

Beitbridge border upgrade: Embracing Customs border modernisation for enhanced trade facilitation and the regional integration agenda in Africa

Rwatida Mafurutu



TRADE BRIEF

tralac Trade Brief
No. IDRC22TB06/2022
December 2022

Readers are encouraged to quote and reproduce this material for educational, non-profit purposes, provided the source is acknowledged. All views and opinions expressed remain solely those of the authors and do not purport to reflect the views of tralac.

ABSTRACT

The emerging realisation of the importance of the worldwide obligations meant to guide and harmoniously influence international trade is somewhat behind the increasing demand for effective trade facilitation by businesses, private sectors, transporters, and traders. Recently, this demand is equally becoming more evident in Africa through its various existing regional trade arrangements or RTAs fronted by the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA). This Trade Brief focuses on the concept of Customs modernisation and the important complementary role that it can play towards enhancing operational trade facilitation, especially in Africa.

Published by the Trade Law Centre (tralac)
P.O. Box 224, Stellenbosch, South Africa, 7599

Copyright © tralac, 2022

Citation

Mafurutu, R. 2022. *Beitbridge border upgrade: Embracing Customs border modernisation for enhanced trade facilitation and the regional integration agenda in Africa*. tralac Trade Brief No. IDRC22TB06/2022. Stellenbosch: tralac.

About the Author

RWATIDA MAFURUTU is a career expert of more than twenty-seven years of technical experience in the management, administration and implementation of Customs & Excise and Internal Taxes. He has a keen research interest in regional and continental trade and policy issues in Africa. Rwatida is a holder of Master of Commerce Specialising in Management Practice in the Field of Trade Law and Policy (University of Cape Town), Master of Philosophy in Taxation (University of Pretoria) and a Master of Science in Fiscal Studies (National University of Science and Technology).

Readers are encouraged to quote and reproduce this material for educational, non-profit purposes, provided the source is acknowledged. All views and opinions expressed remain solely those of the authors and do not purport to reflect the views of tralac.

Acknowledgements

This work was carried out with the aid of a grant from the International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of IDRC or its Board of Governors.



Canada

www.tralac.org | info@tralac.org | Twitter [@tradelawcentre](https://twitter.com/tradelawcentre)

Please consider the environment before printing this publication.

Beitbridge border upgrade: Embracing Customs border modernisation for enhanced trade facilitation and the regional integration agenda in Africa

By Rwatida Mafurutu

The emerging realisation of the importance of the worldwide obligations meant to guide and harmoniously influence international trade is somewhat behind the increasing demand for effective trade facilitation by businesses, private sectors, transporters, and traders. Of late, this demand is equally becoming more evident in Africa through its various existing regional trade arrangements or RTAs fronted by the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA). To further accelerating trade facilitation into prominence within the continent, the Africa Union Commission's flagship programme of the AfCFTA has raised the stakes for legitimate demanders of trade facilitation by comprehensively covering it separately as Annex 4 (Trade Facilitation) under the Protocol on Trade in Goods.

Operational Trade Facilitation refers to the whole range of explicit set of actions that ultimately streamline and simplify the **border** formalities, **border** processes, **border** operations and the statutory **border** procedures applied in clearing goods and services as they enter or exit countries involved in cross-**border** trading. The formalities and aspects that broadly have something to do with effective cross-border operational trade facilitation are several. Table 1 below covers some of these key formalities in the context of Africa's ambitious vehicle for regional integration and the trade facilitation agenda – the AfCFTA.

Table 1: Some of the key formalities for operational trade facilitation (Trade in Goods) under AfCFTA

Border related formalities	Annex 3 Customs Cooperation & Mutual Administrative Assistance	Annex 4 Trade Facilitation
Advance rulings		✓
Advance exchange of information	✓	
Publication		✓
Simplification & harmonisation of Customs procedures	✓	
Electronic payment		✓
Automation of Customs operations	✓	
Pre-arrival processing/clearance		✓
Harmonisation of Values Systems & Practices	✓	
Enquiry points		✓
Communication of Customs information	✓	

The link between operational trade facilitation and the border

Following from our above brief but all-encompassing review of operational trade facilitation, it is clear that the term “**border**” is dominating in the definition. This suggests that there exists an inherent and inseparable commensal relationship between the concept of **trade facilitation** and the term **border** as the place or location of border management and Customs administration. From this generalised approach, the temptation is high to advance a novel claim (to be explored in detail on another day, space permitting). *In Africa, the first place for transformative and operational trade facilitation to prosper is at the borders!*

