

Date: 17 September 2025  
Time: 13:30 – 14:45 CET  
Format: In-person, WTO Library

## Side event for the WTO Public Forum 2025: “*Enhance, Create and Preserve*”

### Title: **EDAR 2024: Unlocking Africa’s Trade Potential - Boosting Resilience through Digital Transformation and Regional Integration**

#### I. Background

The World Trade Organization (WTO) will hold its annual Public Forum 2025 from 17–18 September in Geneva. The Forum is the WTO’s largest outreach event, bringing together over 2,000 participants each year from civil society, academia, business, government, international organizations, and the media. It provides a unique space to discuss the latest developments in global trade and to propose concrete ways of enhancing the multilateral trading system.

This year’s theme — Enhance, Create and Preserve — highlights the role of modernized and digitalized trade frameworks in delivering social, economic, and environmental benefits. Discussions will explore how digital technologies can:

- Enhance living standards by improving access to markets and information.
- Create employment opportunities through innovation, entrepreneurship, and e-commerce.
- Preserve natural resources by enabling more efficient and sustainable production and distribution chains.

Against this backdrop, UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) will host a dedicated session discussing its flagship publication, the **Economic Development in Africa Report (EDAR) 2024 – “Unlocking Africa’s Trade Potential: Boosting Regional Markets and Reducing Risks.”** Considering that Africa’s trade potential remains largely untapped due to exposure to external shocks and underutilized regional value chains, EDAR 2024 provides a data-driven lens on how African economies can de-risk trade, shift from commodity dependence and build long-term resilience through regional integration, smart infrastructure and firm-level risk management strategies.

This session will address Africa’s need to build resilience in the face of increasing global uncertainty. It seeks to enhance African market connectivity by reinforcing intra-regional trade linkages and strengthening firm-level capacity to withstand shocks. It also aims to create new avenues for trade diversification and value addition within Africa through regional value chain development. By highlighting the importance of proactive risk mitigation and resilience planning, the session speaks to the need to preserve the gains made in African trade integration despite overlapping global crises. Finally, the session links these African-led strategies to the broader global trade architecture,

particularly ongoing WTO discussions on trade facilitation, digital trade and inclusive governance mechanisms.

## II. Objectives:

This session will discuss the key findings of EDAR 2024 and catalyze action on African trade resilience. Key objectives:

- Discuss the key findings and recommendations of the 2024 Economic Development in Africa Report.
- Frame regional trade development not only as a long-term goal but also as an immediate strategic response to global trade volatility and polycrisis conditions.
- Provide practical and research-based guidance to WTO members, policy makers and business leaders on strengthening Africa's trade resilience and positioning the continent as a more integrated, competitive, and sustainable actor in global trade.

## III. Critical questions addressed:

- How can Africa reduce its vulnerability to external shocks by deepening regional integration and operationalizing the AfCFTA?
- What specific, actionable measures can firms, governments, and development partners implement to scale up trade resilience, including investments in infrastructure, digital tools, and institutional capacity?
- How can global trade institutions, particularly the WTO, better support Africa's efforts to de-risk trade and develop inclusive regional markets that contribute to global economic stability?

## IV. Organizing Partners:

UNCTAD's Division for Africa, Least Developed Countries and Special Programmes (ALDC)

## V. Session Format:

A 75-minute in-person session structured as follows:

- **Opening remarks (10 min)** by *Mr. Junior Davis*, Head, Policy Analysis and Research Branch, Division for Africa, LDCs and Special Programmes, UNCTAD
- **Report Presentation (15 min)** by *Mrs. Habiba Ben Barka*, Chief, Africa Section, UNCTAD
- **Panel Discussion (30 min): Unlocking African SME's trade potential through building stronger resilience**
  - *Prof. Wim Naudé* (RWTH Aachen): AI/digital solutions for trade resilience
  - *H.E. Ms. Fancy Chepkemai Too* (Permanent Representative of the Republic of Kenya to the United Nations Office in Geneva): AfCFTA operationalization & state perspectives
- **Q&A / Audience Engagement (15 min)**
- **Closing Remarks (5 min)**

## VI. Contact

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