

Wednesday 18 June 2025

Inaugural Commonwealth Business Summit: Harnessing Commonwealth
Trade for Shared Prosperity
Windhoek, Namibia | 18 - 20 June 2025

Keynote Address by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Hon.
Shirley Ayorkor Botchway

Honourable Ministers,

Excellencies,

Business Leaders and Partners,

Distinguished Guests,

Good morning – *Mwalelepo*.

It is a pleasure to welcome you to Windhoek for the inaugural Commonwealth Business Summit.

We meet here in the heart of Southern Africa – a region of vast potential – and at a pivotal moment for global trade and investment.

This Summit runs alongside the Commonwealth Trade Ministers Meeting, which for the first time is being held outside London. I thank the Government and people of Namibia for their leadership and hospitality.

And I thank all our partners – especially the
Namibia Investment Promotion and Development
Board, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry,
Afreximbank, and our Commonwealth and
COMESA colleagues – for helping make this
moment possible.

This Summit is not just a new event – it is a new
platform, designed to turn the **Commonwealth
Trade Advantage** into real trade opportunities.

We have the fundamentals:

- A market of **2.7 billion people**;
- Shared language, legal systems, and deep trust;
- A 21% average cost saving on intra-Commonwealth trade.

But we also have something more important: a shared belief that trade and investment should deliver prosperity **for everyone** – across all 56 of our member states, from the largest economies to the smallest islands, from cities to rural communities.

That is why I have placed **trade, finance and economic resilience** at the heart of the Commonwealth's new strategic plan.

And that is why this Business Summit matters so much.

Because in a world that is fragmenting – economically, politically, and technologically – the Commonwealth, by conviction and choice, has decided to be the place for connection, partnership, and shared prosperity.

Friends,

If we want to harness Commonwealth trade for shared prosperity, we need to focus on three imperatives:

1. Inclusion

Trade must work for all – not just somewhat for big companies in major markets; not just for a small segment of the potential Commonwealth market of 2.7 billion.

That means **MSMEs**, which make up over 80% of businesses across the Commonwealth, must have access to finance, regulatory support, and market intelligence.

It means putting **women entrepreneurs and young people** at the centre of our trade strategy.

Namibia's example – with strong female leadership across government and industry – is an inspiration.

And it means supporting **small states and least developed countries** to integrate more fully into global markets.

This Summit's sessions on gender, digital access, and trade facilitation will tackle these issues head-on.

2. Innovation

The future of trade is digital.

Paperless systems, e-commerce platforms, and data-driven supply chains are no longer optional – they are essential.

We need legal and regulatory frameworks that keep pace.

The Commonwealth Secretariat is already helping member countries adapt laws, build capacity, and close connectivity gaps – especially for digital agriculture, blue economy sectors, and cross-border data flows.

We are also promoting **Digital Public Infrastructure** that can transform access for entrepreneurs and government alike.

3. Investment

Trade cannot thrive without capital – and infrastructure.

We need stronger pipelines for **blended finance** and greater support from development banks.

We must unlock investment into sectors where the Commonwealth has a clear edge:

- **Renewable energy,**
- **Agriculture and agri-tech,**
- **Digital infrastructure,**
- **Critical minerals,**
- **Transport and logistics.**

In 2022, intra-Commonwealth FDI reached **US\$172 billion** – more than four times its 2015 level.

Let's build on that momentum and make the Commonwealth the world's most investable market network.

Friends,

This Summit is not about platitudes or rhetoric.

It is about **partnerships, pipelines, and progress.**

From AfCFTA integration to SME growth, from food systems to climate-smart trade – these discussions will shape real outcomes.

The Secretariat is working with countries across the Commonwealth to:

- Improve business environments;
- Strengthen trade policy;
- Expand regional value chains;
- And help countries get deals done.

This is a platform for action. And you – the business leaders, investors, and entrepreneurs – are at the centre of it.

Friends,

The Commonwealth is a living system – it must be the network of trust, the driver of opportunity, and the home for ambition.

Where global trade stumbles, we must lead.

Where others close doors, we must open them.

When others speak of risk, we must speak of possibility.

Our goal of US\$2 trillion in intra-Commonwealth trade by 2030 is ambitious – but achievable.

To reach it, we need to build confidence, break down barriers, and bring new actors into the conversation. At the Trade Ministers Meeting we will challenge our leaders to expedite their ambitious industrialization agendas in order to expand consumer markets across the Commonwealth. That is the pathway to our shared prosperity.

So let this Summit be a launchpad:

- For bold ideas;
- For practical solutions;
- And for meaningful investment that transforms lives.

I hope we leave here not just with declarations,
but with deals.

And not just with good intentions – but with a
shared agenda for inclusive, innovative, and
investable growth.

Thank you – and let's get to work.