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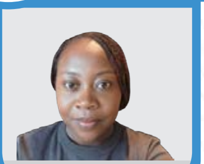
TOP STORIES

- HARARE TO HOST 19TH COMESA BUSINESS FORUM
- ZIMBABWE, SOUTH AFRICA DEEPEN TRADE PARTNERSHIPS
- LOCAL COMPANIES HEAD TO MOZAMBIQUE FOR FACIM TRADE FAIR
- HERITAGE-BASED PRODUCTS ARE ZIMBABWE'S NEXT EXPORT FRONTIER

AUGUST 2026

1 HARARE TO HOST 19TH COMESA BUSINESS FORUM


Kudzai Magwenzi

LOCAL BUSINESSES are set to gain direct access to regional buyers, investors and policymakers when the 19th COMESA Business Forum and Multi-Sectoral International Exhibition is held in Harare from 19-21 October 2026.

The event will be held on the margins of the 25th COMESA Heads of State and Government Summit and is expected to bring together businesses, financial institutions, development partners and Government representatives from across the region.

The Forum is being convened by the COMESA Business Council, ZimTrade and the Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce in partnership with COMESA Secretariat and the Government of Zimbabwe.

It will run under the Summit theme, "One Market, One Future: Advancing Inclusive Industrialization, Investment and Regional Integration in COMESA."

For Zimbabwean exporters, the gathering provides an opportunity to engage a regional market of more than 640 million people, with a combined gross domestic product of about US$1 trillion and merchandise trade exceeding US$383 billion.

The Forum will focus on measures to increase intra-COMESA trade and investment, improve access to markets and finance, and strengthen links among businesses, governments and investors.

Although COMESA represents a large market, intra-regional trade remains below its potential, while many member states continue to depend heavily on exports of primary commodities.

The Forum will therefore place emphasis on strengthening regional value chains, expanding productive capacity and encouraging businesses to increase value addition.

Structured business-to-business, business-to-government and investor engagements will form part of the programme, giving participating companies an opportunity to pursue partnerships and explore potential transactions.

The meeting will also produce a Private Sector Communiqué containing recommendations from business representatives for presentation to the 25th COMESA Summit of Heads of State and Government.

This will provide the private sector with an opportunity to contribute to regional policy discussions affecting trade, investment and industrial development.

The Forum's sessions will focus on four main areas, including the development of seamless and resilient trade systems through the reduction of non-tariff barriers and strengthening of trade corridors.

Discussions will also cover regional value chains, access to finance and mechanisms to reduce investment risks, as well as the use of digital technologies and artificial intelligence to improve business competitiveness.

A dedicated session will provide information on financing and related instruments available to the private sector through regional institutions such as the Trade and Development Bank and Afreximbank.

Running alongside the Forum will be the Multi-Sectoral International Exhibition, which will feature country pavilions, a COMESA institutions pavilion and structured networking platforms.

Priority sectors will include manufacturing, agriculture and agro-processing, the digital economy, financial services and fintech, mining, energy, textiles, leather products, tourism and hospitality.

The exhibition is expected to provide Zimbabwean companies with a platform to showcase products and services while engaging potential buyers and partners from other COMESA member states.

For local exporters, the three-day programme also provides an opportunity to meet regional financiers, development institutions and Government representatives in one place, reducing the need to approach individual markets separately.

Businesses wishing to exhibit, attend the Forum or participate in structured business-to-business meetings are encouraged to register early through ZimTrade or the Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce to facilitate their inclusion in the matchmaking programme.

2 ZIMBABWE, SOUTH AFRICA DEEPEN TRADE PARTNERSHIPS

Melisa Ncube

ZIMBABWEAN COMPANIES have been urged to take a more strategic approach to the South African market by targeting opportunities in manufacturing, industrial supply chains, technology partnerships and regional distribution networks.

The opportunities came under discussion at the South Africa–Zimbabwe Business Forum held on 21 August 2026, at the Gallagher Convention Centre in Midrand.

The Forum was held on the sidelines of the South Africa–Zimbabwe Bi-National Commission under the theme, "Catalysing Economic Resilience: Strategic Trade and Investment Partnerships for the Future."

It brought together businesses, investors, manufacturers, Government institutions and trade support organisations from the two countries to explore ways of strengthening trade and investment relations.

Discussions focused on the need to move beyond increasing the volume of goods traded between the two countries and place greater attention on production partnerships, value addition and stronger regional value chains.

South Africa has a large consumer market supported by an extensive industrial base comprising manufacturers, processors, mining companies, engineering firms, distributors and suppliers.

For Zimbabwean companies, this presents opportunities to supply products and services directly into these industries.

Businesses producing packaging, mining inputs, processed foods, chemicals, steel products, leather goods and specialised components can target manufacturers and processors that require inputs for their operations.

This means that, in some cases, the most suitable customer may not be the final consumer, but a company looking for a reliable supplier within its production chain.

Such opportunities can lead to supplier agreements, contract manufacturing, distribution partnerships and joint production arrangements.

They also require companies to undertake detailed market research.

