

**Submission to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References
Committee Inquiry into Australia's Trade Investment Relationships with the
Countries of Africa
By
Gordon Chakaodza**

As the inaugural Austrade Trade Commissioner in West Africa, I am pleased to provide input for the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee Inquiry into Australia's Trade and Investment Relationships with the Countries of Africa.

I served as Austrade Trade Commissioner from October 2012 until June 2016. My submission is based on some observations and experiences during my time in West Africa. It will touch briefly on aspects of the specified Terms of Reference.

Africa's Attitude Towards Australian Goods and Services.

Firstly, it's important to point out that there is enormous goodwill in Africa towards Australian goods and services.

In September 2015, during my tenure as Trade Commissioner, I led the first ever Australian Education Exhibition in West Africa. It was the first time the Australian Government held an organised education activity in the region. The highly successful education exhibition, held in both Ghana and Nigeria, resulted in some 5000 people walking through the doors to talk to the 17 Australian education institutions that participated in the exhibition. Such attendance was unprecedented. It is my contention that the sheer numbers attending the inaugural exhibition suggest a novelty factor around Australian study programs.

Australian education institutions should continue to capitalise on this novelty factor and continue their recruitments efforts in the region with the support of Austrade and other private agencies. The Australian Government team in West Africa — Austrade and The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAT) — continue to do a great job in promoting Australia's education capability.

Nigeria in particular has the potential to provide good opportunities in the future, despite recent economic headwinds. There are, however, some challenges with this market, as the country has seen its fair share of fraudulent applications. Australian education institutions, with the support of the Australian Government, should implement stronger mechanisms to ensure a robust review of applications from the region.

Commercial Opportunities for Australia in West Africa.

While I'm sure the Senate Committee has received several submissions and statistics about the 'Africa Rising' narrative including key markets and opportunities, I will make some brief points about the opportunities. Mining companies and associated mining services have led the way in Africa. In partnership with Austmine, I had the opportunity to lead the first Austrade/Austmine mining services mission in Ghana and Burkina Faso in 2012, where I

observed a high interest and demand for Australian technology and mining services, especially from tier one and tier two mining companies.

However, sovereign risk in the region will impede new Australian entrants into the West African market. The terrorist attack in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso in August 2017 reminds everyone about the volatility in the region. In February 2016, I facilitated a roundtable meeting at the Mining Indaba Conference on security issues in West Africa. Australian mining companies had firm ideas about mitigating security risk. I would encourage the Australian Government to pursue some of the ideas that came out of this forum.

Looking beyond the mining and education sectors, I observed viable niche opportunities for Australian firms across several sectors: aviation, food and beverages and security services. **Technology is clear standout as an opportunity area.** Africans are enthusiastic adopters of new technology and Australian start-ups particularly those in the edu-tech and healthcare space should be encouraged to export their technology to African markets.

Promoting African Commercial Opportunities in Australia.

A key observation during my posting was that the Australian business community did not always fully understand the opportunities that were available in Africa. There is room for the Australian Government to facilitate the education process here in Australia. Examples may include workshops in the various State and Territories about opportunities and risks of operating in Africa.

While it could be argued that the various Africa focussed business associations such as AMMEG, Africa Australia Business Council and Australia Africa Chamber of Commerce have a role to play, the reality is that such organisations are not well-resourced enough to make a meaningful impact. Additionally, there is little coordination across these organisations, making collaboration difficult. The Australian Government should encourage amalgamation and cooperation between these organisations, with a view of one independent voice. The Australia China Business Council appears to be a good example of a good bilateral chamber with one common purpose.

Harnessing the African Diaspora in Australia.

In closing, I encourage the Australian Government to harness the African community in Australia to extend its relationship with Africa across trade, investment and development. Africans continue to make a significant contribution in all facets of Australian life including sport, business, community and Government. It was pleasing to see Lucy Gichuhi being sworn in as Australia's first African Member of Federal Parliament earlier this year.

Many Africans including myself now call Australia home. We are very proud of our heritage and would welcome the opportunity to play a role — however small — to strengthen economic and people-to-people links between Australia and Africa.

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Gordon Chakaodza was the Austrade Trade Commissioner in West Africa. Based in Accra, Ghana, he served as Trade Commissioner between October 2012 and June 2016. He now lives and works in Perth, Australia. He is currently contracted by a Western Australian State Government agency in an investment attraction capacity.