



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism



AFRICA BUSINESS GROUP

23RD ANNUAL TRANS-ATLANTIC TRADE AND INVESTMENT SYMPOSIUM

Creating Opportunities for Economic Diversification and Resilience

Through Expansion of Trade and Investment with West Africa

Hilton Trinidad and Conference Centre July 31, 2025, 9:00am to 5:00pm

SPEAKERS BRIEF PROFILES



MRS. HAZEL SIMONETTE- HERNDON

Hazel Simonette- Herndon is an energetic businesswoman who, after graduating from Famshawe College and the University of Western Ontario, with a degree in Hotel and Restaurant Management and Tourism, worked in the Hospitality Industry both in Canada and Trinidad and Tobago for fifteen years. She brings a personal commitment for African Advancement, based on strong family traditions of African expression and entrepreneurship, as well as an abiding commitment to national development. As Director of the Emancipation Support Committee she puts her skills and expertise in the area of tourism, marketing, protocol and resource development in the service of the goals of the organisation.



MRS. ROXANNE COLTHRUST

Roxanne Colthrust is a serial entrepreneur involved in communications, web-development, tourism, ecommerce and animation. With a Masters Degree with Merit in Leadership, Entrepreneurship & Innovation, her vision is for an advanced Caribbean community where entrepreneurship leads growth and development for the region.

She has been strategically involved in the development of the Trinidad and Tobago animation industry for the past 20 years, as a Co-Director to the Anima Caribbean Festival. Having directed community outreach sessions all over Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean, managed delegations of animators seeking outsourcing work opportunities at foreign trade shows, she has been a champion for the Animation industry.

She has worked alongside a dynamic team at web-development & integrated communications studio SIGHTFACTORY to bring multiple corporate and private sector website, communications campaigns, conferences and events into reality. In 2016, she partnered with husband and co-director Philip Colthrust to develop the tourism booking platform Destination Trinidad and Tobago (www.destinationtnt.com) which has amassed more than 800000 visitors per year. In 2020, she became the Managing Director of ShopCaribe.com, the ultimate marketplace for Caribbean-made products, with more than 168 vendors and 3000 products.



SENATOR THE HONOURABLE MR. SATYAKAMA "KAMA" MAHARAJ

Senator the Honourable Mr. Satyakama "Kama" Maharaj Minister of Trade, Investment and Tourism of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Maharaj is the Founder and Managing Director of Sacha Cosmetics, a company which he started in 1979, following his decision to leave his job as a mathematics teacher at Fyzabad Composite School. An experienced manufacturer, Mr. Maharaj has received numerous accolades in entrepreneurship, including being named in 2012, among the country's "Top 50 Icons & Exemplars" from 1962-2012, being awarded the Trinidad & Tobago Chamber of Commerce "Champion of Business 2014", the Caribbean Development Agency "2014 Caribbean Exporter of the Year" and the EY Caribbean Entrepreneur of the Year in 2016.

Mr. Maharaj has a degree in economics and is a founding member of the Hibiscus Foundation that cares for children born with AIDS.



MR. TEMWA GONDWE

Temwa Gondwe is seasoned trade and development economist. He leads African Export-Import Bank's deployment of support towards the development of the creatives and cultural industries in Africa through various initiatives such as financing, capacity building, export and investment promotion, and policy advocacy.

Prior to joining Afreximbank as Manager for Trade Facilitation in the Intra-African Trade Division, Temwa held various specialist positions in the Government of Malawi, European Union and World Bank over a 10-year period; following which over 5 years he held various technical advisory roles as a consultant for DFID, GIZ, World Bank, ILO, UNDP, UNESCO, IMF, the most recent being Trade Facilitation Advisor at USAID/Southern Africa Trade and Investment Hub.

Temwa holds an MBA from the Edinburgh Business School, an MA in Economics and Trade Law from Lund University, and BA in Economics from University of Malawi. He is also a certified Commercial Banking & Credit Analyst (CBCA) by the Corporate Finance Institute.



MR. MICHAEL SUDARKASA

Michael Sudarkasa is the Founder and Chairman of Africa Business Group (ABG) a South Africa based, continentally active, African economic development company. Founded in 2005, ABG focuses on the following areas: 1) Professional Services – economic development (public sector, foundations, large NGO clients) and management consulting (private sector and government owned corporations), 2) Industry Development Initiatives – undertaking with partner institutions various development catalyzing projects (in agriculture, tourism, renewable energy infrastructure, transportation, technology, healthcare, creative industries) and 3) Capacity Development – offering a range of initiatives intended to strengthen institutional and individual capacity on the continent (knowledge event development/ facilitation; short course development; sector/ industry platform development and management). ABG specializes in the areas of private sector development, public – private engagement facilitation, as well as the promotion/ facilitation of trade and investment within Africa,

and between Africa and the global business community. ABG also undertakes a range of initiatives that support the inclusion of youth and women in the African business sector, that involve creating and strengthening business linkages between the African diaspora and the African continent, and that support the role of the private sector in disaster risk reduction on the continent.