Exporters need to understand how targeted industries operate, the products and inputs they require, the gaps in existing supply chains and the standards expected of suppliers.

The Forum also highlighted areas where Zimbabwe and South Africa can combine their respective strengths.

Zimbabwe has natural resources, agricultural capacity, manufacturing capabilities and opportunities for further value addition, while South Africa has established industrial networks, technology, engineering expertise and deeper capital markets.

Sectors identified for possible cooperation included mining and beneficiation, manufacturing, agriculture and agro-processing, energy, tourism and technology.

For businesses targeting these sectors, identifying demand is only part of the process.

A buyer enquiry may require a company to increase production, acquire new machinery, improve technology, secure working capital or meet higher quality and certification requirements.

The ability to supply consistently and meet agreed volumes and specifications therefore remains important. South Africa has traditionally been a major source of machinery and equipment for Zimbabwean industry.

The Forum, however, also looked at opportunities for technology transfer, shared manufacturing and stronger industrial partnerships between businesses in the two countries.

Zimbabwe has production potential in minerals, steel, agriculture and other resource-based industries, while South Africa has established capabilities in precision engineering, machinery and advanced manufacturing.

Linking these capabilities could create opportunities for companies to develop products jointly and strengthen production across regional value chains.

Smaller businesses can also benefit from such arrangements.

A company may not have the capacity to supply a large retail market directly, but it may be able to provide a specific component, raw material, packaging product or service required by a larger manufacturer.

Participation in supply chains can therefore provide smaller businesses with an entry point into regional markets.

The African Continental Free Trade Area also widens the scope of such partnerships.

Products developed through Zimbabwe–South Africa production linkages can be supplied beyond the two countries into other African markets.

For example, Zimbabwean raw materials can be combined with South African technology, engineering expertise or distribution networks to produce goods for customers elsewhere on the continent.

South Africa - Zimbabwe Business forum 2026

3 SOLAR-POWERED BOREHOLE STRENGTHENS CHIKOMBA HONEY CLUSTER

Runyararo Mukahanana

ZIMTRADE HAS facilitated the installation of a solar-powered borehole at the Chikomba Honey Cluster in Sengwe, a development expected to support honey production while improving access to water for the surrounding community.

The borehole forms part of efforts to strengthen productive capacity within provincial clusters and create conditions that enable small-scale producers to develop into commercially viable and export-oriented enterprises.

For beekeepers at the cluster, reliable access to water is expected to support hive colonisation and improve conditions for honey production.

Water plays an important role in an apiary, as bees use it to regulate temperatures within hives, support brood development and maintain healthy colonies.

Although bees can travel considerable distances in search of water, a dependable source close to the apiary provides more favourable conditions for colony establishment and maintenance.

The borehole project was undertaken against the background of limited underground water availability in the area.

According to the project's technical report, groundwater potential in the surrounding area is generally low, with several boreholes requiring drilling to depths of at least 95 metres.

Solar-powered infrastructure is particularly suited to rural production areas where electricity supplies can be limited.

It also reduces recurrent energy costs and supports the long-term operation of productive infrastructure.

The borehole was designed to serve both the honey cluster and the wider community.

Community water points have been established in centrally accessible areas, while a nearby primary school is also expected to benefit from the water supply.

The intervention forms part of ZimTrade's wider approach to developing provincial production clusters, which bring producers together around common products, production areas and commercial objectives.

The project also feeds into corporate social responsibility activities.

Through the cluster model, producers can receive targeted support in areas such as production improvement, quality management, standards, packaging, branding, market information and market linkages.

The approach is also intended to address one of the major challenges faced by emerging exporters, which is the ability to supply markets at sufficient and consistent volumes.

An individual beekeeper may not always be able to meet the volume requirements of a large buyer.

Organised producers, however, can aggregate output, improve consistency and collectively respond to larger commercial opportunities.

In this way, provincial clusters can provide a link between rural production and regional and international markets.

Zimbabwe has scope to increase exports of honey and other apiculture products, particularly where producers can meet requirements relating to food safety, quality, consistency and traceability.

Increasing production, however, is only one part of the process.

As hive colonisation and honey volumes improve, producers will also need to strengthen harvesting and post-harvest handling practices, maintain appropriate hygiene standards, prevent contamination and establish reliable traceability systems.

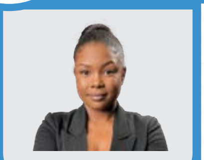
Aggregation of honey from different producers will also require consistent quality standards to ensure that products supplied to buyers meet market requirements.

The availability of reliable water is expected to contribute to this process by improving the production environment for bees and supporting other activities associated with the cluster.

Improved hive colonisation could result in better use of existing hives and increased volumes of honey available for aggregation and commercialisation.

With continued technical and market-development support, the Chikomba Honey Cluster has the potential to progressively expand beyond local markets and participate in regional and international trade.

4 LOCAL COMPANIES HEAD TO MOZAMBIQUE FOR FACIM TRADE FAIR


Karen Bvurere

ZIMBABWEAN EXPORTERS are set to deepen their footprint in Mozambique when the Maputo International Trade Fair (FACIM) 2026 opens next week, offering local companies a platform to pursue new markets, secure buyers and build strategic partnerships.

