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The Transformative Potential of Digital Readiness for Africa's Trade Facilitation: The Case of Kenya And Ghana

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Abstract

In today's interconnected global environment, the significance of trade facilitation in propelling international trade and fostering economic growth cannot be overstated. It focuses on creating an environment that promotes smoother, faster, and more cost-effective cross-border trade. When coupled with digital readiness – the ability to leverage technology effectively – it amplifies the efficiency of trade facilitation by enabling automation, improving data exchange, and enhancing supply chain visibility.

This research explores the nuanced relationship between digital preparedness and trade facilitation, placing particular emphasis on Kenya and Ghana, which have made significant strides in their digital advancement. By examining their approaches to digital trade facilitation implementation and tracking progress indicators, our research unveils the potential benefits of digital readiness for Africa's economic advancement and global integration.

Valuable insights for African countries emerge from the case studies of Kenya and Ghana. In pursuit of digital readiness, African countries need to prioritise investment in digital infrastructure, streamline customs procedures, establish robust digital payment systems, address digital skills gaps, and improve their regulatory environment. The success of African countries in their efforts toward digital trade facilitation also hinges on critical enabling factors, including strong governmental support, dedicated senior-level champions, seamless cooperation among multiple government agencies, rationalising business processes and fostering regional cooperation.

1. Introduction

In our increasingly interconnected global landscape, the pivotal role of trade facilitation in driving international trade and stimulating economic growth is undeniable (WTO, 2011). Trade facilitation involves the simplification, standardisation, and optimisation of processes and procedures associated with the cross-border movement of goods. It aims to alleviate trade barriers that impede efficiency, such as excessive paperwork, customs delays, and logistical inefficiencies (UNECE,2022). In fact, according to the WTO (2021), trade facilitation measures are projected to lower trade costs by an average of 14.3%, underscoring its significance in international trade and economic integration. The overarching goal is to create an environment where international trade becomes smoother, faster, and more cost-effective, thereby fostering enhanced global economic integration.

Within this context, the growing importance of digital readiness, a key enabler of effective trade facilitation, has come to the forefront as a transformative force in modern trade practices. Digital readiness, often referred to as digital preparedness or digital maturity, refers to a country or organisation's capacity to effectively harness digital technologies and infrastructure for a variety of purposes, including trade and commerce. It incorporates a spectrum of factors, ranging from the availability of robust digital infrastructure such as broadband access, to the cultivation of digital skills within the workforce, the formulation of relevant digital

regulations, and the fostering of digital innovation (Peterson, 2017; Smith, 2020).

As digitalisation continues to reshape industries and economies, countries with high levels of digital readiness are better equipped to capitalise on the benefits of streamlined trade facilitation. The positive correlation between digital readiness and trade facilitation is evident, as economies with advanced digital infrastructure tend to have shorter trade clearance times and lower trade-related costs (UNCTAD, 2021).

The focus of this study is particularly directed towards two prominent African countries, namely Kenya and Ghana, which have demonstrated higher levels of digital readiness. Leveraging their technological prowess, these countries have undertaken innovative approaches to digital trade facilitation. By examining their strategies and practices, our objective is to reveal valuable insights and practical lessons for other African countries looking to boost their digital readiness.

2. Improving Trade Facilitation Through Digital Readiness in Africa

African countries have become more willing to investigate the opportunities afforded by trade facilitation, whether within the framework of national, regional, or multi-lateral discussions. Most African countries face immense challenges in overcoming issues such as unstable electricity supply, bureaucratic processes in customs clearance and congested border posts (Buyonge & Kireeva, 2008).

Nonetheless, the continent is seeing a rise in trade facilitation measures that tackle administrative barriers as well as physical infrastructure such as ports, highways, and phone access. Investing in skills development, adopting digital platforms, streamlining laws, strengthening regional collaboration, and improving and expanding infrastructure are also some solutions that have been proposed (Buyonge & Kireeva, 2008).

Trade facilitation is critical for the African continent to ensure shorter import and export times, and reduced trade costs. Adom (2022) found that customs clearance processes in sub-Saharan Africa can take up to six times longer than in the EU region. Bonuedi, Kamasa and Opoku (2020) indicate that the best trade facilitation policies to improve trade conditions in Africa are those that focus on reducing delays at borders and documentation compliance.