An American commercial attorney by training, Michael has lived, travelled, and worked in 51 countries around the world (including 35 in Africa), and is the author of several publications, including: The African Union Commission's Africa Business Directory: Toward the Facilitation of Growth, Partnership and Global Inclusion (African Union, 2014), A Field Guide to Inclusive Business Finance (UNDP 2012), Investing in Africa: An Insider's Guide to the Ultimate Emerging Market (John Wiley & Sons, August 2000) and The African Business Handbook (1991-92; 1993-94; 2007-08)

Michael also currently serves on the Africa leadership team of the UN Disaster Risk Reduction Agency's Private Sector Alliance for Disaster Resilient Societies (ARISE), as Chair of Impact@Africa, an initiative focused on the development of communities of practice within Africa's impact investment ecosystem, is a member of the University of Michigan Provost's Advisory Committee, sits on the Advisory Board of the African Center for the Study of the United States of the University of Witwatersrand, and as also Chair of the Advisory Board of the African Studies Center of the University of Michigan. He holds a B.A. degree from the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor (High Honors in History) and a J.D. degree from Harvard Law School. Of American, Bahamian and Nigerian heritage, he is also fluent in French.



MS. VASHTI GUYADEEN

Vashti Guyadeen is CEO of the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce. With over 20 years' experience in research, policy, SME development, and global competitiveness, she has driven national initiatives, collaborated with global agencies, and champions private-sector-led development, Caribbean trade, and international partnerships. She is the VP, Caribbean Women In Trade and member of the Advisory Board of the Shridath Ramphal Centre in Barbados and the Global Ambassador of the Pan African Leadership Institute based in Accra, Ghana for Trinidad and Tobago.



DR. YAO GRAHAM

Dr. Yao Graham is the Coordinator of Third World Network-Africa (TWN-Africa) a pan-African advocacy organisation based in Accra, Ghana. TWN-Africa (www.twnafrica.org) works for economic and social equity in Africa, and equity for Africa in the global order. Its current programme focuses on the challenges of achieving structural transformation with equity in Africa centred on the issues of mining, trade and investment, finance and agro-industrial linkages. TWN-Africa coordinates several pan-African and Ghanaian CSO advocacy networks.

Yao has extensive knowledge and experience of Ghanaian, African and international development issues from many years of work as a public intellectual and activist, government official and journalist. Under his leadership TWN-Africa has been active in international and global South advocacy alliances on global economic justice issues. These include the debt question, against the power and conditionalities of the IMF and World Bank, in defence of Southern interests in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and against the EU's attempts to impose Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) on African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries.

He has worked as a consultant for the United Nations Economic Commission (UNECA), Africa Union Commission (AUC), the UNDP, UNCTAD and other UN bodies on international trade and investment and minerals and development, and African regional integration Issues. He was a member of the International Study Group (ISG) on the reform of Africa's mining regimes set up by the UNECA and AUC which produced the report Minerals and Africa's Development (2011), and anchored the intellectual processes around the Africa Mining Vision and its Action Plan and subsequent policy documents.

Yao was a member of the national committee set up by the President of Ghana to oversee the celebration of the centenary of the birth of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah in 2009.

Yao Graham studied law at the University of Ghana, the Free University of Brussels (VUB), Belgium and the University of Warwick, Coventry, UK where he obtained his PhD in Law. Yao is the Africa Editor of the journal Review of African Political Economy (ROAPE) and founding editor of the Ghanaian bi-weekly newspaper Public Agenda.



MR. STEPHEN DE GANNES

Stephen de Gannes is a graduate of the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine where he pursued a degree in Electrical Engineering with a focus on Electronics and Telecommunications. After spending 16 years in that field, he ventured into formal management training and obtained a Masters in Business Administration from the Arthur Lok Jack Graduate School of business which has been put to good use by the corporations in which he managed which include:

Rockwell Automation Trinidad and Tobago, the local office of an Electrical and Control equipment manufacturer, Universal Pegasus Incorporated, the local office of a Houston based Engineering firm, and Warren ECM, a local branch of Sonepar, the largest electrical distributor in the world.

Stephen then moved a bit further away from his electrical engineering base to focus on reorganization and other area of organizational structures in his time at Trinidad Systems Limited, a local IT and document management firm, and the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce as the CEO, before leading the task of the operationalization of the Trinidad and Tobago Special Economic Zones Authority whose mandate is to ensure compliance of enterprises within the regime that benefit from rewards designed to encourage participation by firms that invest and create employment in the country.