Mozambique's premier multi-sectoral trade exhibition will run from 31 August – 6 September in Maputo, bringing together businesses, investors, Government officials and buyers from across Africa and beyond.

For Zimbabwean companies, the fair comes at an opportune time, with trade between Harare and Maputo on an upward trajectory and the two neighbouring countries pushing ahead with measures designed to make cross-border business easier.

Mozambique remains one of Zimbabwe's key trading partners and an important destination for locally produced goods.

Zimbabwe's exports to Mozambique grew by four percent from US$255,1 million in 2024 to US$266,2 million last year, underlining the market's growing importance to the country's export drive.

Against this background, ZimTrade, the national trade development and promotion organisation, will lead local companies at a dedicated Zimbabwe Pavilion.

The pavilion will bring together businesses from different sectors under a single national brand, in support of the country's economic diplomacy thrust being pursued through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

Products and services expected to be showcased include manufactured goods, agricultural produce, processed foods, building materials, engineering products, arts and crafts as well as a range of other export-ready offerings.

ZimTrade Chief Executive Officer Mr Allan Majuru says this year's fair comes at a particularly favourable time for Zimbabwean businesses, given the strengthening economic relations between the two countries and Maputo and growing demand for locally produced goods in the neighbouring market.

"Our participation at FACIM is about creating linkages that place Zimbabwe firmly at the centre of regional trade routes.

"FACIM continues to open real, actionable opportunities for Zimbabwean exporters, and the strengthened relations between our two countries make this the right time for businesses to engage the Mozambican market directly," he said.

Mr. Majuru also revealed that Mozambique had continued to demonstrate strong potential for Zimbabwean companies, particularly because of its proximity, established trade links and growing appetite for competitively priced regional products.

"Zimbabwean companies are well positioned to grow their presence in Mozambique because we already have strong trade linkages, a shared border and relatively easy access to the market.

"What is important now is for our businesses to take advantage of these conditions, understand the needs of Mozambican buyers and offer products that are competitively priced, reliable and suited to the market," said Mr Majuru.

Mr Majuru also noted that buyers in Maputo, Beira and Tete had over the years shown confidence in the quality and reliability of Zimbabwean products, providing a solid base from which local companies can expand their presence.

Over the years, FACIM has grown into one of Southern Africa's major trade exhibitions, attracting more than 50 000 visitors, including exhibitors, investors, buyers, policymakers and business executives.

This year's edition comes against the backdrop of strengthened relations between Zimbabwe and Mozambique, with both countries increasingly focusing on practical measures to boost trade, investment and connectivity.

The inaugural Zimbabwe-Mozambique Bi-National Commission held in November last year saw the leadership of the two countries commit to initiatives aimed at improving the movement of goods and people.

Among the projects under consideration are the development of a dry port facility along the Beira Corridor, modernisation of the fuel pipeline and establishment of a one-stop border post at Forbes-Machipanda.

The two Governments have also committed to addressing tariff and non-tariff barriers in line with Southern African Development Community and African Continental Free Trade Area protocols.

For exporters, these developments present an opportunity to translate strong political and economic relations into tangible business.

FACIM 2026 will provide local companies with direct access to potential buyers and partners while allowing them to better understand the Mozambican market.

Beyond product displays, the fair offers exporters an opportunity to gather market intelligence, assess consumer preferences, track emerging industry trends and benchmark their products against competing brands.

Such information is critical for businesses seeking to fine-tune their packaging, pricing, product specifications and marketing strategies for regional markets.

The fair will also provide Zimbabwe with an opportunity to strengthen its position as a competitive and reliable source market.

Previous participation by Zimbabwean companies under the ZimTrade Pavilion has generated market inquiries, distributorship opportunities, strategic partnerships and export orders.

The results have reinforced the importance of face-to-face business engagement, particularly in regional markets where relationships, consistency of supply and confidence in suppliers are central to securing long-term business.

5 ZIMBABWE ECONOMY TAKES CENTRE STAGE AT UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Sheron Chingonzo

ZIMBABWE'S ECONOMY will come under the spotlight in New York when the country hosts a high-level Business Forum on the sidelines of the 2026 United Nations General Assembly, with the platform expected to showcase trade, investment and tourism opportunities to an international audience.

The Zimbabwe Business Forum will bring together local companies, international buyers, investors, financiers and development partners as the country seeks to widen export markets, attract investment and strengthen commercial relations.

Running under the theme, "Global Challenges. Zimbabwean Solutions. Shared Prosperity," the Forum will position Zimbabwe as a source of goods, services and investment opportunities at a time when countries and businesses are reviewing supply chains in response to changing global economic conditions.

The event is being jointly organised by ZimTrade, the Zimbabwe Investment and Development Agency and the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority.

The Forum comes at a time when Zimbabwe's profile within the United Nations system has received renewed attention following the country's election in June this year as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the 2027–2028 term.

