



ITFA ARC WORKSHOP AND PARTICIPATION AT GTR AFRICA, March 2025

Written by **Tedd George**, Kleos Advisory UK

On March 12th ITFA's African Regional Committee (ARC) held its first educational workshop of 2025, exploring innovative approaches to close Africa's Trade Finance Gap. This event was aimed at all ITFA members, especially those involved in financing or underwriting trade in Africa, as well as the wider trade finance community. The workshop was hosted by ITFA and ARC member, RMB, at their offices in Cape Town which offer spectacular views of the city from the 28th floor auditorium. There were ten speakers at the workshop – a record for the ARC – and 35 attendees from banks, NBFIs and fintechs in the trade finance space.

The workshop was jointly opened by Mergan Naidoo (Head of Trade Finance at RMB) and Sean Edwards (ITFA Chair & Head of Legal EMEA at SMBC UK), who emphasised the importance of partnerships between ITFA and its members to share market insights and best practice. They were followed by George Wilson (ARC Chair & Head Institutional Trade Finance at Investec Bank) who gave the opening words which focused on the ARC's role in fostering two-way dialogue with Africa in order to identify the key challenges for SME traders and develop tailored solutions to address them.

Next up, Dr Tedd George (ARC Secretariat & Chief Narrative Officer at Kleos Advisory) gave a presentation on the outlook for trade flows across Africa and the key challenges and opportunities for trade finance. Tedd noted the multiple risks to African trade, from the impact of climate change and commodity price volatility to the disruption caused by Trump tariffs and disruption to shipping caused by the Red Sea Crisis. Despite these challenges, African trade flows have continued to grow, reaching an estimated USD 1.4 trillion in 2023, dominated by SADC and COMESA, producing a trade deficit of nearly USD 80 billion. But the picture varies greatly from country to country, with Egypt, Morocco and Kenya accounting for the lion's share of Africa's trade deficit, while Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria and Ghana have a roughly balanced trade account, and Algeria runs a large surplus.

This presentation was followed by an introduction to the ARC Working Group on SME trade finance by Tedd and Ahanna Anaba (ARC WG Lead & Head of Sales & Partnerships at Finverity). Tedd explored the causes of Africa's gaping trade finance gap, the disconnect between the DFIs/multinational banks and the local African banks and their SME clients, and how the ARC WG's efforts will feed into the planned TF COP Task Force. Ahanna then shared the results of surveys carried out by the ARC WG, noting the mismatch between what clients are demanding (e.g. receivables financing) and what the banks are offering them (mostly overdraft facilities). This section finished with an overview of the three work streams of the ARC WG: financial products, regulatory/legal and technology/capacity building. All three work streams are focused on identifying the challenges facing African SME traders and developing specific tools to meet their needs, from standardised legal documentation to bespoke financing products and tech solutions.

The final session of the workshop brought together four companies that are working to produce innovative financing solutions for African trade. First was Anne-Marie Woolley (ARC member & CEO of Africa Global Trade Finance), who spoke about the importance of capacity building and close engagement with SME clients



and their banks to enable trade finance solutions, notably through her work with other ITFA members to develop standardised templates. She was followed by Laurie Hammond (Founder at Dealflow) who outlined the capabilities of the platform she has developed to automate cross-border trade finance deals, especially for SME traders. Next up was Morgan Lepinoy (MD & Global Head of Trade Facilitation at Viaservice) who showcased his company's container deposit financing solution, which could release an estimated USD 10 billion of capital locked up in container deposits and free it up for SME traders. The session ended with two speakers from Monetago, Neil Shonhard (CEO) and Ian Milne (Executive Director Sales) who explored how their platform can help combat fraud – the biggest cause of loss in trade finance – and root out forged invoices. The workshop ended with a lively Q&A focused on how these solutions can be applied to African traders and markets.

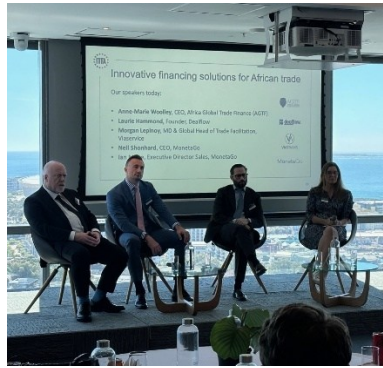
Over the next two days all ARC participants at the workshop spoke at GTR Africa 2025, which drew a record 690 attendees this year. Kevin Holmes (Product Development Portfolio Head at Rand Merchant Bank) moderated a panel on using digital solutions to streamline the guarantee process; Sean Edwards spoke on a panel about political and credit risk insurance; Duarte Pedreira (ITFA Board & ARC member & Head of Trade Finance at Crown Agents Bank) moderated a panel on Africa's trade finance gap and the aims of the planned TF COP Task Force, which included fellow ARC members George Wilson & Anne-Marie Woolley; and Tedd George moderated two panels, one involving fellow ARC member, Simon Cook (ITFA board member & Partner at Sullivan & Worcester), discussing the causes of fraud and how Warehouse Receipt Financing (WRF) can be used as a tool to mitigate these risks, and the final panel of the conference exploring tradetech solutions, with contributions from Tether, Onafriq, Intellect Design Arena, Afreximbank and Binance.

Look out for the next ARC workshop and participation in GTR West Africa which takes place in late April. Full details of the agenda and how to register will follow in the coming weeks.

ITFA ARC Educational Workshop Photos



Sean Edwards (ITFA Chair & Head of Legal EMEA at SMBC UK), **Mergan Naidoo** (Head of Trade Finance at RMB) and **Mwinda Kiula** (Head of Marketing and Communications, RMB)



GTR Africa, 2025 Photos