MR. ROGER ROACH

Roger Roach, Former President Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association [TTMA] Mr. Roach is the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Lazuri Apparel Limited. Mr. Roach is passionate about the holistic development of the Manufacturing Sector in Trinidad and Tobago.

He is the Chairman of Export Centres Company Limited (ECCL) and serves as a Director on the Boards of Evolving Technologies and Enterprise Development Company Limited (eTeck), The National Insurance Board of Trinidad and Tobago and Trinidad and Tobago NGL Limited.

Mr. Roach is the former Chief Executive Officer of Langston Roach Industries Limited and Managing Director of ANSA Coatings Limited.

He holds a BSc. in Economics & Management and a Post Graduate Diploma in Corporate and Commercial Law from the University of the West Indies, as well as an International Master of Business Administration (MBA) from the UWI Arthur Lok Jack School of Business where he specialised in International Marketing



MR. ROBERT LE HUNTE - Fmr. Executive Director for The Bahamas, Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, The Inter-American Development Bank

Mr. Robert Le Hunte currently serves as the Executive Director for the Caribbean member countries at the Inter-American Development Bank. He has also been one of the founding advocates for increased Trade and Investment between Trinidad and Tobago and the African continent. He worked for five years in Ghana as Republic Bank's point person, leading the investment team that bought and established Republic Bank in Ghana. After leaving Republic Bank as a member of the Bank's executive team, he served as a government minister in Trinidad and Tobago from 2017 to 2020, responsible for public utilities. To his credit, he has even gone further in bringing the links between the two countries together by having a Ghanaian wife



DR. GILLIAN MARCELLE

Dr. Gillian Marcelle, PhD, CEO, Resilience Capital Ventures LLC (RCV), a boutique capital advisory practice specializing in blended finance headquartered in Washington D.C. Dr Marcelle developed the Triple B Framework to improve flows and allocation of capital in its multiple forms; this provides a platform for engaging in the finance and investment world, where her contributions and perspectives on diversity, inclusion, accountability and alignment with the SDGs are becoming influential. Most recently, she was recognized by earning inclusion in the fourth annual Forbes Fifty Over Fifty: Investment list.

Her decades long track record includes attracting investment and structuring deals. Her sectors of focus are telecoms, fintech, renewable energy, regenerative agriculture and health systems. Her specialty is the design and implementation of blended finance strategies that involve partnerships, ecosystem strengthening and architectures to facilitate transformational change. Dr Marcelle includes among her clients and partners: The Bahamas; Open Society Foundations; MPC Energy Solutions, PolicyLink, Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT), AfricaBio and the Clinton Foundation. She serves on the Advisory Boards of New Majority Capital and Global Venture Partners. Additionally, she has guided numerous ventures in the role of Senior Advisor. She is also an LP in Outside Ventures.

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/gillianmarcelle>



MR. TROY PERSAD

Mr. Troy Persad is a maritime professional with over 24 years of experience in the industry, spanning activities such as, strategic planning, budgeting, marketing, business development, operations, project management, corporate governance, and communications.

Since 2017, he has served as General Manager of Bridge Control Services Limited, a maritime transportation provider, where he leads all functions and processes including operational and organisational transformation and stakeholder engagement. His career is also marked with experience in port management and maritime policy formulation and implementation.

In March 2025, Troy was also appointed President of the Shipping Association of Trinidad and Tobago, where he now plays a key role in shaping industry policy, leading collaboration across membership, government, public and private sector stakeholders, while advocating for sustainable and competitive maritime development.

He holds certifications in History, International Relations, Business Administration, and Operational Maritime Management, bringing a multi-disciplinary treatment to the challenges and opportunities facing the maritime and logistics industries. Troy's career reflects a commitment to innovation, operational excellence, and leadership in a rapidly evolving maritime landscape.



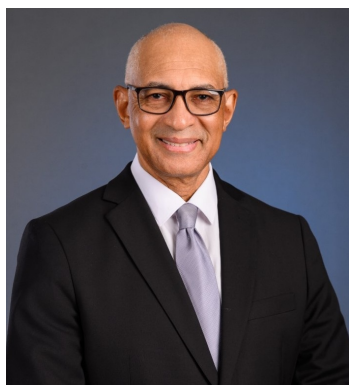
DR. MELISSA VARSWYK

Dr. Melissa Varswyk is a distinguished figure in the fields of education, healthcare, and energy, with established leadership roles in multiple international organizations. She holds the position of Co-founder and Chief Executive Officer of Georgetown American University (GAU), an esteemed institution with presence in Guyana and registered in Georgia, and Maryland, USA.