That development provides an additional platform for Zimbabwe to deepen international engagement, with the Business Forum seeking to complement diplomatic visibility with stronger trade and investment relations.

While the country's participation at the General Assembly will involve high-level diplomatic engagements, the Business Forum will give the private sector an opportunity to pursue commercial discussions with potential partners gathered in New York.

A major focus will be on changes taking place in global supply chains.

Geopolitical tensions, disruptions along major shipping routes, tighter financing conditions and climate-related shocks have encouraged businesses in several markets to diversify their sources of supply.

The Forum will use this changing environment to present Zimbabwe as an alternative supplier in areas where the country has established or emerging production capacity.

One of its three thematic pillars, “Trade for Resilient Supply Chains”, will focus on the country’s capacity to supply value-added goods and services to international markets.

Targeted sectors include horticulture, processed foods, leather products, manufactured goods, minerals, creative products and professional services.

The programme will also place emphasis on converting interest generated at the Forum into business opportunities.

Ahead of the event, organisers will undertake a business linkage and matchmaking programme to identify and profile buyers, investors and trade partners according to their sector interests.

This will allow participating companies to hold targeted engagements with potential buyers, distributors and other commercial partners whose interests correspond with their products and services.

Business-to-business meetings will form an important part of the programme, providing companies with room to discuss supply arrangements, distribution partnerships and other possible transactions.

The structured approach is expected to help participating businesses move beyond general networking towards engagements centred on specific commercial opportunities.

The Forum will also feature dedicated discussions on Zimbabwe’s trade relationship with the United States as part of efforts to identify opportunities for expanding exports into that market.

Zimbabwean agricultural exporters and business process outsourcing companies already operating in the United States are expected to share their experiences, including lessons on market entry and servicing international clients.

Their participation is expected to provide other local businesses with practical insights into market requirements and the opportunities available in different sectors.

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6 ZIMTRADE AND CZI INK MOU TO ACCELERATE MANUFACTURED EXPORTS

Shingirai Masara

ZIMTRADE AND the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries (CZI) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) establishing the Zimbabwe Export Manufacturers Initiative on 14 August in Harare.

This initiative creates a collaborative platform designed to equip local manufacturers with the strategic solutions needed to compete regionally and globally.

While Zimbabwe enjoys preferential access to vast markets through the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), manufactured exports currently account for little 10 percent of the country's total exports.

While manufactured exports have been improving over the years, recording a growth of 34.4 percent from US$149 million in 2025 to over US$200 million in 2026, there is a need for enhanced industrial capacity and competitiveness, a gap the new initiative directly aims to address.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, CZI Chief Executive Officer Ms. Sekai Kuvarika emphasised the necessity of moving beyond mere production.

"We need more Zimbabwean manufacturers to enter export markets, expand into new destinations and move towards higher-value products that meet international standards," she stated.

The initiative will therefore focus on overcoming the specific barriers that limit export growth, including productivity enhancement, standards compliance, access to finance, trade facilitation, and market intelligence.

By merging ZimTrade's export development and market access expertise with CZI's deep industry knowledge and advocacy capabilities, the MoU creates a unified approach to transforming the manufacturing sector.

ZimTrade Chief Executive Officer Mr. Allan Majuru noted that closer cooperation between industry and trade promotion is essential for translating production capacity into sustainable export growth.

"This initiative is important for developing practical and strategic solutions that enable manufacturers to transition from serving domestic markets to competing successfully on the global stage," he said.

Beyond immediate export support, the partnership is expected to drive Zimbabwe's broader industrialization agenda by promoting value addition, improving product quality, and creating employment opportunities.

More importantly, the collaboration will strengthen engagement between industry and policymakers, ensuring that persistent challenges are addressed through evidence-based policy reforms and targeted support programmes.

The signing of this MoU marks a foundational step toward building a resilient, export-oriented manufacturing sector by aligning industry expertise with export development initiatives.

Through this ZimTrade and CZI are laying the groundwork for greater participation of Zimbabwean products in regional and international value chains, which will ultimately position the country as a competitive manufacturing and export hub within Africa and beyond.

7 AFCFTA OPENS NEW EXPORT OPPORTUNITIES FOR MSMES

Archford Mabuka

THE AFRICAN Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is opening new opportunities for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to reach customers across Africa, supply regional value chains and compete for business currently going to suppliers outside the continent.

For local enterprises, the opportunity is significant.

According to ITC Trade Map, Africa imported goods worth approximately US$506 billion in 2025, but only about US$65 billion of those imports came from within the continent.

This means intra-African imports accounted for about 12.8 percent of Africa's total imports, while approximately US$441 billion, or 87.2 percent, was sourced from outside the continent.

China alone supplied goods worth approximately US$99 billion to African markets during the year, accounting for close to one-fifth of the continent's imports.

The figures point to a sizeable market that African businesses, including Zimbabwean MSMEs, can increasingly target as the AfCFTA improves conditions for trade between participating countries.

Not every product currently imported from outside Africa can be produced competitively on the continent in the short term.

However, replacing even a small share of those imports with African products could result in billions of dollars in additional intra-African trade and create opportunities for manufacturers, farmers, processors and service providers.

