

THE 2026 PIVOT:

Empowering Trade Promotion in an Era of Rising Protectionism

- transforming global turbulence into export opportunities

North-West University (NWU) TRADE WTO Chair - Trade Research Advisory

2026 User Group Conference

Date: Thursday 12 March 2026

Venue: Definitive Conferencing Building

Location: Corner of Definitive Lane & Kruin St, Harmelia, Isando (close to OR Tambo airport)



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Context:

If COVID-19 forced a pivot in logistics, the geoeconomic shifts of 2025/2026 demand a pivot in **strategy**. The mandate of Trade and Investment Promotion Agencies (TIPAs) has fundamentally transformed. In an era of rising protectionism and supply chain fragmentation, the traditional role of 'promotion' is no longer enough. Modern TIPAs must now act as strategic navigators simultaneously protecting domestic interests while converting global turbulence into concrete export opportunities.

As rapid-fire tariff changes and the surge in South-South trade outpace traditional facilitation models, agencies require a new perspective. This workshop introduces the concept of 'Advanced Export Intelligence' required to modernize facilitation, meet national economic mandates, and outmanoeuvre the 'Tariff Wall'.

RSVP Confirmation:

The North-West University (NWU) TRADE WTO Chair, in collaboration with Trade Research Advisory, is looking forward to hosting you to our 2026 User Group Conference which focuses on "Empowering Trade Promotion in a Protectionist Era".

Thank you for your interest in this session and for confirming your attendance.

Reminder

Date: Thursday 12 March 2026
(Arrival and registration 08:30 – 9:30am)

Venue: Definitive Conferencing Building

Location: Corner of Definitive Lane & Kruin St, Harmelia, Isando (close to OR Tambo airport), 1619
[Click here](#) for Google map location.

Parking:

Please note that while parking is available at the Venue, more parking is available in the areas of the 3 hotels behind the venue as indicated on the map.



Attached please find the detailed programme.

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Slot	Topic	Speaker
08:30 – 09:30	Arrival and registration	All
09:30 – 09:35	Welcome & introductions	Dr Martin Cameron
09:35 – 09:50	Increasing intra-African trade: Can the African Continental Free Trade Area be the game changer? Freely available from https://books.aosis.co.za/index.php/ob/catalog/book/371 Context and overview of our latest book, updating the methodological approach described in the 2012 book: Export Promotion – A Decision Support Model Approach, freely available from https://www.academia.edu/21980784/Export_promotion_A_decision_support_model_approach	Prof Wilma Viviers
09:50 – 10:10	WTO, Geopolitics and Strategic Export Promotion Context and role of the WTO Chairs programme in South Africa. The World Trade Organization has traditionally provided the rules and stability that support global trade. However, the system is currently under pressure - what is happening in the global trading system and why it matters for Trade and Investment Promotion Agencies (TIPAs) in South Africa. Despite the current challenges, the WTO remains important because it still provides the rules, transparency, and information that help countries and businesses navigate global trade.	Dr Adelia Janse Van Rensburg
10:10 – 10:30	Global Trade Turbulence & need for TIPAs as strategic navigators Unpacking the Global Trade Turbulence and strategic geo-economic developments of recent weeks. Why it is important and how does it feed through in modelling of opportunity identification, the AfCFTA and China questions and implications for TIPAs and exporters.	Dr Martin Cameron
11:00 – 11:30	Algorithm or Autonomy? Digital and Energy Sovereignty and the Future of Trade The shipping container was arguably the most significant technological innovation of the 20th century impacting on international trade. In the 21st century, it is likely that digital and (renewable) energy technologies will have the most significant impact. Unlike the shipping container however, digital and (renewable) energy technologies present a double-edged sword: they can either boost a fairer form of globalisation, or result in a mercantilist-type of world economy. In the 21st century, it will be the super-power who dominates in digital technology and renewable energies that will also set the rules – the terms – for global trade. This presentation will explain how this quest for digital dominance – in the fields of AI and blockchain – and in energy security, is fundamentally changing how nations participate in international trade, and how the role of governments, and their trade and investment promotion agencies, will be more important than ever	Prof Wim Naudé

