



Australia Zimbabwe Business Council.

Inquiry Into Strengthening Australia's Trade,
Investment, and Workforce Relations With Africa

Submission by:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Africa is one of the most consequential global regions for Australia's future economic, workforce, supply-chain, and geopolitical positioning. By 2050, Africa will account for approximately 25% of the world's population, hosting the largest young workforce globally and emerging as a key driver of global consumption, innovation, and labour supply.

Despite these realities, Australia's engagement with Africa remains limited, fragmented, and substantially below the strategic involvement demonstrated by major global partners, including China, the United States, the European Union, India, Turkey, and the Gulf States.

These global actors have implemented comprehensive Africa strategies integrating:

- Infrastructure financing
- Supply-chain partnerships
- Capacity building
- Labour mobility
- Education and training
- Long-term diplomatic positioning

In contrast, Australia's engagement is intermittent and siloed, lacking an overarching framework to coordinate trade, investment, workforce mobility, and diplomacy.

At the same time, Australia faces persistent and well-documented labour and skills shortages, particularly in:

- Aged care and disability support (NDIS)
- Nursing and allied health
- Agriculture and food production
- Logistics, freight, and supply chains
- Mining and engineering services
- Hospitality and tourism
- Early childhood education and community services
- ICT, cybersecurity, and business services



African nations collectively offer a young, educated, English-proficient workforce that aligns closely with Australia's critical labour demand. Many African countries share Commonwealth ties, similar legal and administrative systems, and education structures conducive to efficient skills recognition.

This submission outlines a continental opportunity model for Australia–Africa engagement, drawing on the practical experience of the Australia Zimbabwe Business Council (AZBC) and partnerships across multiple African regions. Zimbabwe is referenced only as a case study to demonstrate feasibility; the recommendations apply broadly across Africa.

Australia's long-term economic and workforce resilience requires new partnerships beyond the Indo-Pacific. Africa's economic rise, demographic strength, strategic geography, and resource base make it indispensable to Australia's future planning.

This submission recommends the establishment of a structured Australia–Africa Trade, Investment, and Workforce Strategy, supported by:

- A coordinated whole-of-government framework
- Structured labour mobility partnerships
- Agricultural and supply-chain diversification
- Digital and professional services collaboration
- Skills development partnerships between TAFEs, universities, and African institutions
- Targeted trade missions and market-entry programs
- Diaspora-led business facilitation and investment

These actions will generate measurable economic, workforce, and diplomatic gains for both Australia and African partner nations.



INTRODUCTION

Africa's economic landscape is undergoing rapid transformation. Once viewed predominantly through a development lens, the continent today demonstrates:

- Expanding middle-class consumer markets
- World-leading digital innovation, particularly in fintech
- Rising manufacturing and industrial clusters
- Significant agribusiness and renewable-energy potential
- Increased political and economic integration through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)

Australia's current policy settings have not kept pace with these changes. Engagement with Africa remains largely:

- Ad hoc
- Resource-sector focused
- Under-resourced diplomatically
- Fragmented across agencies
- Lacking a unified national strategy

By contrast, African governments increasingly view Australia as a credible and attractive partner due to shared Commonwealth ties, governance practices, education systems, and technical expertise. Australia's strengths in agriculture, education, mining services, renewable energy, health, and compliance are highly complementary to Africa's development trajectory.

The Australia Zimbabwe Business Council (AZBC) has firsthand operational experience across the continent, demonstrating strong demand for collaboration in:

- Skills development
- Agribusiness
- Investment facilitation
- Tourism
- Digital and professional services

These insights underpin the proposed Australia–Africa Business Corridor model.

WHY AFRICA MATTERS TO AUSTRALIA

2.1 Demographic and Economic Growth

Africa is poised to become the primary engine of global workforce growth:

- By 2050, 1 in 4 people globally will be African
- Africa's middle class is projected to reach 1.1 billion by 2060
- Over 60% of Africans are under 25 years of age
- Urbanisation is occurring at twice the global average rate
- Africa hosts many of the world's fastest-growing cities, including Lagos, Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, and Kigali

This demographic profile complements Australia's ageing population and slowing workforce growth.

Economic growth is increasingly driven by:

- Mobile money and fintech innovation (e.g. M-Pesa)
- Digital entrepreneurship
- Regional infrastructure corridors
- Rapid growth in e-commerce and online education
- Rising demand for higher-quality goods and services

The AfCFTA integrates 54 nations into a \$3.4 trillion single market, presenting major opportunities for Australian exporters, investors, educators, and service providers.