Changing global trade conditions are also strengthening the case for developing regional suppliers. Disruptions to international supply chains, geopolitical tensions and rising transport costs have increased the importance of securing products closer to markets.

For local businesses, this presents an opportunity to identify products that African countries are importing

For many MSMEs, participation in regional value chains may provide a more practical route into continental trade.

A small business can supply raw materials, ingredients, packaging, components, semi-processed products or services to another company elsewhere in Africa without having to manufacture the final product.

A Zimbabwean packaging company, for example, could supply a food processor in Zambia, while a local agro-processing business could supply ingredients to a manufacturer in Kenya.

Engineering businesses could also supply components to larger industrial companies operating elsewhere on the continent.

This allows smaller firms to enter regional markets progressively, increase production and develop commercial relationships without immediately carrying the cost of establishing full distribution networks in foreign markets.

Participation in these value chains can also help MSMEs improve standards and consistency as they respond to the requirements of larger regional buyers.

Aggregation can address the problem of scale

One of the main barriers facing smaller businesses seeking to export is the ability to supply the volumes required by larger buyers.

A single MSME may have a competitive product but fail to secure an order because its production volumes are too small.

Aggregation provides one possible solution.

Through organised producer groups, trading companies or other structured arrangements, smaller businesses can combine their products to meet larger orders while maintaining agreed specifications and quality standards.

The AfCFTA SME Booster Programme highlighted trading-company models being used in countries such as Ghana, Egypt, Rwanda and Kenya.

in large quantities from overseas and assess whether they can compete in those markets.

There are already indications of growing trade among African countries.

Uganda's imports from African markets increased from approximately US$5 billion in 2024 to US$8,6 billion in 2025, while Zimbabwe's imports from African countries rose from about US$3,4 billion in 2018 to US$5,2 billion in 2025.

The challenge now is for local businesses to position themselves as buyers of products from the continent, and also increasingly as suppliers.

Import substitution presents opportunities

One of the immediate opportunities for MSMEs under the AfCFTA lies in supplying products that African countries continue to source from outside the continent.

Sectors identified during the AfCFTA SME Booster Programme include pharmaceuticals, textiles, edible oils, plywood and veneer, meat products, footwear and tiles.

For Zimbabwean businesses, opportunities also exist in processed foods and beverages, horticulture, pharmaceuticals, clothing and textiles, leather and footwear, fertilisers and agricultural inputs.

Other areas include construction materials, iron and steel products, packaging, mineral-based products, furniture and selected engineering products.

MSMEs do not necessarily have to compete across all these sectors.

The starting point should be identifying products where a business already has production capability, understanding where demand exists and establishing whether it can meet the price, quality, volume and regulatory requirements of the targeted market.

Regional value chains offer another route

The AfCFTA opportunity is not limited to selling finished products directly to consumers.

Such models can assist smaller businesses through product aggregation, buyer-seller matchmaking, distribution, market-entry support and trade facilitation.

This approach could be particularly relevant to Zimbabwean producers in horticulture, processed foods, clothing, leather products, handicrafts and agricultural commodities.

Several smaller producers supplying collectively may be better placed to meet the volumes required by a regional buyer than they would be individually.

AfCFTA preferences are becoming practical

The AfCFTA is also moving progressively from policy commitments towards implementation.

During the AfCFTA SME Booster Programme attended by ZimTrade in Gaborone, Botswana, information presented by the AfCFTA Secretariat indicated that more than 12 126 AfCFTA Certificates of Origin had been issued.

Under the tariff liberalisation framework, approximately 90 percent of tariff lines fall under non-sensitive products, while about seven percent are treated as sensitive products and around three percent are excluded.

This creates scope for qualifying African goods to enter participating markets at reduced or eliminated customs duties as tariff commitments are implemented.

However, the preferential treatment is not automatic.

Exporters must comply with the applicable Rules of Origin, which determine whether a product qualifies as originating within the AfCFTA area.

They must also have the correct documentation, including Certificates of Origin, and comply with the requirements of the destination market.

For MSMEs, understanding these requirements is critical.

Businesses need to know the Harmonised System classification of their products, the applicable Rules of Origin, documentation requirements and the standards or regulations applying in the market they want to enter.

Where a Zimbabwean product satisfies the relevant Rules of Origin and the importing country has implemented the applicable tariff concession, it may enter that market at a reduced or zero tariff.

That can improve its competitiveness against similar products imported from outside Africa.

Businesses still need to be export-ready

While the AfCFTA creates a larger market and improves trading conditions, it does not remove the fundamentals required to succeed in export markets.

MSMEs still need adequate production capacity, dependable supply chains, consistent quality and the ability to meet agreed delivery schedules.

They also require appropriate certification, sound financial management, suitable packaging and a clear understanding of buyer and market requirements.

This is where business development support remains important.

Under the guidance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, ZimTrade has developed programmes aimed at preparing small businesses for export markets.

These programmes focus on strengthening production, improving quality and standards, developing packaging and branding, providing market information and connecting businesses with potential buyers.