Digital readiness is, therefore, critical for African trade facilitation as it can assist in streamlining cross-border trade processes and reducing border delays. By integrating digital technologies such as electronic customs systems, online documentation and digital payment platforms, business transactions can become more efficient and cost-effective. Digital transformation can help reduce bureaucratic barriers and delays, allowing a smoother flow of goods. The World Bank (2017) emphasised that digital technologies in trade facilitation can significantly improve trade efficiency and reduce trade costs, ultimately benefiting African economies by improving their global competitiveness (World Bank, 2019)

In addition, UNCTAD (2017) showed that Africa ranks lowest in all indicators of e-commerce readiness, including internet penetration, reliability of postal services, secure servers per million inhabitants, and credit card penetration. UNCTAD also indicated that improving digital readiness is essential for African countries to effectively participate in the digital economy and take advantage of digital business opportunities.

Akankunda (2023) reports that merely 30% of the African population participates in online shopping, generating only \$22 billion in turnover in regional business-to-consumer (B2C) e-commerce transactions. Nonetheless, Assefa, Rorissa and Alemneh (2021) highlight a trend where digital technologies are being adopted by public and private organisations in Africa to improve work processes, boost productivity, and enhance service delivery.

Several factors can drive higher digital readiness in Africa (Carliner, 2017; Dewan & Riggins, 2005; Qiang *et al.*, 2009). Government policies and regulations play a crucial role in creating an enabling environment for digitisation. Clear practices in digital infrastructure development, cyber security, data protection and e-governance can encourage investment and innovation. Also, investments in digital infrastructure, including broadband networks and data centres, are critical to improving digital readiness. These investments improve connectivity and enable the adoption of advanced technologies. In the surveys conducted as part of the Agility Emerging Markets Logistics Index 2023 (Agility, 2023), participants were asked about the critical digital readiness factors influencing their investment decisions in emerging markets. Most respondents emphasised that technology adoption, specifically the utilisation of internet and mobile phones, ranked as the foremost digital readiness factor. Interestingly, they considered this aspect even more crucial than technology infrastructure, emphasising that even the best

infrastructure holds little value if the population cannot effectively leverage it. Therefore, promoting digital skills and literacy through educational programmes is crucial for individuals and organisations to use digital technology more effectively. Finally, public-private partnerships and stakeholder collaboration are central to fostering a culture of digital innovation, especially in the customs environment, to reduce border delays and documentary compliance issues (Hoffman *et al.*, 2018).

UNECE (2021) places specific emphasis on the importance of moving towards cross-border paperless trade measures and the implementation of Single Windows at borders to enhance trade facilitation. This is only possible if there is a concerted effort to move towards deeper integration of digital technologies in trade processes, and most African countries are unable to implement these processes without the assistance of organisations such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the World Customs Organisation (WCO).

3. Measuring Digital Readiness

Tracking digital readiness over time is crucial in understanding a country's progress in adapting to the digital era. In assessing a country's digital readiness, a diverse array of indicators and methodologies are employed to determine its capacity for technological adoption and innovation. These encompass measures ranging from infrastructure and affordability to digital skills and e-government services. Longitudinal analysis and benchmarking against peers further enhance the understanding of a nation's preparedness for the digital era. Within this context, this study chose to analyse the Agility Emerging Markets Logistics Index (Agility, 2023), a specialised indicator offering invaluable insights into logistics capabilities within emerging markets, to select markets to focus on for the rest of the study. In addition to the Agility Index, this study also leverages some insights from the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation (UNECE, 2023). This survey provides a valuable perspective on the digital readiness of countries by assessing key elements such as digital infrastructure, regulatory frameworks, and the integration of technology in trade processes to give a representation of progress made in digital and sustainable trade facilitation measures. This includes measures featured in the WTO's Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), and other regional and global initiatives on digital trade. Together with the Agility Index, these

tools offer a comprehensive understanding of a country's overall competitiveness, drawing from assessments of logistics capabilities, business climate and digital readiness to navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by the evolving digital landscape.

3.1 Agility Emerging Markets Logistics Index

The Agility Emerging Markets Logistics Index 2023 (Agility, 2023) evaluates the logistics and business environment of 50 emerging markets through a robust methodology. Recognising that digital readiness alone is not sufficient in assessing a country's digital trade facilitation capabilities, the index adopts a comprehensive approach, considering factors such as infrastructure, logistics services, and the overall business environment. This comprehensive assessment provides a more accurate evaluation of a country's readiness for digital trade, aiding investment decisions.