A border post¹ is an officially recognised port of entry. It is a specified and designated area of control by the competent and regulatory authorities. It is a place where goods and people either depart or enter a country, subject to existing regulations and formalities. It is often situated at an airport (being

¹ See <https://www.lawinsider.com/dictionary/border-posts>

a special form of an inland border for air traffic), international port or land borders of a given country (leading directly into the neighbouring or adjacent country). The competent and regulatory authorities are the key players made up from the various government stakeholders present at the borders. Continent wide, Customs authorities generally assume the lead agency role by default given their functional responsibilities that include clearance of all imports, transits, exports and conveyancers, and collection of a large chunk of revenues due to the national fiscus compared to the rest. In the context of international trade of goods and services, border posts through Customs administrations play crucial roles that have far reaching economic impact either for good or for worse. These roles include operational trade facilitation, ensuring safe and secure movement of goods and services along the regional and global supply chains, nodes of regional integration, hubs for enforcing created obligations under various enforceable regional trade arrangements, points of guaranteeing the protection of societies as well as the attraction throughput centres of foreign direct investment. On the other hand, Immigration is another leading key stakeholder with the responsibility of controlling the physical or actual movement of natural persons. The rest of the other stakeholders enforce various controls and standards as well as offering security services.

To excel reasonably towards responding to some of the Customs related competing expectations, it is imperative that Customs administrations always remain equally versatile in their border management approaches. One sure and compelling way of doing this is through fully embracing Customs modernisation. Customs modernisation generally refers to the process of implementing appropriate and applicable in the circumstances, the standard international frameworks of the World Customs Organisation (WCO) which are designed to promote seamless cross-border movement of goods and services through the simplification and harmonisation of the border formalities and procedures.

The overall goal of this Trade Brief is to focus the discussion on the concept of Customs modernisation and the important complementary role that it can play towards enhancing operational trade facilitation, especially in Africa. Building from this foundation, the focus switches to contextualising the concept by looking at the Beitbridge border upgrade. It identifies, highlights and updates the key Customs modernisation features that may potentially spur regional integration and accelerate the operational trade facilitation agenda in Africa provided proper care is taken. This is done at least for two reasons.

Beitbridge is the busiest Southern African border post in Africa that gives direct entry into SADC, COMESA, ESA Region as well as the entire sub-Saharan Africa from South Africa. It is a border post where a massive modernisation project, in the region or continent where such undertakings are still very few.

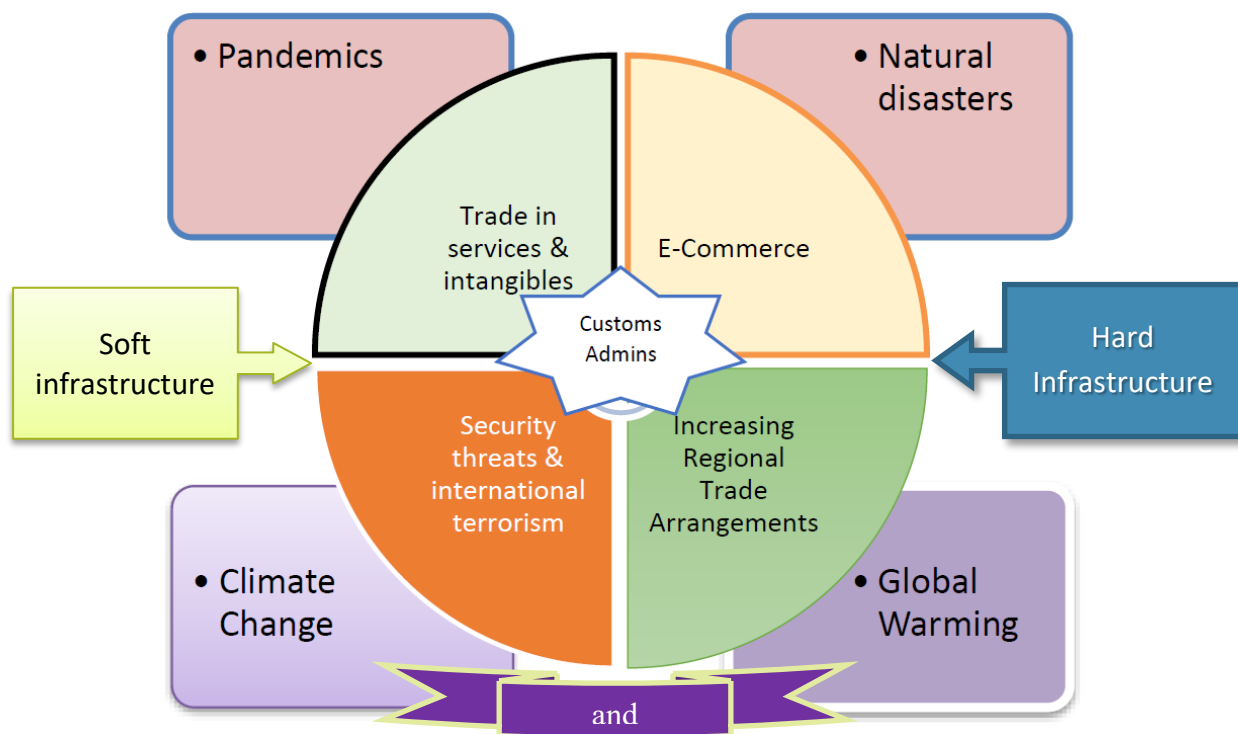
Modernisation – a global reform agenda for Customs Administrations in Africa