8 PACKAGING AND LABELLING FOR GLOBAL HORTICULTURAL MARKETS

Maxmillan Chikwati

HIGH-QUALITY products fail in exports every day because of poor packaging and labelling rather than poor quality.

International buyers make split-second decisions based on what they see on the shelf, and getting the right package and labelling right is the difference between a rejected shipment and a long-term contract.

Export packaging carries two jobs.

Compliance meets the destination country's rules on safety, labelling, and product information so the shipment clears customs at all, and no amount of product quality rescues a shipment that fails it.

Commercial appeal is what makes a buyer choose one product over another once it has cleared, and it is where Zimbabwean exporters targeting the EU, the UAE, and China win or lose on shelf.

What Each Market Demands on the Label

The EU's labelling rules sit under the Food Information to Consumers Regulation, requiring the product name in the destination language, ingredients by descending weight, allergens highlighted distinctly, net quantity in metric units, a best-before or use-by date, the food business operator's details, country of origin, a nutrition declaration, and a batch number.

Organic products carry the EU organic logo with the certifying body's code, and Fairtrade products the Fairtrade mark under Fairtrade International's guidelines.

China is stricter still.

Under GACC's food safety rules, no pre-packaged food enters without a Chinese-language label; a sticker added later does not satisfy the requirement.

The label must carry the product name, ingredients, origin, production and expiry dates, storage instructions, net content, importer and distributor details, a nutritional panel, and allergen declarations.

The facility's registration code, issued through the separate GACC/CIFER system, must also appear on the packaging and every customs document, its absence is one of the most common reasons shipments are turned away.

The UAE requires Arabic on every food label, and an English-only label is turned away.

Arabic text must be at least as prominent as any English on the label, and where the two disagree, Arabic governs.

Arabic stickers are accepted if pre-approved by Dubai Municipality or Abu Dhabi's Agriculture and Food Safety Authority, but printing Arabic directly onto the packaging is more professional and avoids approval delays.

Halal certification is mandatory for meat and anything animal-derived; it is not legally required for plant-based goods, but many UAE buyers will not stock a product without it regardless.

Within SADC, requirements are lighter but still enforced.

English labelling is generally accepted, a ZIMRA-certified Certificate of Origin secures preferential duty rates, and MRL test results may be required depending on the product.

Packaging That Can Survive the Journey

A label only matters if the package under it survives the trip.

Export packaging must withstand temperature swings inside a container, shifting humidity, and repeated handling at ports and warehouses.

Corrugated cardboard of at least five-ply, moisture-resistant coatings, reinforced corners, and palletisation on standard 1.2m by 1.0m pallets are the baseline.

Getting the Dates Right

Date formats vary by market.

The EU, the UK, and the UAE use day/month/year, the United States uses month/day/year, and China uses year/month/day.

The safest habit is to write the month as an abbreviated name, so a date such as 25 DEC 2026 reads the same way everywhere.

Best-before dates speak to quality and are what Zimbabwean exporters of macadamia, tobacco, maize, and soybeans will typically use, since these decline gradually rather than becoming unsafe; use-by dates are a safety marker reserved for perishables.

Shelf life remaining on arrival is a buyer expectation more than a fixed law, and it varies by market.

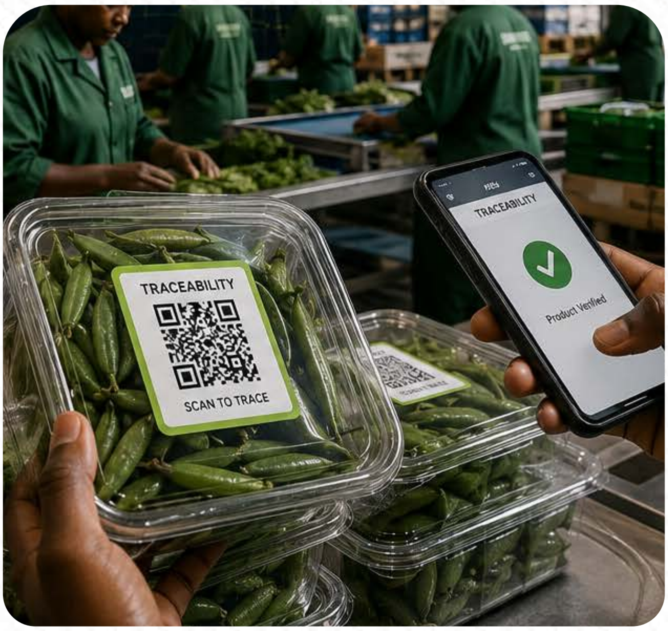
EU retailers commonly want 60 to 75 percent remaining, the UAE generally applies 50 percent minimum.

Chinese customs enforce strictly though the exact figure can depend on product category, and SADC buyers work off a similar benchmark but tend to be more flexible.

Either way, the planning step is the same: know your product's shelf life, know what your buyer needs on arrival, and work backwards to set deadlines.

Traceability

Traceability lets a product be tracked back to its origin if something goes wrong, and buyers increasingly read it as a sign of a professionally run operation.