The Agility Emerging Markets Logistics Index comprises three main components:

- 1) Firstly, the overall index combines scores derived from assessments of both domestic and international logistics markets, alongside the business environment of each country.
- 2) Secondly, the overall index is broken down into four sub-indices for a more detailed analysis. These encompass domestic logistics opportunities, international logistics opportunities, business fundamentals and digital readiness.
- 3) Thirdly, a survey of 750 professionals from the trade and logistics industry is carried out.

Note that metrics assign equal weights to domestic and international logistics opportunities, business fundamentals, and digital readiness.

The *Domestic Logistics Opportunities* sub-index evaluates a nation's infrastructure quality, including road, rail, air networks, logistics services and customs procedures. This metric is pivotal, mirroring a country's proficiency in the movement of goods and people within its borders. The *International Logistics Opportunities* sub-index determines a country's connectivity to global markets, encompassing air and sea connectivity, trade agreements, and logistics services. It reflects a nation's ability to engage in international trade and access worldwide markets.

The *Business Fundamentals* sub-index measures the ease of conducting business, accounting for regulations, property rights, contract enforceability, crime levels, corruption, and credit accessibility. This

metric offers insight into a country's broader business environment. The *Digital Readiness* sub-index evaluates a nation's preparedness for digital technologies, considering internet penetration, mobile phone usage, e-commerce adoption, and government support for digital transformation. It reflects a country's ability to leverage digital technologies to enhance logistics performance and competitiveness.

The index uses data from reputable sources such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, United Nations Agencies and World Economic Forum, ensuring accuracy and comprehensiveness in depicting logistics performance. It serves as a valuable benchmark for comparison and pinpointing areas for improvement. All scores in the index, including the overall index and sub-indices, are rated on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest and 1 being the lowest.

4. Case Studies

Some African countries have been able to adopt digital technologies at a higher rate than others and have therefore significantly improved their trade facilitation efforts as a result. The following section explores the digital landscape of two African countries, namely Kenya and Ghana, selected based on their ranking and performance in the 2023 Agility Emerging Market Index discussed in section 3.2. These case studies will provide valuable insights into how different approaches to technology adoption can lead to different speeds of digital transformation, and shed light on the strategies and practices that have enabled these African countries to adopt digital technology faster than others, offering practical lessons for other countries looking to boost their digital readiness and trade facilitation.

Although both South Africa and Egypt outranked Kenya and Ghana in the overall 2023 index ranking, it is their digital readiness that made them stand out. As digitalisation emerges as a key driver of growth for developing economies, both these nations have made notable strides in transforming into digitally driven, skill-rich, innovation-oriented, and sustainable African countries poised for the future (Agility, 2023).

4.1. Kenya

Kenya ranks 25th in the Agility Emerging Markets Logistics Index 2023 with a score of 4.86, a testament to the country's commitment to enhancing its digital readiness. Kenya has shown improvement in its

ranking, ascending one spot compared to the previous year (Agility, 2023). Notably, customs and border procedures have been subject to significant simplification and streamlining in recent years.

This progress is rooted in Kenya's proactive regulatory environment and enhanced internet connectivity, which have paved the way for innovation and entrepreneurship. A prime example is the legal framework that facilitated the widely adopted digital payment technology (fintech) platform, M-Pesa, to flourish (Ndung'u, 2017). This innovation revolutionised mobile banking services not only in Kenya, but also across multiple African countries. Originally designed for money transfers, Kenya's M-PESA system has evolved over time to encompass real-time retail transactions and expanded into a virtual savings and credit expansion platform (Ndung'u, 2017). These advancements have culminated in the establishment of a comprehensive retail payment infrastructure, significantly enhancing the efficiency, transparency, and security of financial transactions.

Kenya's financial sector has therefore undergone a remarkable transformation, with a surge in digital payments adoption, credit card ownership, and mobile money accounts. The widespread adoption of mobile money services has propelled financial inclusion for previously unbanked populations and facilitated the expansion of digital transactions (Lilako, 2022). Moreover, this expanded platform has proven invaluable for various functions such as e-commerce, tax remittances, and revenue management. According to a report published by Jumia (2019), a prominent e-commerce entity in Kenya, 70% of all transactions conducted on the platform were facilitated through mobile money, with the remaining 30% being accomplished through alternative payment modes, such as cash on delivery and card payments. This shift has contributed to a more inclusive financial sector, benefiting both urban and rural areas (Lilako, 2022).

