



Making the AfCFTA work through modernised customs and border management. What's happening at Beitbridge border post?

As Zimbabwe prepares to implement the Annexes to the AfCFTA Protocol on Trade in Goods, we focus here on the trade facilitation design of the newly upgraded and modernised Beitbridge border post. A new feature of this border post is the physical segregation of traffic by type into 3 terminals. The terminals separately cater for a) Commercial Freight, b) Buses and c) Pedestrian and Private Motor Vehicles. Given the expansion of the border post, each terminal is self-contained with separated north-bound and south-bound traffic.

Centrally located among the three terminals is the stand-alone administration block which serves as the Customs administrative hub for accelerated recourse and deciding on appeals emanating from the Beitbridge border post processes. Other leading government border stakeholder agencies' administrative functionalities, for example, Immigration and border security agencies are housed in this area.

Implementation of Annex 4 (Trade Facilitation) focuses on preparations and features in each terminal including: automation and digital transformation of all the essential cross-border processes, Non-Intrusive Inspections (NII)- through use of fast modern scanners (with the capacity of scanning a maximum of 120 commercial trucks per hour, baggage scanners, real-time public communication and announcement through use of digitised and automated voice and print media (Giant digital public notices and public address systems), automated boom gates and convertible structures for a One Stop Border Post (OSBP) should the need arise.

Some of the Customs trade facilitation strategies in place include the use of the electronic temporary import permit (e-TIP) system for pre-clearance of visitors' foreign registered private motor vehicles, pre-arrival clearances, use of advance rulings, use of Customs risk management systems linked to the Automated Systems for Customs Data (ASYCUDA), high

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capacity generators as back-up to assure electricity supply, use of the Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) or drones to ensure safe and secure supply chains (free from threats), clean and well-spaced ablution facilities, among others.

Preparedness for the implementation of the annexes on technical barriers to trade (Annex 6) and sanitary and phytosanitary measures (Annex 7) include the availability of standard road infrastructure networks within the border that define traffic channelling as well as the Beitbridge-Chirundu regional road corridor. Twenty-four hour within border services include Radiation Authority inspection services, Vehicle Inspectorate Department weighbridges, Plant Inspector, Environmental Management Authority (EMA), Agriculture and Veterinary, modern holding facilities for animals (Animal Shed or Plant and Animal Quarantine Centre), Veterinary, fully-fledged standalone Port Health block (comprising isolation rooms for men and women, triage rooms, in-Post clinic, treatment rooms, medical doctor consultation room, sick bay, screening facilities, ambulance facilities and rooms for attending to human remains) and housed inside this block is the office of Civil Registrar.

Implementation of the provisions on the freedom of transit or simple transit (Annex 8) includes the use of the electronic cargo tracking system (ECTS), ASYCUDA World System and the automated national transit bond guarantee system, which is already reliably in use

The new just-out-of-the-border features or borderland developments brought about by the border expansion and modernisation project include, the construction of a huge Fire Station which has since been handed over for management and administration by the local municipality, 220 staff housing units for all border stakeholders including Customs and Immigration were allocated on the 3rd of May 2023, completed construction of an 11,4 million mega litre water reservoir for the supply of the border and the entire border town (with a capacity to supply water for 7 days without replenishment), and the newly introduced sewer oxidation plant.

How will the AfCFTA Annexes be implemented?

Ratification of the AfCFTA requires the deposit of the instrument of ratification with the Chairperson of the African Union Commission. As of April 2023, all the African Union member states except Eritrea (54 out of 55) had signed the AfCFTA. Of these 54 signatories, 46 countries are State Parties by virtue of having ratified and deposited their instruments of ratification with the Commission. Of the 8 remaining countries, one (1) country has completed national parliamentary ratification while 7 countries which have only signed the

Agreement are yet to ratify it. Zimbabwe deposited its instrument of ratification with the depositary Commission on 24 May 2019¹.

Zimbabwe submitted its initial tariff offer to the African Union in November 2021² but did not meet the minimum threshold (liberalisation of 90% of tariff lines) after a technical review. A resubmission has been done and the country now waits for the outcome of the technical verification process by the Secretariat³. Once verified and approved, the next step will be for Zimbabwe to align or amend its national provisions with its AfCFTA market access offer (Annex 1), certificate of origin (Annex 2-Rules of Origin) and the tariff book.

What needs to be done and what challenges may arise?

There is a need for increased Customs cooperation and enhanced collaboration with other Customs Authorities towards simplification of procedures, and enhanced trade facilitation by putting in place standard border operating procedures, as well as international Customs standards and harmonised customs formalities. It is critical to significantly increase mutual assistance and cooperation in the areas of harmonisation of Customs Tariff Nomenclatures and statistical nomenclatures, harmonisation of Valuation Systems and Practices, automation of Customs operations, and advance exchange of information.

Furthermore, trade enhancement through cooperation in the areas of standards, technical regulation, conformity assessment, accreditation and metrology is increasingly becoming apparent. Maximum cooperation and transparency in the development and implementation of sanitary and phytosanitary measures to ensure that they do not become non-tariff barriers to trade is another area which requires drastic improvement and collaboration. These efforts should be extended to enhance the free movement of goods and services for goods in-transit. The introduction of modern border management systems such as single windows, harmonised border patrols, and port authorities are critical for coordinated border management, but African countries are at different levels of development, automation, and border modernisation, and this adds to the challenges of fully implementing the AfCFTA customs and border management and broader trade facilitation agenda.

¹ *Domestic implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area: Case study of Zimbabwe*

<https://www.tralac.org/publications/article/15462-domestic-implementation-of-the-african-continental-free-trade-area-case-study-of-zimbabwe.html>

² Zimbabwe submits AfCFTA tariff offer to the AU Commission <https://www.chronicle.co.zw/zimbabwe-submits-afcfta-tariff-offer-to-au-commission/>

³ Zimbabwe submits tariff offers to AfCFTA <https://www.chronicle.co.zw/zimbabwe-submits-tariff-offers-to-afcfta/>

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