In addition, Dr. Varswyk has demonstrated her commitment to philanthropy as the founder of the GAU Foundation, the university's non-profit division, based in the USA. Through her extensive work in both the education and healthcare sectors, within Guyana and the USA, she has amassed substantial knowledge of transnational business operations and best practices. Broadening her influence into the energy sector, Dr. Varswyk recently pioneered the inception of Sispro Inc., a trailblazing energy corporation owned and operated by Guyanese women. With an investment focus on both renewable and non-renewable energy resources, Sispro Inc. is characterized by its corporate social responsibility agenda, aiming to empower women, girls, and underserved communities.

Within the broader business community, Dr. Varswyk holds significant positions, serving as Vice-Chair for both Women in Energy and the Black Entrepreneurs Association. Furthermore, she has a seat on the Board of Directors for the American Chamber of Commerce Guyana and Board Secretary of Georgetown International Academy, demonstrating her comprehensive influence in both the public and private sectors.

An alumna of Keele University and University of Guyana, Dr. Varswyk holds a Doctor of Medicine Degree and post-graduate qualifications in Health Professions Education. Her accomplishments have been acknowledged on multiple occasions, earning her accolades such as the Most Influential Person of African Descent Under 40, UN OHCHR human rights fellow, and a place among the Most Influential Women Leaders in Guyana.



MR. GORDON ADRIAN PAUL

Mr. Gordon A. Paul is a Successful Business Development Consultant and Entrepreneur@ Gordon Paul Financial Services. He has been involved with a Real Estate and Land Development concerns that focuses on Housing targeted to the middle income niche. He is also:

A Husband and father of three successful and accomplished adults. Former Director at the Environmental Management Authority. Director at African Association Credit Union Of T&T A former Banker and Insurance Sales Manager. A Graduate of the University of Winnipeg, Canada. Member of the Rotary Club of Diego Martin and Past Assistant Governor of Rotary District 7030

Treasurer of the Beausejour Community Council (of Blue Basin, Diego Martin)

Member - Chancellor Hill Posse (Social and Charitable Organization)



DR. RALPH HENRY

Over the last 35 years Dr. Henry has served as a short-term consultant, in the capacity of Team Leader of Research Teams on projects, and as an Individual Consultant, with a number of regional and international organisations, in the Caribbean and in Southern Africa.

He was a Senior Lecturer and the Head of Department of Economics, at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine for five years in the 1990s. Dr. Henry has consulted in the area of Development Economics, Economic Planning, Industrial Policy and Labour Economics in the Caribbean, preparing critical reports that served for policy formulation of Governments and institutions.

Prior to joining the University in 1980, Dr. Henry had worked in the Public Sector, including as an Economist in the Ministries of Education, Planning and Development, and of Labour in Government of Trinidad and Tobago. He was also Director of Research at the National Training Board in Trinidad and Tobago, on its establishment, prior to joining the University.

He served as Chairman in the establishment and initial operations of the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago during the period 2003 to 2005, and has, in the past, served on the Boards of state organizations and in the private sector of Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana. He was the Chairman of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund of Trinidad and Tobago – the Sovereign Wealth Fund of the country – 2014-2017.

He continues to contribute extensively to academic work in his areas of interest. More recently he has been involved research on the economic impact of disaster in the Caribbean, and has organised a small think-tank on the impacts of climate change.

While Dr. Henry now operates primarily as a consultant, he is invited regularly to contribute to academic papers and to review articles submitted for publication to journals. He continues to assist the Department of Economics at St. Augustine on advisory panels for students pursuing Masters and PhD programmes.

He is currently the main adviser of a student reading for the PhD in Economics and he has been a part-time lecturer in a course on Public Policy for graduate students in the Department of Chemistry at the University of the West Indies.

He is Chairman of Kairi Consultants Ltd, founded in 1990, which has operated over the years in the Caribbean and twenty-five years ago, in Southern Africa.



MR. DAREEM JEFFERY

Dareem Jeffrey is from the rural village of Moruga in deep south Trinidad. He is a 28-year-old entrepreneur who launched his latest business at the age of 24 after losing everything he had after being unemployed for 8 months due to COVID 19.

Mr Jeffrey owns and manages the EcoWash brand, the country and Caribbean's first water conservation car wash, which guarantees a clean car using only 2 litres of water. He has expanded his operations to countries on the African continent, a achievement resulting out of the TtMA Trade Mission to Ghana in 2023.

EcoWash's business model involves empowering youth, especially those from vulnerable areas, to run their units at strategic locations, such as malls. Their objectives are two-fold: reduce water wastage while providing youths with a positive outlet which will make them self-sustainable.

EcoWash & Dareem has won several awards over the years including but not limited to:

- Top Innovation in the World at World Congress in Switzerland 2023
- Global Sustainable Entrepreneur of the Year 2024