Furthermore, policies and regulations supporting digital trade, including the introduction of a modern data protection law, have fostered an environment conducive to digital service investments. The Huduma programme, launched in 2013, stands as a flagship initiative, directly contributing to Kenya's Vision 2030 of becoming a newly industrialised middle-income country (Gakii, Mukiri & Murimi, 2018). Its resounding success is evident in the enhanced accessibility of government services experienced by every Kenyan citizen, including businesses. Key enablers of this achievement include the widespread availability of mobile money transfer services, and the ambitious

deployment of fibre optic infrastructure nationwide (Gakii, Mukiri & Murimi, 2018). Complementing this regulatory environment is Kenya’s vibrant incubator hub ecosystem, providing start-ups with essential resources for growth and the implementation of innovative solutions.

Additionally, the introduction of the National Electronic Single Window System stands as another success story in Kenya’s digital trade facilitation. The system is designed to minimise non-tariff trade barriers and streamline cross-border trade processes. It serves as a unified platform for the exchange of electronic information among regulatory agencies and trading stakeholders. This includes the electronic submission and approval of standardised documents to meet all regulatory requirements for imports, exports, and transits. Essentially, it aims to offer the trading community and stakeholders a centralised access point for all trade-related services, ensuring compliance with legal trade requirements (KenTrade, 2019; Ministry of Information, Communication & Technology, 2019).

Table 1 highlights Kenya’s remarkable progress in digital and sustainable trade facilitation, showcasing a substantial increase in its overall score from 47.31% in 2015 to an impressive 69.89% in 2023. According to the UN Global Survey (2023), this commendable progress is credited to a combination of enhanced transparency, streamlined formalities, and the adoption of paperless trade practices.

Table 1: Kenya: Digital and sustainable trade facilitation

Indicator	2015	2023
Transparency	73.6	86.7%
Formalities	41.7%	62.5%
Institutional arrangement and cooperation	22.2%	33.3%
Paperless trade	59.3%	81.5%
Cross-border paperless trade	27.8%	66.7%

Source: Authors’ compilation based on UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation (2023)

Kenya’s commitment to transparency is evident in proactive measures such as engaging stakeholders in regulatory consultations, providing advance rulings, and ensuring online accessibility of import/export rules. Additionally, they have made significant improvements in risk management and post-clearance audits. Notably, the transparency indicator surged from 73.6% in 2015 to an impressive 86.7% in 2023.

In the domain of formalities, Kenya has made significant strides, improving from 41.7% in 2015 to 62.5% in 2023. This progress is underscored by enhancements in risk management and post-clearance audits, reflecting a proactive approach to trade facilitation.

In the move toward paperless trade, Kenya has successfully implemented automated customs systems, ensured internet access for agencies, and introduced electronic submission processes for declarations and permits. The paperless trade indicator has risen from 59.3% in 2015 to 81.5% in 2023, indicating a successful transition towards digital trade practices.

Furthermore, Kenya is actively working on strengthening institutional cooperation and harmonising procedures with neighbouring countries at border crossings. These ongoing efforts emphasise Kenya's commitment to fostering collaboration and enhancing trade facilitation beyond its borders.

However, despite Kenya's remarkable strides and accomplishments in the digital realm, it does not overshadow the underlying disparities and challenges that lie ahead, as noted by the World Bank (2020). Firstly, there is the task of closing the broadband connectivity divide. While Kenya has made significant progress in broadband accessibility, regulations need to evolve to keep up with rapidly changing technology and address the affordability barrier. Secondly, improving uptake and accessibility of e-government services. The government's digital infrastructure requires upgrading to meet growing bandwidth demands and improve user experiences. Furthermore, addressing digital capacity gaps in government is also important for security. Thirdly, boosting digital business and skills. While Kenya has shown digital prowess in generating innovative digital startups, there is a need to focus on their sustained growth. Equipping individuals with the necessary technical and soft skills is essential for success in an increasingly digitised economy.

Introduced in 2019 by the Ministry of Information, Communications and Technology (2019), the Digital Economy Blueprint articulates a vision and plan to establish a nation in which every citizen, enterprise and organisation possesses digital access and the capabilities to actively participate and thrive in the digital economy. This blueprint positions Kenya strategically for digital expansion, as it recognises and addresses key risks associated with the digital divide, including connectivity, skills, access to digital devices and affordability. It also outlines processes for prioritising policy and regulation to address these challenges.

As such, Kenya's progress in digital trade and trade facilitation is commendable, offering significant potential for growth and global competitiveness. However, concerted efforts are needed to strengthen infrastructure, enhance cybersecurity, and ensure that regulatory frameworks are in place for sustained success in the digital economy.