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Slot	Topic	Speaker
11:30 – 11:50	Break (start again 12:00, but communicate 11:50)	All
12:00 – 12:30	Data driven overview of global container trade trends – Container Trade Statistics An overview of how global shipping volumes, pricing and trade patterns evolved in 2025, with a particular focus on Sub Saharan Africa. The return to steady post pandemic growth, the impact of supply chain diversification and regionalisation, and Africa’s role as a fast growing, import driven market, while examining regional trade flows, key commodities, infrastructure constraints and the strategic implications for shippers, freight forwarders and policymakers. Potential implications on pricing and trade patterns due to the latest Iran war disruptions.	Me Claire Thackeray
12:30 – 13:00	From Disruption to Direction: South Africa in a Shifting Global Economy How the DTIC envisaging turning chaos into strategic advantage for SA’s trade policy.	Ambassador Xolelwa Mlumbi-Peter
13:00 – 13:30	The WTO, the US, China and International Trade While the WTO provides rules for governing fair international trade, under the US International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), the US President imposed WTO-inconsistent “reciprocal duties” that the US Supreme Court have ruled are illegal. The CIT has since ruled that all duties collected under IEEPA must be refunded. AGOA was allowed to lapse and was then reinstated for 12 months. USAID was disbanded and support to PEPFAR all but discontinued. The EU is renegotiating its bound tariffs and steel. China has responded to the IEEPA duties by introducing a zero-duty policy for all (but one) African countries, effective 1 May 2026, aiming to virtually double China-African trade within one year. All of these developments in the last 15 months have thrown world trade into disarray. This presentation looks at the impact these actions have on international trade and investment and what African countries should do to benefit most from a volatile trade environment.	Dr Gustav Brink
13:30 – 14:00	Lunch & Networking	
14:00 – 15:00	Q&A session with experts Opportunity to ask practical, technical and policy-rated questions, reporting and any other relevant research questions, studying opportunities (NWU) etc. Trade servicification, AI, crypto currencies, Iran war, global oil and energy, CBAM, international trade law etc.	Dr Adelia Janse Van Rensburg
15:00	Closure	Dr Adelia Janse Van Rensburg

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More on the speakers

Dr Adelia Jansen Van Rensburg

(Senior lecturer, WTO Chair, International Trade, TRADE research focus area, NWU)

North-West University, South Africa, Adelia.JansenVanRensburg@nwu.ac.za (+27) 18 285 2114

Adelia was appointed as the WTO–WCP Chair of South Africa in November 2024. She is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Economic Sciences at North-West University, South Africa, where she teaches economic and trade-focused subjects, including International Trade Relations. Her involvement with the WTO Chairs Programme dates to 2017, when she joined TRADE as a postdoctoral research fellow and contributed to the Programme’s research, curriculum development, and outreach initiatives.

Before entering academia, Adelia worked as a diplomat in the Directorate: Trade Policy Development and Research at the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) Secretariat, supporting SACU’s trade negotiations work programme.

She has authored several publications aimed at strengthening trade policy development. Her research interests include the evolving global trade landscape, the design of trade policies for diverse national and regional contexts, and the tensions between the WTO’s multilateral approach and the growth of bilateral, regional, and continental preferential trade agreements. She is also interested in how shifting geopolitics shapes trade and policy.

Adelia holds a PhD in International Trade and is a trade economist with extensive expertise in global and regional trade governance, trade agreements, and negotiation processes. Throughout her career, she has collaborated widely across government, academia, and the private sector. She has a longstanding collaboration with South Africa’s Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC), beginning in 2007 when the NWU-TRADE Export Promotion Research Group supported government in identifying viable export opportunities. She contributed to the National Strategic Framework for Promoting South Africa’s Services Exports in 2018/2019 and continues to support DTIC through research, including a recent study on reforming the WTO Dispute Settlement System to enhance accessibility and inclusivity for developing countries.

As WCP Chair, Adelia envisions the team playing an increasingly influential role in supporting government to design trade strategies that advance South Africa’s and Africa’s long-term trade and development objectives. She is equally committed to empowering researchers, students, and policymakers to deepen their understanding of the international trading system and leverage trade policy as a catalyst for economic growth and development.

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Dr Gustav Brink.

(Extraordinary lecturer, International trade law , University of Pretoria)

Gustav is a specialist in international trade remedies and WTO dispute settlement and highly experienced in international trade law and policy with more than 30 years practical and academic experience, including as WTO dispute settlement lawyer, panellist and academic.

He has assisted with institutional transformation in various countries on three continents and provided technical training on international trade law in more than 30 countries on five continents. Excellent interpersonal skills and used to working in multinational and multicultural environments.

