



Gates Foundation



Remarks by the SADC Director of Industrial Development and Trade

Mr Dhunraj Kasseo

TSTR Policy Dialogue Forum with Non State Actors

18-19 February 2026

Mercure Hotel, Nairobi, Kenya

1. TTF Chair and Director of Trade at EAC Ms Flavia Busingye represented here by Ms Prisca Mbaga
2. Director of Trade, COMESA, Dr. Christopher Onyango

3. **Mr. Protase Echessa, Representative of AGRA, our funding partner**
4. **Distinguished representatives of civil society, youth networks, women's organisations, labour movements, business councils, farmers' associations,**
5. **Colleagues from our Tripartite RECs region**

Good morning

It is my honour to welcome you to this important Policy Dialogue Forum on the Tripartite Simplified Trade Regime (TSTR) here in Nairobi, a gathering that brings together the diverse voices that keep our regional integration agenda vibrant and grounded in lived realities. Allow me to acknowledge the presence of the Youth, NGOs, Business Councils, the Trade Unions, Small-Scale Farmers, as the apex bodies of non state actors, among other valued partners.

At the outset, let me extend our sincere appreciation to AGRA (the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa) for the financial and technical support that has made this project and this engagement possible. AGRA's commitment to strengthening African-led policy solutions and fostering inclusive economic participation is deeply aligned with our own ambitions in SADC.

Today, as we convene in this multi-stakeholder forum, we are reminded that regional integration is not an abstract policy pursuit. It is a lived experience for millions of small-scale traders who cross borders daily, for youth seeking opportunities, for women balancing enterprise with household responsibilities, and for communities that rely on open, efficient, and predictable trade systems.

This is why SADC, together with our Tripartite partners, continues to prioritise improvements to the Simplified Trade Regime (STR) and the ongoing development of the Tripartite Simplified Trade Regime (TSTR). These initiatives aim to reduce administrative burdens, enhance transparency, and create safer and more accessible trade environments for micro-, small- and medium-scale traders.

But policies alone cannot carry us forward. Your voices as Non-State Actors are indispensable. Whether from youth platforms, labour unions, business associations, farmers' organisations or civil society groups, you provide the insight, accountability, and lived experience that ensure our policy frameworks remain meaningful.

Today's dialogue offers us an opportunity to:

- Reflect on persistent non-tariff barriers
- Address harassment and GBV issues traders face
- Improve border efficiency and coordination
- Strengthen institutional support for small-scale traders
- Ensure that trade contributes to sustainable livelihoods across our region
- Amplify youth and women's participation in shaping economic policy

We are committed to ensuring that your recommendations inform the ongoing work of the SADC Secretariat, our Member States, and indeed our Tripartite partners.

Let this dialogue be a celebration of cooperation, a reaffirmation of our shared responsibility, and a space where we build solutions that reflect the aspirations of the people we serve.

Once again, we extend heartfelt thanks to AGRA for supporting this important initiative, and to all of you for your dedication to building an integrated, inclusive, and prosperous region.

I thank you!