4.2. Ghana

In the Agility Emerging Markets Logistics Index of 2023, Ghana secures the 29th position, earning a noteworthy score of 4.72. This marks a commendable advancement of three positions from the previous year, underscoring the country's steadfast commitment to enhancing its digital readiness.

Over the past decade, Ghana has witnessed a remarkable surge in internet usage, with the proportion of the population having an online presence soaring from a mere 8% in 2010 to an impressive 69% in 2021 (Dabalen & Tei Mensah, 2023). This significant growth can largely be attributed to the widespread availability of mobile broadband, facilitated by the accessibility and affordability of smartphones and the expansion of mobile network coverage. These trends are similar to patterns observed in several other African countries.

In contrast to many of its neighbouring countries, Ghana has successfully established an appealing economic and regulatory environment for both domestic businesses and investors, largely attributed to its stable government and regulating policies. Ghana had a vision to bring more Ghanaians into the banking system and to increase the accessibility of services. While banks in Ghana displayed a lack of enthusiasm in establishing the type of mass-market business envisioned by regulations, mobile network operators were eager to step in. However, they faced heavy restrictions due to regulatory constraints (Zetterli, 2015). The pivotal shift came with the introduction of new agent and e-money regulations by Ghana's central bank in 2015, which outlined best practices for digital financial services. These regulatory changes opened the door for non-banking institutions to own and operate mobile money networks, marking a monumental shift and giving rise to a dynamic market of diverse providers competing to offer the most innovative and efficient services (Zetterli, 2015).

Furthermore, the introduction of mobile money interoperability in 2018 further accelerated the adoption and utilisation of financial technologies (fintech) in Ghana. This milestone development played a

crucial role in driving the growth and accessibility of digital financial services across the country, allowing direct and seamless transfers of funds (Ghana Chamber of Telecommunications, 2018). Consequently, the mobile revolution presented a significant opportunity to involve the majority of the population in the financial sphere.

Table 2 highlights the remarkable strides Ghana has taken in digital and sustainable trade facilitation, based on the findings of the UN Global Survey (2023). From 2015 to 2023, Ghana has exhibited a substantial improvement in its overall trade facilitation score, soaring from 46.67% to an impressive 84.95%. This noteworthy advancement is a testament to Ghana’s comprehensive approach to trade facilitation, evident across various indicators assessed by the UN Global Survey (2023).

Table 2: Ghana: Digital and sustainable trade facilitation

Indicator	2015	2023
Transparency	46.7%	86.7%
Formalities	62.5%	91.7%
Institutional arrangement and cooperation	44.4%	77.8%
Paperless trade	63%	100%
Cross-border paperless trade	16.7%	55.6%

Source: Authors’ compilation based on UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation (2023)

Ghana’s commendable performance extends across key aspects of trade facilitation, including transparency, formalities, institutional arrangements, and cooperation, as well as the pivotal domain of paperless trade. Transparency, for instance, has recorded a remarkable improvement from 46.7% in 2015 to an impressive 86.7% in 2023, underscored by practices such as stakeholder consultation on draft regulations, accessibility of existing import-export regulations online, and the timely dissemination of new trade regulations and rulings related to tariff classification and rules of origin.

Furthermore, Ghana has made significant progress in formalities, improving from a mere 62.5% in 2015 to an impressive score of 91.7% in 2023. This improvement is evident in the embrace of practices such as risk management, pre-arrival processing, and post-clearance audits. The proactive approach to the disclosure of average release times further contributes to this positive trend.

Institutional arrangements and cooperation have been strengthened, improving from 44.4% in 2015 to 77.8% in 2023. This improvement is marked by the establishment of a fully operational national trade facilitation committee, coupled with government agencies entrusting border controls to customs authorities. Plans for the implementation of a comprehensive national legislative framework for border agencies' cooperation are also in progress.

In addition, Ghana has fully embraced paperless trade, achieving a perfect score of 100% in 2023, up from 63% in 2015. This includes leveraging automated customs systems, an electronic single window platform, electronic submission of customs declarations, and e-payment mechanisms for customs duties, among other initiatives. This concerted effort towards digitalisation has not only streamlined trade processes but also positioned Ghana as a frontrunner in sustainable and efficient digital trade facilitation practices.