He has published three textbooks, chapters in several textbooks, and more than 40 academic and research papers. He has been included as an expert in Who's Who Law's/ Lexology's Trade and Customs section every year since 2012, and six times as a "Global Elite Thought Leader" – one of only two Africans ever to be included in this list. He has been involved in more than 200 trade remedy investigations and reviews in various jurisdictions and is still actively involved in investigations, and has assisted 3 countries in their TPRs.

Gustav's qualifications include B Com (financial management, accountancy), LLB (international private law, insurance law), LLD (International Trade Law), Certificate in Human Rights and Certificate in Industrial Policy.

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Dr Martin Cameron

(Managing Director, Trade Research Advisory, a spinout-company of the NWU)

Martin Cameron is the founder and managing director of Trade Research Advisory (Pty) Ltd, a spin-out company of the North-West University. Martin is a quantitative economist specialising in the field of quantitative executive decision support, economic impact analysis (computable general equilibrium (CGE) modelling) and engineering management decision support. He has extensive experience in these fields – specifically in relation to international trade and energy economics and modelling. He holds a PhD in International Trade from the North-West University.

Martin has authored various papers on the topic of international trade and power (electrical) network reliability. He has been conducting economic impact assessments and other related South African macro-economic, sectoral, provincial and industrial impact studies and policy-related analysis since 1994. In 2020, Martin was commissioned by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) to develop (over a three-year period) an international trade decision support model for all 11 ECCAS member states, including policy briefs and technical inputs for the development of each country's industrialisation and export strategies. In 2024, Martin was commissioned by Trade and Investment Queensland, Australia to conduct an analysis of the State of Queensland's use of and benefits derived from the Australia-India Free Trade Agreement and the Australia-UK Free Trade Agreement.

Most recently Martin advised the DTIC on the development of the export "Butterfly" strategy that was launched during the Export Symposium and Expo that took place from 14-16 October 2025, in Midrand, Gauteng, at which Martin was also requested to be a panellist during the launch session.

Martin holds a master's degree (Cum Laude) in computable general equilibrium (CGE) modelling and development economics and received a PhD in International Trade at the NWU in 2020.

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Prof Wim Naude

(Professor of the Economics of Innovation, Trade and Development at RWTH Aachen University, Germany, Associate Trade Research Advisory)

Wim Naudé holds a PhD in CGE modelling and is Professor of the Economics of Innovation, Trade and Development at RWTH Aachen University, Germany. In addition, he is a Fellow of the African Studies Centre at the University of Leiden, The Netherlands, and Distinguished Visiting Professor at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa. He has been attached to Trade Research Advisory (Pty) Ltd since 2016 as strategic advisor.

He is a graduate of the University of Warwick (MSc Quantitative Development Economics) where he studied Social Accounting Matrices and CGE Modelling under Graham Pyatt and Jeff Round; and the North West University, South Africa (PhD economics) where his PhD thesis dealt with CGE modelling.

Previously he has been a lecturer and research officer at the Centre for the Study of African Economies, University of Oxford (1994-1996), Visiting Professor at the Economics Department, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia (1994), Full Professor in Economics at North West University, South Africa (1996-2006), Senior Research Fellow at the United Nations University (2007-2011) and Professor at Maastricht University. In 2005 the South African Minister of Finance, Trevor Manuel, appointed him to the Council of Statistics SA.

His research, teaching and community outreach is concerned with the relation between trade, technological innovation and sustainable development, with a special focus on Africa. His Google h-index is 57, with more than 12,000 citations to his work. According to IDEAS/RePEc he is ranked among the top 5 economists in Africa (see: <https://ideas.repec.org/top/top.africa.html>) and according to Stanford University / Elsevier he is among the top 2% of scientists in the world (see <https://topresearcherslist.com/Home/Profile/779634>)

He is an internationally acknowledged expert on trade and innovation, and the role of trade in structural transformation in Africa. On this topic he has consulted for the UN-system, including UN-DESA, UNDP, UNIDO and UNCTAD, as well as for the World Bank, the OECD, the EU, and various governments. For example, he has been:

- Lead author of the 2024 Economic Development in Africa Report¹ (EDAR) of the United Nation's Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) which deals with "*Unlocking Africa's trade potential: Boosting regional markets and reducing risks*" which deals intensively with the relation between AfCFTA and the risks from the polycrisis in Africa.
- Invited Guest Speaker and Panellist at the World Trade Organization (WTO's) Public Forum 2025 in Geneva, speaking on African Trade, AfCFTA and resilience.
- Contributor to the World Trade Organization's 2018 Flagship Report "*World Trade Report 2018: The future of world trade: How digital technologies are transforming global commerce*". Geneva: WTO.
- Co-author of the International Trade Centre's 2024 "*SME Competitiveness Outlook: Small Businesses in Fragility: From Survival to Growth*". Geneva: ITC.