Located at the centre of today's increasingly complex cross-border related trading environment are Customs administrations (see Figure 1 below). These authorities are confronted with numerous constraints, challenges and threats from within and around the environment they discharge their obligations from. This position in Africa is complicated by virtue of the predominance of developing and least-developed economies.

Notably, the accelerating pace of global transformation ever since the turn of the new millennium has ushered in a new era characterised by a rapid upsurge in volume and interdependence of international trade as well as new global challenges that directly impact on cross-border management. These global challenges include pandemics such as COVID-19, natural disasters such as floods, global warming and climate change. To these pervasive menaces, are added new generation challenges that Customs finds itself confronted with. The use of new technologies and models in businesses, logistics, digitisation and digitalisation of trade and processes leave border authorities following from behind is on the rise. In Africa, these cross-cutting new generation challenges have the potential of leaving the border authorities way behind, especially in the fields of e-commerce, international security threats, trade in services and intangibles. Figure 1 below provides an overview of the main global trends affecting trade and their potential impact on Customs' roles, policies, and practices².

² Revised Kyoto Convention: Customs' blueprint journey towards further simplification and harmonisation of Customs procedures; see <https://mag.wcoomd.org/magazine/wco-news-92-june-2020/revised-kyoto-convention-customs-blueprint-journey-towards-further-simplification-and-harmonisation-of-customs-procedures/>

Figure 1: Customs Administrations & the new trends in trading environment dilemma



These challenges are among the top drivers of change impacting the global trading environment, each in their own special way. Neither Customs administrations in rich countries, for example Europe nor those in poor jurisdictions, for example in Africa are immune to these realities. The notable difference is however in the level and degree of extenuation offered to these threatening realities. In rich countries, Customs administrations invest in advanced and complex mitigatory measures, that go a long way towards cushioning whilst the opposite is true in developing and least developed countries, especially in Africa.

Customs administrations in Africa are generally limited in their delivery of service owing to challenges associated with hard infrastructure (immovable infrastructure), abundance of bottlenecks and interoperability challenges related to soft infrastructure (institutionalised border inefficiencies). Whilst in the majority of cases border delays are attributed to Customs, in reality some of these delays emanate from other government border stakeholder entities. These agencies include agriculture, police, health, quarantine, immigration and standards who are generally concerned about their slender

risk management aims than in expediting movement of goods across the borders. They find themselves in this position because oftentimes they lack the necessary reform schemes, automation and technical guidelines developed from international experience³. Whatever delays these border stakeholders cause, experience in Africa has shown that the public generally blames them on Customs border authorities. This is probably because of their distinct visibility and overshadowing lead agency by their evolving and noticeable functionalities.

How may Customs authorities respond?

Customs administrations, including their functions, roles and responsibilities are universally and generically the same. This is because they are defined by a single institution – the WCO – with member-driven obligations stemming from the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The WTO is the multilateral trade governance institution. Trade obligations are negotiated by its members and are normally taken by consensus.