Similar to Kenya, Ghana also faces significant challenges. Firstly, there is a pressing need to extend digital services to rural and underserved communities, transitioning from traditional paper-based and cash-dependent methods to on-demand, paperless, and cashless processes accessible through the internet. This shift is essential to foster equity and inclusion, particularly among marginalised groups, enabling their fuller participation in economic activities. Additionally, Ghana must grapple with the task of nurturing its local IT industry, capitalising on the opportunities presented by the rise of the internet while strategically addressing the creation of new digital jobs (World Bank, 2019).

4.3. Key insights

Examining some of the key strategies, processes and successes of Kenya and Ghana, the widespread adoption of mobile payments and digital payment solutions represents a transformative catalyst for trade facilitation and economic growth. These technologies enhance financial inclusion, offering accessible and efficient payment systems that empower a broader spectrum of individuals and businesses to partake in formal trade networks. By reducing transaction costs and streamlining compliance processes, mobile payment solutions can facilitate seamless cross-border transactions, fostering a more interconnected and dynamic trading landscape. Furthermore, their ability to provide SMEs with credit access and facilitate e-commerce platforms amplifies market opportunities, both domestically and internationally. With real-time data

insights and supply chain financing capabilities, these solutions equip businesses to navigate the complexities of global trade with greater efficiency. In essence, the integration of mobile payments and digital payment solutions represents a pivotal advancement in strengthening the digital readiness of African nations, ultimately propelling economic growth and prosperity throughout the region.

However, striking the right balance between the advantages offered by these technologies and the potential risks they may entail is crucial. Given the comparatively lower levels of financial inclusion, a competitive banking landscape, and macro-financial connections in Africa, regulators and central banks stand to gain from viewing financial technologies as an opportunity for significant progress in fostering increased trade, inclusive economic growth, and development.

In this regard, international organisations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the World Customs Organization (WCO) play a significant role in assisting African countries to improve their digital readiness and digital trade facilitation. For instance, the WTO's Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) can help African countries simplify customs procedures and reduce trade barriers. Simultaneously, the WCO, specialising in customs matters, champions the harmonisation of customs procedures, advocating for the adoption of modern technologies and best practices that streamline cross-border trade. These organisations not only serve as platforms for knowledge sharing and capacity-building but also spearhead initiatives that empower nations, particularly those in the developing world, to harness the full potential of digital technologies for trade, thereby driving economic growth and prosperity on a global scale.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Amid an expanding digital landscape, Africa is experiencing a surge in the adoption of digital platforms, financial technologies, and mobile money applications. This trend signals a profound shift towards a digital economy, highlighting the pivotal role of governments and regulatory frameworks in guiding this transformative journey. To fully capitalise on the potential of digital technologies, governments must establish a robust regulatory foundation that fosters a dynamic and conducive environment for all stakeholders.

This will require a nuanced approach, as ill-conceived regulations can inadvertently impede, rather than facilitate, the readiness and

development of the digital economy. It is therefore important to acknowledge that these novel technologies also bring about new vulnerabilities, necessitating the need for proficient regulatory frameworks.

To bolster digital trade facilitation and readiness in African countries, while mitigating the associated risks, valuable insights emerge from the case studies of Kenya and Ghana. First and foremost, prioritising investment in *digital infrastructure*, starting with improving access to electricity and broadband networks, is essential to enhance internet connectivity and accessibility. *Streamlining customs procedures* through the adoption of electronic systems and digital trade documents can significantly reduce the time and cost of moving goods across borders.

Moreover, the *establishment of robust digital payment systems* is instrumental in facilitating cross-border transactions and reducing transaction costs. *Addressing digital skills gaps* is of paramount importance, ensuring inclusivity and equitable access to the digital economy, with a specific emphasis on empowering women. Additionally, there is a pressing need for an *improved regulatory environment*, encompassing measures such as safeguarding intellectual property rights and ensuring data privacy, which are essential for creating a favourable environment for e-commerce to thrive. Policymakers also need to synchronise swift innovation with the often slower pace of implementing regulations.

The success of African countries in their efforts toward digital trade facilitation, as underscored by the lessons learned, also hinges on critical enabling factors. These include political will and strong governmental support, dedicated senior-level champions driving the implementation process, and seamless cooperation among multiple government agencies. Furthermore, rationalising business processes, fostering regional cooperation, and allocating a sufficient budget all contribute to the effectiveness of digital trade facilitation. Taking a comprehensive approach that encompasses these strategies and enablers is paramount in ensuring that African nations not only navigate the digital revolution proficiently, but also seize the full spectrum of opportunities it offers for employment, productivity, and more broadly its role in driving much-needed structural transformation.

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