



# TRADE BRIEF

Monthly Newsletter, October 2025



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### Kenya Assumes the COMESA Chairmanship

Kenya takes over leadership of the regional bloc's policy direction and implementation of key programs.

### COMESA - EU Talks boost Africa's Horticulture Trade

The first COMESA -EU horticultural connect forum explores opportunities across Eastern and Southern Africa.

### Kenya - China Trade Deal Talks

Kenya and China are working on a preliminary trade deal aimed at strengthening trade and investment.



## PS Note:

The 24th COMESA Summit of Heads of State and Government, hosted in Nairobi, will be remembered as a defining moment for regional commerce, a turning point that placed Kenya not only at the center of East and Southern Africa's trade transformation but also at the forefront of steering it forward.

President William Ruto, assumed the Chairmanship of COMESA and Kenya now carries the mantle of leadership to drive the digital transformation agenda across the region.

Under the visionary theme "Leveraging Digitalization to Deepen Regional Value Chains for Sustainable and Inclusive Growth," the Nairobi Communiqué of October 2025 was not merely a declaration of intent; it was a launchpad for the next chapter of African economic integration. It signaled that the future of our trade will not be written on paper, but powered by data and digital systems that eliminate inefficiencies and open markets to all.

The resolutions from this year's Summit laid the groundwork for a digital trade revolution. From the adoption of the Electronic Certificate of Origin to the rollout of a regional Electronic Cargo Tracking System, COMESA is setting the stage for a seamless, paperless trade ecosystem. For too long, unnecessary bureaucracy and paper-heavy processes have acted as a hidden tax on our exports and imports. This summit commits us to eliminating those inefficiencies through a wholesale digitalization of trade facilitation instruments.

As these systems take root, traders will no longer navigate a maze of manual processes but will move goods and services across borders with a single digital click. This is the dawn of a new era, where our ports and borders become gateways of opportunity and not bottlenecks of bureaucracy. Digital tools will strengthen regional value chains by easing the movement of raw materials, intermediate goods, and components, thereby making it more viable to manufacture finished products within the COMESA bloc.

With the Summit aligning seamlessly with the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) vision, the journey toward a borderless, digitally connected Africa has begun in earnest. Kenya's leadership of COMESA reaffirms our collective resolve to deepen integration, enhance participation in the Free Trade Area and unlock the boundless potential of Africa's digital future.

**Regina Ombam**  
**Principal Secretary**



# Kenya Takes Over the Mantle for COMESA Chairmanship

Kenya officially assumed the chairmanship of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), taking over leadership of the regional bloc's policy direction and agenda-setting. In this role, Kenya will guide the implementation of key regional programs including: trade integration, infrastructure development and industrialization, facilitating consensus among member states, providing political guidance to the COMESA Secretariat and overseeing the execution of summit decisions.

President William Ruto took over the chairmanship from Burundi's President Évariste Ndayishimiye at the 24th COMESA Summit of Heads of State and Government held in Nairobi. In his opening address, President Ruto called on member states to harness digital technology as a catalyst for accelerating regional integration, trade and inclusive growth.



Africa must transition from being merely a consumer of technology to becoming a global producer and innovator,



President William Ruto.

“Africa must transition from being merely a consumer of technology to becoming a global producer and innovator,” he said, citing Kenya’s M-Pesa as a homegrown innovation that had transformed millions of lives. He emphasized that the continent’s future prosperity would be shaped by how effectively it leverages digital technologies.

President Ruto commended President Ndayishimiye for his wise and steady leadership Over the past term, which had steered the bloc to notable progress over the past year.

The summit, held under the theme **“Leveraging Digitalization to Deepen Regional Value Chains for Sustainable and Inclusive Growth,”** brought together regional leaders to explore deeper cooperation and economic transformation.



