



Gates Foundation



Remarks by the TTF Chair: EAC Director of Trade and Customs

Ms Flavia Busingye

**TSTR Policy Dialogue Forum with Non
State Actors**

18-19 February 2026

Mercure Hotel, Nairobi, Kenya

1. Director of Trade, COMESA, Dr. Christopher Onyango
2. Director of Industrial Development and Trade, Mr. Dhunraj Kasse

- 3. Mr Protase Echessa, Representative of AGRA**
- 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 great honour and privilege to welcome you all to Nairobi, on behalf of the Tripartite Task Force (TTF), to this important forum which brings together our three regional economic communities to advance a united vision of deeper regional integration and economic transformation.

Before proceeding, allow me to recognise and sincerely thank AGRA for its financial and technical support to this programme. AGRA's commitment to strengthening agricultural markets, supporting smallholder farmers, and enabling policy reforms is a foundation upon which many of our efforts in the Tripartite region are built, including the very dialogue we are engaging in today.

This gathering brings together vital stakeholders, who are largely apex bodies of non state actors in the region. Your presence reflects a shared understanding that regional integration is not achieved by governments alone. It requires the active engagement of the people who drive our economies, advocate for equity, and uphold democratic participation. Thus, your presence demonstrates a shared conviction that the real drivers of regional integration are the people who trade, produce, advocate, innovate, and build across borders every day.

The Tripartite Task Force continues to advance several priority initiatives, including the operationalisation of the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA), improvements in trade facilitation, digitalisation of trade systems, and the strengthening of the Simplified Trade Regime. The ongoing work to harmonise and roll out the Tripartite Simplified Trade Regime (TSTR) is a major step in easing the movement of goods and empowering small-scale traders especially youth and women.

However, we recognise a critical truth that once the TSTR is validated and adopted by our policy organs, and ultimately endorsed by the Summit of Heads of State and Government in July 2026 here in Nairobi, its success will depend on strong, structured partnerships with you — our apex Non-State Actors.

We therefore wish to express, from the outset, our willingness to work with your organisations in the implementation, rollout, monitoring, and continuous improvement of the TSTR

But the effectiveness of these reforms depends heavily on your contributions. We rely on:

- Civil society for independent monitoring and community outreach
- Business councils for insights on competitiveness and supply chains
- Trade unions for ensuring decent working conditions
- Farmers' organisations for representing rural livelihoods and food systems
- Youth networks for technological innovation and future-oriented thinking

Your voices amplify the real issues at our borders and in our markets — from inconsistent procedures to information gaps, from non-tariff barriers to challenges in accessing finance.

As we meet here in Nairobi, I encourage us to be practical, bold, and collaborative. Let us aim to identify solutions that can be incorporated into the implementation frameworks of the Tripartite region, and into the workplans of Member States, border institutions, and trade facilitation agencies.

Together, we can build a region where:

- Trading across borders is simpler and more predictable
- Opportunities are accessible to young people and women
- Agricultural and informal traders are supported rather than marginalised
- Integration efforts translate into real socio-economic transformation

On behalf of the Tripartite Task Force, I once again extend our gratitude to AGRA for enabling this platform, and I thank all participants for their commitment to strengthening our collective future.

Thank you.