billion, with a robust compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.08 percent projected through 2034, cementing its position as a high-potential export commodity.

Baobab fruit pulp is celebrated for its high vitamin C content reportedly up to six times that of oranges as well as its richness in antioxidants, dietary fibre, calcium, potassium, and magnesium.

These attributes make baobab particularly

appealing in the health and wellness sector.

The powder segment currently dominates the global market, accounting for nearly 49 percent of the share because it can be easily integrated into cereals, frozen products, and functional beverages.

Baobab oil, extracted from seeds, is another valuable product, known for its moisturizing and regenerative properties.

While the powder leads in volume, baobab oil is the fastest-growing segment in terms of value, driven by a 7.62 percent CAGR as it becomes a staple in the premium "clean beauty" and anti-aging skincare markets of Europe and North America.

Global demand for baobab products is rising steadily, with Europe currently representing the largest market at 33.22 percent of global revenue.

Regulatory milestones, such as the EU's novel food approval and the U.S. FDA's GRAS (Generally Recognized as Safe) status, have facilitated widespread market access.

Meanwhile, the Asia-Pacific region is emerging as the fastest-growing market, with an 8.74 percent CAGR fuelled by a burgeoning middle class in Japan and South Korea seeking premium-nutrient-dense superfoods and "K-beauty" ingredients.

In addition to food applications, the natural cosmetics sector has become a major driver of baobab demand.

Consumers are increasingly seeking organic and sustainably sourced ingredients, particularly in high-income markets.

Baobab oil is prized for its high levels of essential fatty acids and vitamins A, D, E, and F.

The global shift toward ethical consumption where buyers prioritize sustainability and community impact further strengthens the appeal of baobab.

For African producers, baobab presents a significant export opportunity, especially as the organic segment is projected to grow at 9.28 percent annually.

Countries such as Zimbabwe, Malawi, Ghana, and Senegal are naturally endowed with these trees, providing a strong resource base.

The competitive advantage lies in the fact that baobab is largely wild-harvested and often organically grown by default, allowing African exporters to command premium prices in fair-trade markets.

Moreover, baobab harvesting is typically carried out by rural communities, particularly women, creating opportunities for inclusive economic development.

The European Union has strict regulations governing the import of baobab pulp and powder, and exporters must meet these requirements to ensure product safety, transparency, and sustainability.

The key mandatory rules include compliance with the European General Food Law, which sets Maximum Residue Levels, contaminant limits, microbiological standards, and hygiene protocols through HACCP.

Baobab products intended for the supplements market must follow EU Food Supplement Legislation, which regulates labelling and nutrient composition.

Because baobab was not widely consumed in Europe before 15 May 1997, it falls under Novel Food Legislation, requiring a safety assessment before entering the market.

Exporters must also hold an ABS Certificate under the Nagoya Protocol to demonstrate ethical sourcing and fair benefit sharing with local communities. In addition to these legal requirements, several voluntary standards strengthen market acceptance.

ISO 22000 and FSSC 22000 certify strong food safety management systems and are widely recognized by European buyers.

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.

EU Organic Certification is highly valuable for accessing premium organic markets, especially since baobab is often naturally organic.

Exporters are also encouraged to align with the European Green Deal, which promotes lower emissions and environmentally responsible production practices

Despite its strong potential, the baobab export sector faces challenges related to quality consistency and infrastructure.

Inadequate processing facilities can lead to contamination or poor moisture control, which damages buyer trust.

Logistics also remain a barrier, particularly for landlocked countries where transportation to major

ports can be prohibitively expensive.

Additionally, global competition from other superfoods like acai and quinoa is intensifying. To compete effectively, African producers must prioritize value addition.

Strategic interventions are necessary to fully unlock this potential.

Branding and storytelling are critical, baobab products should be positioned as premium, ethical, and sustainable.

Investment in centralised processing facilities and public-private partnerships can help mobilize resources for research and capacity building.

Furthermore, market research and intelligence are essential for identifying emerging opportunities, such as the recent 110 percent rise in Vitamin C supplement sales in the UK, which directly benefits baobab's high-nutrient profile.

Africa can ensure that baobab becomes a flagship export that contributes to sustainable rural development and global health by building long-term relationships with international distributors and adhering to stringent food safety standards.



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