The President urged member states to work towards establishing a single digital market through harmonized policies on e-commerce, data protection and cross-border payments. He also announced Kenya's increased investment of \$100 million in the Trade and Development Bank (TDB) to support Africa's financial autonomy and economic resilience

**“Together, we can build a COMESA that is digital, dynamic and deeply inclusive, a bloc that truly reflects the promise of a rising Africa,”**

**- President William Ruto.**

The summit was attended by Presidents Évariste Ndayishimiye (Burundi), Azali Assoumani (Comoros), Emmerson Mnangagwa (Zimbabwe), and Prime Ministers Abiy Ahmed (Ethiopia), Russell Mmiso Dlamini (Eswatini), and Mostafa Madbouly (Egypt). Also present were Mahmoud Youssouf, Chair of the African Union Commission, Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, Secretary-General of COMESA and Wamkele Mene, Secretary General of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).





# COMESA Bloc Champions for Digitalization, Innovation and Regional Integration



The 18th COMESA Business Forum, held in Nairobi, Kenya, brought together over 300 participants, including business leaders, policymakers, private sector representatives and development partners from across the region and beyond. Running alongside the event was a multi-sectoral trade exhibition, showcasing innovations and products from the 21 COMESA Member States.

Deputy President Professor Kithure Kindiki officially opened the forum, urging regional leaders and the private sector to accelerate progress toward digital integration, value addition and innovation-driven trade. He underscored the critical role of digitalization in unlocking intra-African trade, reducing non-tariff barriers and expanding economic opportunities for women and youth to drive long-term prosperity.





Professor Kindiki highlighted the importance of innovations such as the Electronic Certificate of Origin (eCO) and smart border technologies in enhancing cross-border trade efficiency and minimizing trade-related friction.

Cabinet Secretary for Investments, Trade and Industry, Lee Kinyanjui reaffirmed Kenya's commitment to investing in digital infrastructure and fostering innovation ecosystems. He emphasized that technology is a key enabler of trade, employment and industrial development. He noted Kenya's ongoing efforts to transform agriculture into a high-value sector powered by digital solutions.

COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe described the forum as a major milestone in advancing regional economic integration. Reflecting on COMESA's progress since its establishment in 1994, she highlighted the growth of intra-COMESA trade to nearly USD 14 billion, as well as the development of key trade facilitation instruments such as the Regional Customs Guarantee Scheme and the Yellow Card System both of which have become continental models.

However, Kapwepwe acknowledged a 3.6% decline in intra-COMESA trade in 2024, falling from USD 14.2 billion to USD 13.7 billion, largely due to decreased exports of key commodities. Despite this setback, she emphasized the strategic value of the Forum in promoting a resilient and inclusive regional economy.

She called for greater investment in digital infrastructure, harmonized regulatory frameworks and targeted support for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) particularly those owned or led by women and youth as essential drivers of Africa's economic integration.

Forum discussions centered on actionable strategies to position COMESA as a competitive, digitally enabled and sustainable regional economy. Kenya, in particular, underscored its commitment to leveraging its strengths in technology and innovation to reinforce regional value chains and boost intra-African trade.

The forum concluded on a positive note, with participants expressing confidence that digitalization, innovation and value-added trade will accelerate Africa's journey toward a more inclusive, competitive and sustainable economic future.





# COMESA - EU Strategize on Boosting Africa's Horticultural Trade

The COMESA–EU Horticulture Connect meeting marked a significant milestone in regional trade and investment, as it brought together European buyers, regional SMEs and agribusiness leaders to explore new opportunities across Eastern and Southern Africa's horticulture sector.

Held on the sidelines of the 24th COMESA Summit of Heads of State and Government, the forum represented the first of its kind under COMESA and aligned closely with the Summit's overarching theme.

Presiding over the opening ceremony, Cabinet Secretary for Agriculture and Livestock Development, Mutahi Kagwe, outlined Kenya's efforts to modernize the horticulture sector and enhance its global competitiveness.

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**In Kenya alone, the sector earned over KSh137 billion in 2024 and employed more than 200,000 people directly, most of them women and youth.** ”

**Cabinet Secretary for  
Agriculture and Livestock  
Development, Mutahi  
Kagwe,**



Echoing his remarks, Cabinet Secretary for Investments, Trade and Industry, Lee Kinyanjui, emphasized the forum's strategic role in enhancing competitiveness and facilitating access to international markets.