¹ See https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/aldcafrica2024-overview_en.pdf

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Prof Wilma Viviers

(Extra-ordinary professor, former WTO Chair, International trade, TRADE research focus area, NWU)

Wilma Viviers is an extra-ordinary professor in the TRADE (Trade and Development) research focus area, an NRF-rated researcher and from 2014–2024 was the holder of the WTO (World Trade Organization) Chair at the North-West University (Potchefstroom campus). Wilma holds a DCom (Economics) and a BEd from the North-West University.

Wilma has received many research grants and a number of prizes, including a fellowship from the International Trade Institute of Southern Africa (ITRISA) for her contribution in extending the scope of international trade-focused education and research in South Africa; the 'Women in Research Award' from the South African Association of Women Graduates; five university teaching excellence awards; and the Department of Science and Technology's 'Distinguished Women in Science Award' first runner-up in the Humanities and Social Sciences category. Over the years she has successfully supervised more than 35 master's and PhD students.

Wilma has also been actively involved in initiatives aimed at enhancing South Africa's trade competitiveness and performance. She was instrumental in introducing the TRADE-DSM[®] (Decision Support Model), a market selection tool and an efficient approach to identifying high-potential export opportunities (or product–country combinations) for individual exporters and countries. The TRADE-DSM[®] and its applications are extensively covered in numerous academic publications, and Wilma has also overseen its roll-out in several other countries. More recently, she and her research team have been focusing on the digital economy and big data analytics and how these can be leveraged to improve countries' growth prospects and export decision-making.

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Me Claire Thackeray

(Global sales and marketing manager, [Container Trade Statistics](#))

After completing her degree in English Language and Literature at the University of Portsmouth, Claire embarked on her career in education, initially teaching at a middle school. However, she later transitioned into the realm of sales, where she has accumulated over a decade of experience in B2B sales and marketing across diverse sectors, including travel and shipping. Since joining CTS, Claire has played a pivotal role in implementing CRM and marketing tools, enhancing sales strategy, revamping the company's website, and establishing CTS as a prominent exhibitor at trade shows.

With a keen interest in leveraging cutting-edge technologies, Claire is deeply passionate about harnessing the power of data and AI to drive growth and innovation at CTS.

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Ambassador Xolelwa Mlumbi-Peter

(Deputy director-general (DDG) for Trade, the dtic)

Ambassador Xolelwa Mlumbi-Peter is the Deputy Director-General (DDG) for the Trade Branch at South Africa's Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (the dtic). She leads trade policy, negotiating international trade agreements. Ambassador Mlumbi-Peter has recently been a key figure in South Africa's G20 Presidency for 2025, specifically overseeing the Trade and Investment Working Group (TIWG) meetings that lead up to the G20 Trade Ministers meeting in October 2025.

Ms. Xolelwa Mlumbi-Peter served as the country's permanent representative to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Geneva from May 2019 until September 2023, where she was highly regarded for her leadership in multilateral trade negotiations.

Key Milestones at the WTO included the Council for TRIPS Chair (2020–2021): She was elected as Chairperson of the Council for Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) in July 2020. COVID-19 Response: Led the high-profile lobbying for the TRIPS Waiver to expand global access to COVID-19 vaccines and therapeutics and Fisheries Subsidies: Played a central role in negotiations for the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, which was adopted at the 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) in June 2022.

Before the WTO Ms. Xolelwa Mlumbi-Peter has served as South Africa's Chief Negotiator and Deputy Director-General (DDG) in the International Trade and Economic Division (ITED) at Department of Trade and Industry (the dti) since October 2014. This entailed the development and implementation of trade, intellectual property rights and investment policy. She has led South Africa's trade negotiations with various partners, including the European Union, UK and Mercosur. At the regional and African continental level, this included leading trade negotiations, bilateral and regional trade engagements in the Southern Africa Customs Union, Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), the Tripartite Free Trade Area negotiations between East African Community, Common Market for East and Southern Africa and SADC and the African Continental Free Trade Agreement. She has also led negotiations on behalf of South Africa in a number of multilateral platforms such as the G20, BRICS and the Commonwealth.

Ms Xolelwa Mlumbi-Peter holds B.Com Honours, Economics from a Rhodes University and an MBA from University of Johannesburg.