The critical roles played by Customs authorities include contributing to economic development through revenue collection at the ports of entry, assisting in the collection of trade data that is used to devise trade policies as well as generating statistics on balance of payments and protection of societies. They also play pertinent roles in curtailing emerging challenges in the international trading environment. These challenges include combatting pandemics such as COVID-19, natural disasters and the mammoth task of facilitating cross-border trade and movement of goods along the global supply chains in a safe and secure manner.

In order to harmoniously and predictably operationalise WTO trade obligations, and effectively respond to the new generational cross-cutting pervasive demands outlined above, Customs administrations need to be responsive and adaptive to all these realities. In the context of Africa, Member States and Regional Economic Communities (RECs), have the additional expectation of resolving their inherent border administrative and management inefficiencies – *but how?*

³ Trade Facilitation Implementation Guide – Overview: Border Crossing Delays; see <https://tfig.unece.org/contents/border-crossing-delays.htm>

The modernisation of Customs administrations is critical in ensuring that cross-border trade continues uninterrupted. In the African cross-border trade landscape, when properly implemented this concept will effectively address various manifestations of Customs inadequacies and inefficiencies. To assist Customs authorities globally in this regard, WCO has made available an international Customs framework for modernisation and efficient Customs procedures. This blueprint (as amended) is called The International Convention on the Simplification and Harmonisation of Customs Procedures or simply the Revised Kyoto Convention (RKC or simply the Convention).

The Convention consists of three main components; the Body or text, General Annex and the Specific Annex. The Body or text and the General Annex are binding on the Contracting Parties. In essence, it is designed to accelerate international trade through the use of simplified and harmonised Customs procedures, establishing international standards and finally best practices that rely on the use of information communication technologies. By simplifying and harmonising Customs procedures as well as being premised on the use of information communication technologies, the RKC is both trade facilitation eccentric and focused on Customs modernisation. In the RKC, trade facilitation is directly complemented by Customs modernisation. Table 2 below captures some of the governing principles of the RKC as contained in the General Annex as a schedule which directly speaks to border modernisation, regional integration and the international or cross-border trade facilitation.

Table 2: Principles of the General Annex to the Convention (RKC)

<i>Governing Principles</i>
partnership with the trade
maximum use of information technology
simplified procedures for authorised persons
use of risk management and audit-based controls
transparency and predictability of Customs actions
coordinated interventions with other border agencies
minimum necessary Customs control to ensure compliance with regulations
standardisation and simplification of the goods declaration and supporting documents

The Convention intimates that simplification and harmonisation can be achieved by Customs administrations through the implementation or the use of all or a combination of any of the following principles; the Customs procedures and formalities must be applied in a predictable, consistent and transparent manner; the employment of programmes designed to systematically modernise Customs procedures and practices is critical to improving efficiency and effectiveness; interested parties must be provided with all the necessary information pertaining to Customs law; regulations, administrative guidelines, procedures, instructions and formalities; emphasising the need to embrace use of modern techniques is key. For example, the use of risk management, audit-based controls and the practicable utilisation of information technology; cooperation with other trading communities, Customs administrations and national authorities should be resorted to; to applying applicable international standards (as taken from the Specific Annex). It is also critical that processes of administrative and judicial review be made available and accessible to affected parties. The benefits of properly and effectively implementing RKC by Customs administrations are many and these are summarised in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Benefits of fully and properly embracing the RKC

Potential benefits upon proper implementation
Enable Customs to respond to major changes in business
Employ optimised administrative methods and techniques in its operations
Provides an environment for Customs that facilitates and reduces the cost of cross-border transactions, fosters administrative transparency and efficiency
Fosters administrative transparency and efficiency
Enhance trade security along the supply chain
Ensures increased revenue collection through improved efficiencies in operations
Enables the protection of national security, public health and safety, natural re-sources and the environment, by the adoption of international best practices.
Coordinated approach to controls along with other governmental agencies, and partnerships with trade, among other things

Why should Customs modernisation gain prominence in Africa?

