



## Cover Letter

17 November 2025

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade  
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Dear Committee,

### **Submission: Australia's Trade and Investment with Africa**

On behalf of the Village Support Limited, African Youth Support Council (AYSC) – the youth advocacy branch, the Athiei Foundation, and the Queensland African Communities Council (QACC) – the umbrella organisation that represents more than 80,000 people and organisations of African descent residing in Queensland, I make the following submission in the attachment in relation to Australia's trade and investment with Africa. I would also appreciate an opportunity to be invited to appear before the committee to elaborate further on some of my key recommendations.

Sincerely

**Beny Bol OAM**

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*Founder & CEO – Athiei Foundation*

*Former president - Queensland African Communities Council*

*Author of 2 books: Blessed and Unblessed, and The Ambition & Determination of an Orphan: God in Firm Hope*



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## Strengthening Australia's Trade and Investment with Africa

### Summary

#### Introduction

Australia and Africa share long-standing but underdeveloped connections across culture, education, natural resources, health, agriculture, security and governance. Despite strong collaboration potential, engagement remains limited. In 2024, two-way trade reached \$12.6 billion, with over 170 ASX-listed Australian companies operating mainly in mining and resources. Africa, home to 1.5 billion people across 54 countries, is one of the fastest-growing economic regions, with expanding markets, abundant resources, and a youthful population, positioning it as a future global economic powerhouse. Australia's growing African diaspora contributes to Queensland's social, cultural, and economic landscape. However, diplomatic and institutional engagement has not matched Africa's strategic importance, or the mutual benefits deeper cooperation could bring.

#### Barriers to Engagement

Engagement is constrained by governance and security challenges in some African nations, deterring investment and complicating long-term partnerships. Australia's Indo-Pacific focus has contributed to historical under-engagement, while many African states prioritize ties with larger global powers. Low mutual awareness persists, with Australia often underestimating Africa's economic potential and African nations having limited visibility of Australia's capabilities. Education engagement is hindered by reliance on high-cost admission agents, and Australia's small diplomatic footprint limits sustained dialogue in key markets.

#### Opportunities for Cooperation

Education and skills development remain key entry points, with African students pursuing tertiary and vocational training in Australia. Public health partnerships in disease prevention, digital health, and maternal health align with Africa's priorities. Also, critically important opportunities exist in agriculture, climate resilience, mining, critical minerals, security, governance reform, and public-sector capacity building.

#### Strategic Recommendations

Enhanced diplomatic presence, strategic partnerships with Australian charitable organisations operating locally across various African countries delivering services such as education, health care, governance/peacebuilding, agriculture; regional trade agreements, and direct university applications for African students can strengthen engagement. Deepening diaspora and community links will support a resilient, future-focused Australia–Africa relationship.

#### Conclusion

While engagement has been limited, strategic investment and targeted partnerships can unlock substantial opportunities, fostering stronger economic, social, and cultural ties.

## Introduction

Australia and Africa share long-standing but underdeveloped connections in areas such as culture, natural resources, education, health, agriculture, governance, and geostrategic cooperation. Despite significant opportunities, these links remain under-explored. According to the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), two-way goods and services trade between Australia and Africa reached \$12.6 billion in 2024, with exports including aluminum ores, wheat, education, and travel services (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), 2024a, 2024b). More than 170 ASX-listed Australian companies currently operate across Africa, predominantly in the mining and resources sector (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), 2024a).

Africa, home to over 1.5 billion people and 54 countries, is one of the world's fastest-growing economic regions, with vast natural resources, expanding markets, and rapidly increasing youthful populations (World Bank Group, 2025). Africa's population is projected to constitute 25% of the global population by 2050, positioning the continent as a future economic powerhouse (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), 2023).

Australia's African diaspora, comprising skilled migrants, students, humanitarian entrants, and refugees, is also growing, contributing significantly to Queensland's social, cultural, and economic life (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2022). However, diplomatic, economic, and institutional engagement between Australia and African nations does not yet reflect the strategic importance or the potential mutual benefits of deepened relations.

## Current Barriers to Australia-Africa Engagement

The following factors may represent key barriers that hinder full and effective trade and investment between Australia and Africa:

1. Governance and security challenges in some African countries, such as political instability and weak institutional structures, deter investment and impede long-term partnerships (Kerandi, 2008; Okpara, 2010; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2023).
2. Perceived geographic and strategic distance contributes to Australia's historical under-engagement, with foreign policy heavily focused on the Indo-Pacific (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), 2024a).
3. Many African nations prioritise relationships with major partners like China, the United States, and the European Union (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), 2024a).
4. Limited mutual awareness persists: Australia underestimates Africa's economic potential, while African countries often lack visibility of Australia's capabilities (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), 2024a; Lowry Institute, 2024).
5. High-cost education agents create financial barriers for African students seeking to study in Australia.
6. Australia's small diplomatic footprint, few embassies serving multiple countries across Africa, reduces visibility and weakens sustained dialogue (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), 2024a).
7. Few African nations maintain resident diplomatic missions in Australia, limiting reciprocal engagement.



## Opportunities for Enhanced Cooperation

1. Education and skills development remain strong pathways, with African students favouring Australia for tertiary and vocational training (Department of Education, 2025).
2. Public health collaboration opportunities include disease prevention, maternal health, epidemiology, and digital health innovation (World Health Organisation (WHO), n.d.).
3. Agriculture and climate adaptation partnerships align Australian expertise in dryland farming, water management, and resilience planning with African climate challenges (Yiridomoh et al., 2025).
4. Mining, energy, and critical minerals offer substantial potential due to Africa's reserves and Australia's leadership in ethical mining and geological expertise (International Energy Agency (IEA), 2021).
5. Governance, public sector reform, and anti-corruption programs present further areas for impactful cooperation.
6. Cultural and Educational Exchange Program (CEEP) to enhance people to people links and reconnect Australian African students, particularly those that are born or grow up in Australia and are experiencing identity crisis leading to increasing engagement in anti-social behaviour and lack of appreciations of opportunities that Australia offers to them relative to their peers in Africa.

## Recommendations

1. Expand Australia's diplomatic presence in Africa to strengthen bilateral relationships and support businesses.
2. Partner with Australian humanitarian and community organisations already operating in Africa to leverage existing networks.
3. Promote Australia's strengths in mining, education, public health, and governance through targeted outreach.
4. Where new embassies are not feasible, attach Australian representatives to allied missions (e.g., The US, UK embassies).
5. Explore regional trade agreements with ECOWAS, SADC, and the East African Community to improve market accessibility.
6. Enable direct applications for African students to reduce financial barriers created by education agents.
7. Strengthening people-to-people links through diaspora engagement, cultural exchange, and community-led partnerships – establish Cultural and Educational Exchange Program (CEEP)

## Conclusion

Strengthening Australia-Africa relations presents a significant opportunity to advance economic, diplomatic, and social interests for both regions. While engagement has been limited by security concerns, geographic distance, and low mutual awareness, substantial opportunities exist, particularly in education, where enabling direct application pathways for African students could reduce financial barriers and increase enrolments. By expanding diplomatic presence,



supporting regional trade initiatives, and deepening community partnerships, Australia can build a more strategic, future-focused relationship with one of the world's fastest-growing and most dynamic regions.

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