It matters for recalls, for isolating which batch had a problem, and for meeting the traceability expectations the EU, the United States, and China all apply to food imports in some form.

Every shipment should carry a unique batch or lot code on the retail unit, the master carton, and the shipping documents, including the invoice, packing list, and certificate of origin.

A workable code combines production date, product code, and facility code, so a batch of macadamia produced in Harare might read MAC-2026-08-26-HAR-001.

Buyers increasingly expect a QR code too, revealing farm of origin, production date, certification details, and test results on a scan, for Zimbabwean exporters, still rare enough to be a genuine point of difference.

9 HERITAGE-BASED PRODUCTS ARE ZIMBABWE'S NEXT EXPORT FRONTIER

ZimTrade Team

ZIMBABWE'S strongest export opportunities will come from products rooted in what the country already possesses, understands and produces with a natural advantage.

This is because competing successfully in international markets is not always about producing what every other country is producing.

In many cases, the strongest export sectors are built around resources, knowledge and production systems that competitors cannot easily reproduce.

This places heritage-based products among Zimbabwe's most promising export opportunities.

Indigenous fruits, traditional grains, natural oils, herbs, vegetables and other products that have sustained communities for generations can become an important source of export earnings, rural incomes and industrial development.

This approach is consistent with His Excellency, President E.D Mnangagwa's development agenda, which places emphasis on heritage, innovation, value addition, rural industrialisation and the use of local resources to build an empowered upper-middle-income economy.

National Development Strategy 2 further prioritises export diversification, competitive value-added production and stronger participation in regional and global value chains.

There is an opportunity, therefore, to place heritage-based products more deliberately within Zimbabwe's economic diplomacy agenda.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, working together with ZimTrade and the country's diplomatic missions, can help build visibility for these products and identify commercial opportunities in markets where demand for natural, authentic and sustainably produced goods is growing

Doing so will ensure that Zimbabwe's diplomatic presence abroad increasingly carries products and brands that tell a distinctly Zimbabwean story.

So, there is need for deliberate interventions and support to unlock the potential.

The need is clear.

National Development Strategy 2 notes that more than 70 percent of agricultural output has continued to be sold in raw form.

It also shows that exports of value-added agricultural products increased from US$74 million in 2022 to about US$106 million in 2023.

This is encouraging, but it points to the room that still exists for Zimbabwe to earn more from what it produces.

Heritage-based exports should become a pillar of Zimbabwe's export diversification strategy, alongside mining, horticulture, tobacco and manufactured products.

The issue is not that Zimbabwe should move away from established exports.

Rather, it must grow new export lines and retain more value before products cross the border.

Taping into the wave of superfoods

Consumers across the world are paying closer attention to nutrition, natural ingredients, sustainability, traceability and the cultural origin of food.

Although "superfood" is a marketing description rather than a formal scientific classification, it has become an important commercial category for nutrient-dense products.

Grand View Research estimated the global superfoods market at US$193,26 billion in 2024 and projects it to reach US$276,48 billion by 2030.

Growth is being driven by health-conscious consumers and wider use of nutritious natural ingredients in foods, beverages, cosmetics and wellness products.

This places Zimbabwe in a favourable position because many heritage foods already possess the qualities global consumers are seeking.

For example, baobab is one of the clearest examples.

Scientific studies have reported vitamin C levels in baobab pulp ranging from about 126 milligrams to more than 500 milligrams per 100 grams, depending on origin, variety and testing methods.

Raw commercial oranges, by comparison, contain about 53 milligrams per 100 grams.

Even at the lower end of the reported baobab range, the fruit can provide more than twice the vitamin C found in oranges.

Baobab pulp is also recognised as a source of fibre, calcium, potassium and antioxidant compounds.

Marula presents similar possibilities.

Some studies report between 54 and 194 milligrams of vitamin C per 100 grams of marula pulp, in addition to minerals such as calcium, iron and zinc.

Other studies have recorded even higher levels, demonstrating why Zimbabwe must conduct its own testing across different production areas.

Small grains also deserve greater export attention.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation reports that some finger millet varieties contain between 294 and 390 milligrams of calcium per 100 grams.

Finger millet is naturally gluten-free and contains fibre and phenolic compounds, creating opportunities in breakfast foods, baking mixes, snacks and specialised health-food markets.

These figures show that the solution for Zimbabwe is not to sell tradition only, but also nutritional value supported by science.

Zimbabwe's advantage cannot be copied overnight

The nutritional case leads to an equally important trade argument, that is, heritage products give Zimbabwe a comparative advantage that is difficult to reproduce.

For example, Baobab is a drought-resistant wild fruit tree adapted to the arid and semi-arid areas of sub-Saharan Africa.

Mature trees in nature produce fruits under low-input conditions and are not dependent on irrigation and routine agrochemical applications in the same way as conventional commercial orchards.

Other countries can import seed and establish plantations, but they cannot immediately reproduce Zimbabwe's mature trees, climatic suitability, biodiversity and community knowledge.

That natural advantage must now be strengthened through research, processing, certification and a protected Zimbabwean identity.