2.2 Strategic Competition

Global powers have already recognised Africa's strategic importance:

China

- Over USD \$300 billion invested
- More than 10,000 Chinese firms operating across Africa
- Deep infrastructure integration via the Belt and Road Initiative

United States

- Prosper Africa initiative
- AGOA trade access
- Defence, technology, and governance partnerships

European Union

- Green transition investment
- Infrastructure and trade integration
- Education and research collaboration

India

- Education and ICT capacity-building
- Workforce exchanges
- Strong diaspora engagement

Gulf States

- Agricultural land partnerships
- Logistics hubs
- Food-security agreements

Australia's relative absence is increasingly visible and risks long-term commercial and diplomatic disadvantage.

2.3 Alignment With Australia's Domestic Needs

Africa's workforce capabilities align directly with Australia's shortages:

- Nursing and aged care
- Disability support
- Agriculture and agronomy
- Allied health
- Mining and engineering
- ICT and digital services

Africa offers a sustainable, ethical, and mutually beneficial workforce solution that complements domestic training efforts.

AFRICA AS A STRATEGIC PARTNER

Regional blocs present differentiated opportunities:

- SADC: Mining, agriculture, energy
- EAC: Technology, logistics, tourism
- ECOWAS: Finance, education, agribusiness
- North Africa: Manufacturing, renewable energy

Countries well-suited to pilot partnerships include Zimbabwe, Kenya, Ghana, Rwanda, Namibia, Zambia, and Botswana, based on governance stability, skills alignment, and English proficiency

Zimbabwe is referenced solely as a proof-of-concept case study, reflecting:

- High literacy
- Skilled labour surplus
- Strong Australian diaspora
- Significant agribusiness potential

AUSTRALIA–AFRICA BUSINESS CORRIDOR MODEL

Pillar 1: Agribusiness and Supply Chains

- Joint ventures in horticulture, livestock, and grains
- Out-grower and smallholder integration models
- Climate-smart irrigation and technology transfer
- Export processing zones
- Food-security diversification

Pillar 2: Skilled Labour and Workforce Mobility

- Bilateral workforce agreements
- Offshore and onshore training pipelines
- TAFE satellite and partnership programs
- Fast-tracked skills-assessment hubs
- Remote and hybrid staffing models

Pillar 3: Health, Wellness, and Tourism

- Nature-based rehabilitation and wellness tourism
- Allied-health service exports
- Remote mental-health support
- Integrated health-tourism packages

Pillar 4: Business Council-Led Facilitation

- Annual Africa Opportunity Report
- Targeted trade missions
- Country-specific investment briefs
- Multi-agency coordination platform

IMPLEMENTATION PATHWAY

Phase 1 (0–12 months): Pilot Programs

- Launch in 2–3 African countries
- Establish workforce skills hubs
- Initiate agribusiness demonstration projects
- Deploy digital services teams

Phase 2: Regulatory Integration

- Align vocational frameworks
- Establish migration-integrity safeguards
- Co-develop recognition-of-prior-learning pathways

Phase 3: Industry Expansion

- University and TAFE partnerships
- Service-export expansion
- Scalable investment vehicles

Phase 4: Monitoring and Evaluation

- Joint performance scorecards
- DFAT–Austrade–Home Affairs coordination
- Tracking of jobs, investment, training, and exports

RISK MANAGEMENT

Key risks include:

- Currency volatility
- Banking and transfer constraints
- Political transitions
- Labour-ethics concerns
- Partner reliability

Mitigation measures:

- USD-denominated contracts
- Escrow structures
- OECD-aligned due diligence
- Ethical Recruitment Codes
- Community engagement frameworks
- Phased investment deployment

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COMMITTEE

- Establish a formal Australia–Africa Trade and Investment Framework
- Launch bilateral labour-mobility pilots in priority sectors
- Create an Australia–Africa Agribusiness Partnership Program
- Fund sector-specific DFAT/Austrade trade missions
- Develop a Continental Wellness and Tourism Exchange
- Systematically leverage African diaspora expertise

CONCLUSION

Africa represents one of the most strategic yet under-recognised opportunities for Australia's economic security, workforce resilience, and diplomatic influence. A coordinated, practical, whole-of-government approach is essential for Australia to remain competitive in an evolving global environment.

The Australia Zimbabwe Business Council (AZBC) stands ready to collaborate with government and industry partners to advance this vision through evidence-based policy input, facilitation, and pilot implementation.