“The opportunities are vast, from sustainable production and value addition to enhance regional trade and entry into the lucrative European market. Success requires greater investment, stronger partnerships and bold innovation,” he said.





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**Cabinet Secretary for Investments, Trade and Industry, Lee Kinyanjui**

CS Kinyanjui further highlighted the importance of integrating horticulture into regional and global value chains. He noted that COMESA, through the EU-funded Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP), actively supported SME competitiveness, compliance with sanitary and phytosanitary standards and direct linkages between African exporters and European buyers.

Principal Secretary for Trade, Regina Ombam, underscored the forum’s practical focus and long-term impact.

“This is not just a conversation; it serves as a platform for action. We expect it to result in real B2B partnerships and export deals,” she said, adding that digitalization, stronger value chains and addressing logistics gaps were essential to making African horticulture globally competitive.

COMESA Secretary General, Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, commended Kenya for hosting the inaugural meeting and reaffirmed COMESA’s strategic commitment to value chain development, SME growth and sustainable market integration.

She noted that COMESA’s horticulture exports to the European Union exceeded USD 3.3 billion annually, with the Netherlands accounting for 28% of that trade, a clear indication of a maturing value chain driven by regional collaboration and private sector resilience.

Ms. Lana Zutelija, EU Team Leader for Environment and Climate, Rural Development, and Trade Cooperation, pledged continued EU support for strengthening Africa–EU horticultural trade relations.

The event featured B2B sessions, policy dialogues and exhibitions that connected producers with European buyers. Discussions also focused on climate resilience, logistics and the use of digital tools for supply chain traceability.

The meeting concluded with a joint commitment from governments, the private sector, and development partners to deepen cooperation, strengthen horticulture value chains and position COMESA as a leading hub for sustainable agricultural trade.





# COMESA Summit Key Highlights

01

## COMESA Free Trade Area and Digitalization

- Adoption and implementation of digital trade facilitation instruments to increase efficiency and reduce the costs of trade.
- To boost their collective resilience to shocks, Member States were tasked to enhance the benefits derived from the COMESA FTA.
- COMESA States urged to implement Simplified Trade Regime (STR) which bolsters the inclusivity of regional trade by supporting small scale traders, women, youth and people with disability.

02

## COMESA- EAC – SADC Tripartite Arrangement

- Member States encouraged to accelerate the domestic and implementation of instruments adopted by Tripartite TFA Council of Ministers
- Kenya offered to host the 4th Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Tripartite FTA during the second quarter of 2026 and Member States urged to participate actively in this summit.

03

## Infrastructure Development

- Domestication of the regional transport regulations, policies and guidelines developed by the African Civil Aviation Commission (AFCAC) applicable under SAATM will benefit Member States.



## 04

### Agriculture, Industry and Private Sector Development

- There's growth in the implementation of the regional pharmaceutical sector development project supported by Africa Development Bank.
- Implementation of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Plan (CAADP) requires support from Member States.
- Strengthen the capacity to test and certify products and the adoption and implementation of Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRA) to avoid the duplication of related technical processes.

## 05

### Gender and Social Affairs

- Over 2700 participants and more than 100 exhibitors comprising of women and youth-led small and medium enterprises (SMEs) benefit from market access through trade fairs at regional level.

## 06

### Movement of Persons

- Facilitation of free movement of persons to enhance cross border trade and investment was encouraged.
- Value chain development can be supported by eliminating visa restrictions to facilitate trade, investments, tourism and support.



# Kenya Positions Itself to Capitalize on AfCFTA's \$3.4 Trillion Market Potential



Kenya remains committed to fully harnessing the benefits of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), a transformative agreement aimed at promoting intra-African trade, industrialization and shared prosperity across the continent.

The AfCFTA represents one of the most ambitious trade pacts creating an integrated market of over 1.4 billion people with a combined GDP exceeding USD 3.4 trillion. Speaking during a National Assembly Engagement Workshop on AfCFTA Phase II Protocols in Mombasa, the Principal Secretary for Trade Regina Ombam, emphasized that regional and continental integration are critical to achieving Kenya's national development aspirations.

She reaffirmed the country's readiness to translate AfCFTA commitments into tangible benefits for Kenyan businesses and citizens.