In Africa, goods-in-transit, exports and imports are usually subjected to compliance checks when they arrive at borders. In most instances, the physical inspections are characterised by subjecting these goods to uncoordinated multiple formalities (that are undertaken one after the other) before their ultimate release. These approaches end up increasing the border dwell times of consignments which in turn lead to very long queues of stationary trucks. The impact is obvious. Prolonged border waiting times result in high demurrage costs and avoidable increases in trade costs.

Notably, numerous border posts prominently dotted along the African transport and supply chain corridors are characterised by infrastructural bottlenecks which are worsened by inherently complex cross-border procedures, unclear border logistics, limited parking space, lack of informative signage, manual processes among many more others. All these lead to unprecedented border delays. It has been stated that in SADC alone, about 75 per cent of delays emanate from poor facilitation, specifically in the form of complicated border procedures and customs regulations. The net effect is transport interruptions of up to a day or more, in the process stifling the region's ability to compete on a global scale⁴. Border clearance processes by customs and other border stakeholder agencies are among the most important and problematic links in the global supply chain. It takes three times as many days, nearly twice as many documents, and six times as many signatures to import goods in poor countries than it does in rich ones⁵.

The table below captures selected hard and soft infrastructure related restraints findings by Cross-Border Road Transport Agency (2022) that are commonly at play at Africa's top strategic border posts⁶.

⁴ Transport corridors & spatial development policies; see <https://www.sadc.int/pillars/transport-corridors-spatial-development-initiatives>

⁵ Trade Facilitation – Principles & Benefits; see <https://tfig.unece.org/details.html>

⁶ Annual State of Cross-Border Operations Report, March 2022; see <https://www.cbrta.co.za/uploads/files/Annual-State-of-Cross-Border-Operations-Report.pdf>, page 133

Table 4: Infrastructure-related challenges

Due to various hard and soft infrastructure constraints experienced at strategic border posts, inland borders in the SADC have emerged as one of the greatest impediments to intra-regional trade and travel
Inadequate approach roads to borders, limited parking within the border precinct, a lack of separation between freight and passenger movements and the duplication of border post processes result in significant delays for cross-border road transport operators
Since regional transport corridors stretch across national territories, it is imperative that strategic border posts along a corridor function at more or less the same operational level to optimise trade and transport flows along the entire corridor
Border management reforms in the SADC are often corridor segment focused, which negates the overall impact of improvements on the entire corridor. Although time delays at the Chirundu border post decreased dramatically after its transformation into an OSBP, the impact of this initiative on the entire NSC was marginal since delays have been shifted to other points along the same corridor. This clearly illustrates that border management reforms that are implemented in isolation have a limited impact on trade and transport facilitation across regional transport corridors
In response to the poor performance of strategic border posts, the OSBP initiative has been approved at regional level to improve the uninterrupted flow of traffic across SADC borders. Despite the inherent advantages of transforming two-stop borders into OSBPs only a few borders (Chirundu, Kazungula, Tunduma / Nakonde) has been transformed into functioning OSBPs. At the Lebombo / Ressano Garcia border, the construction work of the OSBP facility has been completed. Outstanding is the ratification of legal instruments to enable the operationalisation of the OSBP
The establishment of strong political will amongst MS, is a pre-requisite to success. Without a shared belief that OSBP's is the solution, the implementation of OSBP projects will not materialise

The list below equally summarises some of the infrastructural related challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa which Chibira (2021) cited as resulting in congestion, procedural delays, long transit times, lack of predictability and high logistics costs⁷.

- *High number of stakeholders operating at border posts which lead to significant levels of bureaucracy and duplications which contribute to border inefficiencies for example at Beitbridge border post between South Africa and Zimbabwe; there are departments and agencies*

⁷ Improving Border Efficiency in sub-Saharan Africa: The Need to Look at 'Beyond the Border' Operations; see <https://www.tralac.org/blog/article/15328-improving-border-efficiency-in-sub-saharan-africa-the-need-to-look-at-beyond-the-border-operations.html>

responsible for customs, immigration, agriculture, port health, police, army, intelligence, trade and environmental affairs

- *Infrastructure such as border approach roads, traffic lanes and parking is inadequate largely due to inherent inefficiencies which result in vehicles and cargo spending more time at border posts than necessary which increases pressure on the infrastructure*
- *Inspections are mostly conducted physically due to lack of modern technology for inspections, document checking and information processing*
- *Both vehicle and cargo inspections are conducted in silos with very little sharing of information regarding risks, if any at all*
- *Lack of computerised and integrated customs managements systems and unharmonised customs procedures*
- *Inadequate capacity regarding staff compliment particularly with respect to customs and immigration*

Generally, negotiating and implementing other provisions of the AfCFTA and other on-going developments in the various RTAs in Africa have rapidly impressed upon considerable Customs authorities in individual countries, Member States and State Partners the realisation of the importance of embracing the Convention for reforming and modernising their administrations. Over and above the RKC, the WCO has also provided a comprehensive strategic document that shortlists invaluable elements (see Table 5, below) which when properly embraced will further result in effective Customs cross-border performances⁸.

