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ATC 2026: Ghana's Trade Minister calls for policy harmonization to drive African trade

Ghana's Minister for Trade, Agribusiness and Industry, Hon. Elizabeth Ofosu-Adjare, has called on African leaders to use policy reforms to eliminate bottlenecks and red tape that hinder the free flow of trade across the continent.

She made the appeal during a High-Level Ministerial Panel at the Africa Trade Conference (ATC) 2026 held in Cape Town, South Africa, where discussions focused on policy harmonization as a catalyst for advancing trade across Africa.

The conference, held on Wednesday, March 11, 2026, brought together global policymakers, business leaders and innovators with the aim of accelerating Africa's integration into global trade.

Speaking on a panel alongside Tiroeaone Ntsima, Minister of Trade and Entrepreneurship of Botswana, and Chipoka Mulenga, Zambia's Minister of Commerce, Trade and Industry, Hon. Ofosu-Adjare said the time had come for Africa to move beyond

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simply highlighting its large population of more than one billion people and instead focus on harmonizing policies that can drive real economic growth.

“We cannot have one law for all of Africa,” she said, “but it is important that we integrate our laws in such a way that they are harmonized and make it easier for us to trade with one another.”

She further called for continental standardization mechanisms that would allow products certified in one African country to be accepted in another without undergoing duplicate certification processes.

For example, she said a product certified in Ghana should be able to enter the Kenyan market without Kenya insisting on conducting a new round of tests.

“If we go to a country like Kenya and look at their certification or permit processes and they are acceptable to us in Ghana, especially since both Ghana and Kenya recognize EU standards, then we should be able to say that once Ghana has certified a product, Kenya can allow it into its market because it trusts Ghana’s certification process,” she explained. Hon. Ofosu-Adjare warned that without such concessions and cooperation, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) risks remaining largely theoretical. “Without these kinds of practical steps, the Continental Free Trade Agreement will remain largely on paper and its full implementation will not be realized,” she said.

She acknowledged that implementing harmonized standards across the continent may appear ambitious given the number of African countries involved. However, she suggested that progress could begin with a few pioneering nations. “If two or three countries start implementing a harmonized standardization policy and the benefits become evident, others will follow,” she added.

Also speaking on the panel, Zambia’s Minister of Commerce, Trade and Industry, Chipoka Mulenga, emphasized the need for African countries to craft policies that complement one another rather than compete. “Africa should not draft policies that appear to compete with each other,” he said. “Instead, we must hold each other’s hand

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and grow together.” Quoting a well-known proverb, he added; “If you want to go fast, go alone, but if you want to go far, go with everyone else.” Mulenga further advocated for a unified trade vision rooted in Pan-Africanism.

Meanwhile, Botswana’s Minister of Trade and Entrepreneurship, Tiroeaone Ntsima, highlighted the importance of partnerships and economic linkages in making trade across the continent cheaper and more seamless. He noted that Botswana, despite being landlocked, has repositioned its narrative by describing itself as a “land-linked country”, reflecting its growing efforts to strengthen trade connections with neighbouring countries and the rest of Africa.

The Africa Trade Conference (ATC), powered by Access Bank, convened policymakers, business leaders and innovators from across the world to explore ways of accelerating Africa’s integration into global trade.

The second edition of the conference featured speakers from finance, government, development institutions and the private sector, who shared insights on unlocking trade opportunities, strengthening intra-African commerce, enabling business expansion and positioning African enterprises for global competitiveness.

Speaking ahead of the conference, Roosevelt Ogbonna, Chief Executive Officer of Access Bank, said Africa must play an active role in shaping the future of global trade. “Africa will not be a spectator in the remaking of global trade. We will be one of its architects,” he said. “ATC 2026 is where those blueprints will be drawn. Africa is not only participating in global trade, but it is also helping to redefine it.”

A stronger focus on intra-African trade is critical, as it strengthens regional integration, reduces dependence on external markets and unlocks Africa’s vast internal demand and resources. With the relatively young African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the continent is building one of the largest free trade zones in the world, aimed at boosting industrialization, creating jobs and strengthening resilience against global economic shocks.

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Roosevelt Ogbonna noted that with operations in 24 countries globally, including 16 across Africa, Access Bank is uniquely positioned to facilitate cross-border trade and support regional economic integration. “Our presence across Africa and key global corridors gives us a front-row seat to the realities of trade,” he said.

“It also gives us the responsibility to design solutions that are inclusive, scalable and future facing. ATC 2026 is part of that commitment.”

About Access Bank (Ghana) PLC

Access Bank (Ghana) PLC, a subsidiary of Access Bank PLC., is a leading full-service commercial bank in Ghana. Committed to driving financial inclusion and providing innovative banking solutions, Access Bank continues to empower individuals and businesses across Ghana through its extensive product offering. With a strong focus on superior customer service, sustainability and digital transformation, the bank remains dedicated to supporting the unbanked, creating opportunities for financial growth, and ensuring that every customer enjoys seamless access to modern banking services.

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