The workshop brought together Members of Parliament, senior government officials and development partners to discuss alignment of Kenya's policies and legislation with the Phase II AfCFTA Protocols on Investment, Digital Trade, Intellectual Property Rights, Competition Policy and Women and Youth in Trade.

The Vice Chairperson of the Trade, Industry and Cooperatives Committee Marianne Kitany, highlighted that the AfCFTA presents Kenya with transformative opportunities, expanding market access, enhancing economic resilience through regional value chains and attracting strategic investments under a unified regulatory framework.

She urged legislators to develop a clear and actionable roadmap for the ratification and domestication of the AfCFTA protocols to ensure Kenya is strategically positioned to benefit from the agreement.



# Kenya– UAE CEPA Ratification Expected to Unlock Trade Opportunities

Ratification of the Kenya–UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) is set to further deepen trade and investment ties between the two nations.

With negotiations successfully concluded, ratification now remains the key step, expected to unlock new opportunities in trade, investment, infrastructure, mining, technology and education.

The Principal Secretary for Trade, Regina Ombam, held discussions with the Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates to Kenya, Salim Ibrahim Bin Ahmed Mohammed Alnaqbi, focusing on strengthening bilateral cooperation between the two countries.

The discussions emphasized the need to address the persistent trade imbalance through concerted efforts to increase Kenyan exports.

The meeting also underscored the importance of streamlining Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures to prevent non-tariff barriers and facilitate smoother customs clearance.

Also discussed was the proposal to establish direct cooperation between the Dubai Port and the Port of Mombasa to create a seamless sea logistics corridor, as well as explore areas of collaboration in the BETA value chains including coffee, tea, dairy, meat and leather products.