This is an advantage that nature has given Africa and Zimbabwe in particular.

However, the resource is not unlimited.

Commercialisation must be accompanied by regeneration, sustainable harvesting, community ownership and biodiversity protection.

The strongest heritage export sector will be one that rewards communities for conserving the trees and landscapes from which the products come.

The advantage, therefore, is not simply possession of baobab or marula.

It also lies in combining the resource with knowledge, research, processing, certification and a protected Zimbabwean identity.

This is where lessons from other countries become useful.

Lessons to pick from

South Africa has demonstrated what can be achieved through rooibos.

Rather than allowing it to remain an anonymous herbal commodity, the country built quality systems, protected its origin and promoted it internationally.

Rooibos is sold in more than 50 countries, and the industry produces over 20 000 tonnes in an average year, roughly half for export, and supports thousands of jobs.

It also became the first African food to obtain Protected Designation of Origin status in the European Union.

The major lesson is that value is not only in the tea, but also in the name, origin, standards and story attached to it.

New Zealand followed a related route with mānuka honey.

As international demand grew, the Government worked with industry and scientists to develop a formal scientific definition and testing requirements for exported mānuka honey.

Morocco's argan oil offers perhaps the closest lesson for Zimbabwe's rural communities.

Traditional knowledge held by women was linked to cooperatives, improved processing, traceability, food-safety standards and geographical-indication protection.

This helped argan oil move into higher-value culinary and cosmetic markets.

It also shows that modern standards do not have to displace traditional knowledge.

When properly designed, standards can protect that knowledge and create stronger market access for the communities that hold it.

The message from these cases is straightforward.

Natural inheritance creates an opportunity, but premium returns come when a country defines the product, proves its qualities, protects its identity and organises its producers.

This also puts an argument on why heritage-based products will make it easy to integrate rural communities into mainstream export business.

The quickest route to rural participation

This model is particularly relevant to Zimbabwe because heritage-based products offer a practical route for bringing rural communities into mainstream exports.

Communities know where trees grow, when fruits mature, which varieties are preferred and how products are stored or processed.

This knowledge is an existing form of capital.

Women are often central to harvesting and preservation.

Young people can bring digital marketing, design and modern processing.

Universities can provide testing and product development, while exporters supply market intelligence, certification and distribution.

The task is not to turn every collector into an individual exporter.

It is to build organised value chains in which communities become reliable and rewarded suppliers.

The good thing is that Zimbabwe is not starting from zero.

For example, national trade development and promotion organisation, ZimTrade's cluster development work provides a practical foundation on which a larger heritage-based export programme can be built.

Through its Export Cluster Development Programme, ZimTrade has been organising small producers into coordinated groups capable of aggregating volumes, improving consistency, meeting standards and engaging formal buyers.

The next stage should be to scale these interventions from individual projects into a connected national system. For example, a successful baobab cluster in Mudzi should not remain an isolated example.

Similar models can be established around marula in Matabeleland South, masau in Mashonaland Central, honey in Manicaland, traditional grains in Masvingo and Midlands, and indigenous vegetables across the country.

Each cluster must be linked to a dependable commercial chain consisting of researchers, laboratories, processors, packaging companies, financial institutions, logistics providers and identified buyers.

The cluster should be the point at which rural production enters the formal export economy.

Turning potential into a national export programme

For this opportunity to reach scale, Zimbabwe requires a coordinated national approach.

The starting point should be a National Heritage-Based Export Strategy that identifies priority products by province and district.

The country must establish where the resources are, the quantities that can be harvested sustainably, the communities involved and the most promising uses in food, beverages, cosmetics and natural ingredients.

Mapping must be followed by research and development.

Universities, innovation hubs, and research centres should identify the nutrients, oils, flavours, bioactive compounds and industrial properties contained in each product.

Zimbabwe requires its own food-composition and natural-products database.

Exporters should not depend entirely on findings from samples tested elsewhere.

The results should also identify differences among varieties, harvesting periods and processing methods.

Research must then become commercial products.

Linkages between learning institutions and producers should result in export-ready heritage-based products.

This is where Heritage-Based Education 5.0 must become visible in factories, brands and export orders rather than ending with academic reports.

Shared facilities will be required for drying, milling, cold pressing, extraction, grading, testing and packaging.

Locating them close to producing communities will lower transport costs, improve quality and retain more value in rural districts.

Zimbabwe must also protect the names and knowledge associated with these products.

Geographical indications, collective trademarks, community protocols and benefit-sharing arrangements can prevent local heritage from becoming a cheap input for foreign brands.

Communities that conserved the resources and knowledge must receive a fair share of the value created.

The final requirement is a sustained global marketing campaign.

Zimbabwean heritage products should be positioned where nutrition, culture, sustainability and international trade meet.

Trade missions, embassies, tourism operators, chefs, retailers and the diaspora should carry one coherent national message.

Zimbabwe must be present at specialised natural-products, food-ingredient, cosmetics and wellness exhibitions, supported by scientific data, attractive packaging, traceability and a clear story of origin.