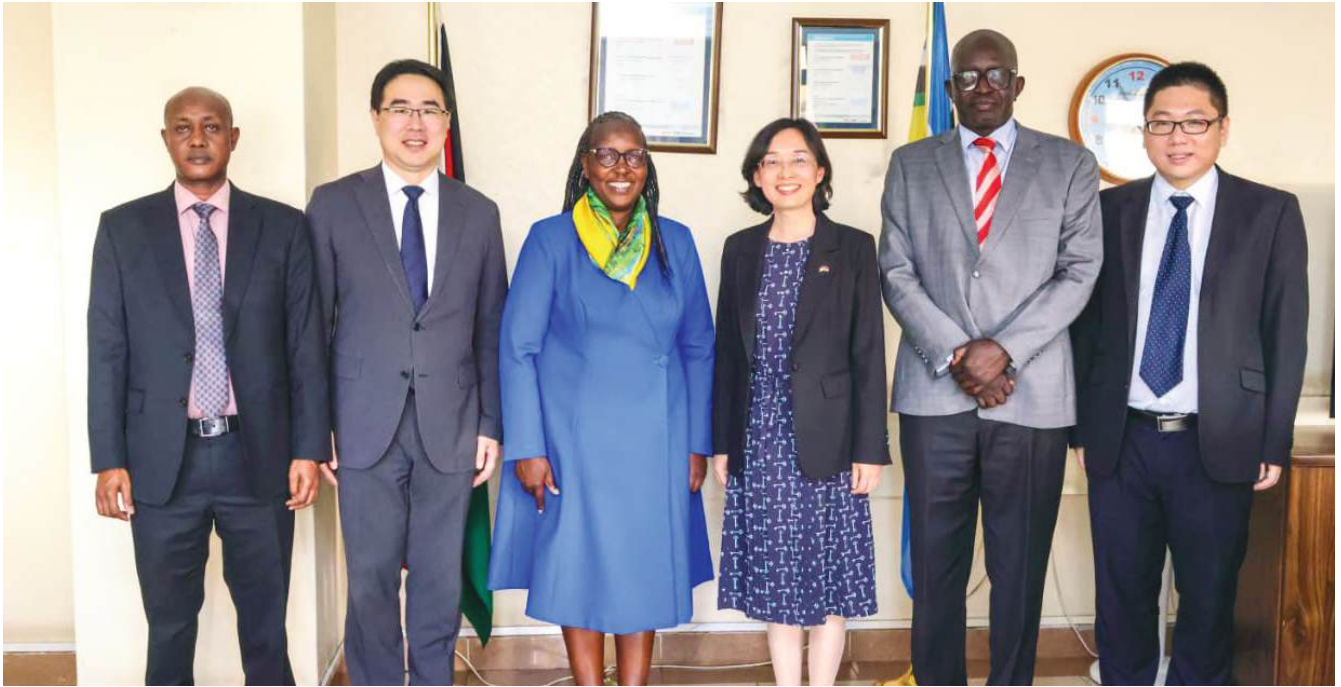


Ambassador Alnaqbi reaffirmed the UAE’s commitment to further deepening bilateral relations for the mutual benefit of both nations.





# Kenya, China Advance Preliminary Trade Deal Talks

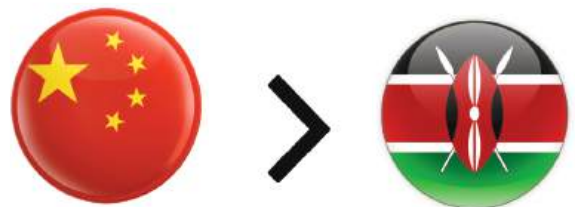


Kenya and China are working on a preliminary trade deal aimed at strengthening trade and investment ties between the two countries.

The Principal Secretary for Trade, Regina Ombam, met with the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Kenya, Guo Haiyan for discussions on progress toward the agreement, which seeks to expand market access especially for Kenya's key export sectors such as tea and coffee and promote greater economic cooperation.

The talks also focused on enhancing Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures for fish and agricultural products to facilitate smoother trade and ensure compliance with international standards.

Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to building a mutually beneficial partnership that supports sustainable trade, investment and shared prosperity.



China to Kenya Imports, 2023  
**\$4.66B**



Kenya to China Exports, 2023  
**\$221M**

*Source: The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC)*



# Kenya Unveils National Technical Barriers to Trade Committee and its Strategic Plan

The State Department for Trade, in collaboration with the Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS) and various state agencies, with support from TradeMark Africa through the Business Environment and Export Enhancement Programme (BEEEP), launched the National Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Committee and the National TBT Strategic Plan (2025–2029). The initiative forms part of Kenya’s implementation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Technical Barriers to Trade Agreement and is designed to strengthen regulatory coherence, improve coordination among institutions and align Kenya’s trade systems with international standards.

Established under Gazette Notice No. 8740 of 4 July 2025, the National TBT Committee is a central mechanism under the National Quality Policy (2023) for promoting coordinated regulation and enhancing market access. As Kenya’s mirror committee to the WTO TBT Committee, it’ll oversee the development, implementation and enforcement of technical regulations, standards and conformity assessment procedures to ensure they do not create unnecessary obstacles to trade.

The National TBT Strategic Plan (2025–2029) aligns with key national, regional and global frameworks, including the Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda (BETA), Kenya Vision 2030, the EAC Vision 2050, Africa Agenda 2063 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It focuses on four strategic goals: strengthening legal and institutional capacity, enhancing trade facilitation, promoting stakeholder engagement and communication and building capacity for effective implementation.



Speaking during the launch, Principal Secretary for Trade, Regina Ombam, noted that the formation of the committee comes at a time when global trade systems face increasing challenges. “We have an opportunity to redefine how trade operates in the 21st century, positioning Kenya as a regional hub and ensuring trade benefits our people and economy,” she said.

Lillian Mwai, Country Director at TradeMark Africa, emphasized the economic impact of technical barriers. “Technical barriers influence over 80 percent of global trade in goods. Yet fragmented technical regulations and slow conformity assessment can add up to 10 percent to export costs,” she stated. Mwai added that EU funding through BEEEP has supported Kenya’s participation in regional and global trade platforms, ensuring that issues affecting Kenyan exports are addressed multilaterally.



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We view this committee not as a bureaucratic layer, but as a bridge between Kenya and its trading partners

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**Filipo Amato,  
Trade Counsellor,  
EU delegation Kenya**

Filipo Amato, Trade Counsellor, EU Delegation to Kenya, reaffirmed the EU’s commitment to supporting Kenya’s trade agenda. “The European Union remains one of Kenya’s leading trade partners, accounting for about 21% of exports and 17% of imports. We view this committee not as a bureaucratic layer, but as a bridge between Kenya and its trading partners,” he said.

By promoting transparency, non-discrimination, and efficiency in trade measures, the National TBT Committee and its Strategic Plan aim to strengthen Kenya’s role in global trade, driving sustainable economic growth and competitiveness by 2029.





# UNCTAD 16 Calls for Economic Transformation and Sustainable Development



The 16th United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD16) took place in Geneva under the theme **“Shaping the Future: Driving Economic Transformation for Equitable, Inclusive and Sustainable Development.”**

The four-day conference brought together ministers of trade and economy, heads of international organizations, private sector leaders, civil society representatives, youth delegates and renowned experts. Participants engaged in high-level dialogue on emerging global trends and policy responses in key areas such as trade, investment, finance, debt sustainability and the digital economy.

As UNCTAD’s highest decision-making body, this quadrennial conference convened representatives from all 195 Member States to address pressing global development challenges, evaluate policy options and forge multilateral strategies for inclusive growth.

More than 40 high-level sessions and ministerial roundtables focused on actionable strategies to strengthen supply chain resilience, promote sustainable financing, catalyze productive investment, and ensure inclusivity in the digital economy. Central to the discussions was the question of how countries can navigate today’s global uncertainties while laying the groundwork for long-term, sustainable development that benefits all.

Principal Secretary for Trade, Regina Ombam, emphasized the need for coordinated and strategic approaches to development. She underscored the importance of integrated planning and the phased implementation of capacity-building projects, alongside investments in infrastructure, education and innovation to enhance national productivity.

PS Ombam also highlighted the critical role of public-private partnerships in mobilizing sustainable financing and acknowledged UNCTAD’s technical assistance and policy support as instrumental in strengthening national development frameworks. Kenya’s active participation in UNCTAD16 reaffirms the country’s commitment to global cooperation aimed at unlocking inclusive, sustainable growth and building resilient economies capable of thriving in an evolving global trade landscape.



# Kenya Participates in the G20 4th Trade and Investment Working Group Meeting in South Africa

**K**enya participated in the G20 4th Trade and Investment Working Group (TIWG) Meeting, held in Gqeberha, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa, reaffirming its commitment to advancing inclusive and sustainable global trade.

Representing Kenya, Trade Attache Jackie Marangu joined delegates in discussions focused on fostering collaboration and driving collective solutions to shared global challenges.

Kenya expressed its support for South Africa's leadership in steering an inclusive, positive and solution-oriented agenda, emphasizing the importance of harnessing the collective energy and contributions of G20 member states, guest countries, international organizations and partners.

The meeting underscored the need for concerted global efforts to address geopolitical tensions, worsening climate-related challenges, fragmenting global supply chains and widening economic disparities between developed and developing nations.





# State Department Showcases Youth Creativity through Art Exhibition

The State Department for Trade hosted a vibrant Art Exhibition event at its offices, spotlighting the synergy between culture, creativity and trade diversification.

The exhibition brought together young artists from across the country highlighting the power of cultural expression as a tool for national identity and a pathway to economic empowerment.



Principal Secretary for Trade, Regina Ombam, underscored the importance of nurturing youth talent and supporting cultural industries as emerging pillars of economic growth. She praised the young artists for their innovation, noting that their work reflects the untapped potential within Kenya's youth.



The digital economy is increasingly driven by creativity and our growing art scene presents new and exciting opportunities for trade and entrepreneurship.



Principal Secretary,  
Regina Ombam

The exhibition featured a range of original artworks, emphasizing the critical role of Kenya's creative industries in enriching the cultural fabric and expanding the country's trade potential.



The event reaffirmed the State Department's commitment to fostering alternative economic sectors powered by innovation, talent and cultural heritage.

The exhibition was organized by Jeremy Esete and Vincent Mawira, third-year Mathematics and Economics students from Kenyatta University, who interned at the State Department.











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