⁸ Customs in the 21st century: Enhancing Growth and Development through Trade Facilitation and Border Security
http://www.wcoomd.org/~media/wco/public/global/pdf/topics/key-issues/customs-in-the-21st-century/annexes/annex_ii_en.pdf?la=en

Table 5: WCO Strategic elements for modernisation

Framework	Scope of Modernisation
Globally networked Customs	Customs-to-Customs Cooperation - need for closer real-time collaboration between Customs administrations and between Customs and business in facilitating legitimate trade and undertaking Customs controls
Coordinated border management:	This entails coordination and cooperation among all the relevant authorities and agencies involved in border security and regulatory requirements that apply to passengers, goods and conveyances that are moved across borders.
Intelligence-driven risk management	Expanding responsibilities and opportunities facing Customs administrations require a more sophisticated understanding of the risk continuum.
Customs-Trade partnership	Customs needs to understand the concerns of business, while business needs to know the requirements of Customs
Implementation of modern working methods, procedures and techniques	Demands regarding the rapid movement of goods, combined with complex regulatory requirements, require modern innovative approaches. These include audit-based controls undertaken away from the border, moving from transaction-based controls alone to using systems-based controls where the level of risk allows, as well as moving away from paper-based systems
Enabling technology and tools	Customs must take advantage of new and emerging technologies to enhance, amongst others, processing, risk management, intelligence and non-intrusive detection
Enabling powers	Customs administrations require appropriate legislative provisions that strengthen enforcement powers, the provision of advance information and the sharing of information domestically and internationally.
A professional, knowledge-based service culture	Staff competencies need to support timely customer-focused processes and services that minimise the administrative burden on legitimate trade
Capacity building	Customs administrations need to ensure that they have the capacity and skills across all dimensions of the operating model to perform all Customs functions most efficiently and effectively
Integrity	The fight against corruption remains an important task that should be undertaken over the years to come

When properly designed and implemented, modernisation of Customs systems guarantees that cross-border trade remains fundamentally uninterrupted while inherent administration efficiencies are eliminated through appropriate border upgrades. The table below summarises some of the benefits which will accrue to the governments, traders and the societies as a result of effective border modernisation

Table 6: Benefits to governments, traders and societies

Governments	Traders	Society
Increased revenue collections	Reduced trade costs	Enjoy competitive prices
Easily detect contraband and similar threats to existentiality	Secure trading and business operating environment	Safe and healthy societies
Coordinated border clearances with other stakeholders	Reduced border dwell times	Constant supply of affordable goods and services
Attract FDI	Knowledge transfer	Employment
Faster clearances	Improved business competitiveness	Growth and development

With rapid advances in technology, globalisation, use of e-commerce and existence of integrated supply chains – African countries in their several regional trading arrangements need to consider embracing and advancing Customs border modernisation in its entirety. One such a country which has resorted to border modernisation and upgrading in an endeavour to normalise and standardise clearances at its busiest border post is Zimbabwe.

Beitbridge border post – the location, infrastructure, trade and economic activities

The geographical barrier demarcating Zimbabwe (to the north) from South Africa (to the south) is the Limpopo river. The bridge that straddles over the Limpopo river physically connecting the two neighbouring countries and the rest of Africa is called Beit while the bridge as a road, avenue or street is called the Alfred Beitbridge Road. On the South African side, the border is called Musina and the nearest town to the border on the same side is also called Musina (about 15 Kilometres away) as well. On the Zimbabwean side both the name of the border and the town is the same – Beitbridge and these two are a continuum.

The trade and economic activities at the borders are influenced by the road and rail infrastructures. Though illegal, a considerable quantum of cross-border activities such as smuggling takes place through the Limpopo river. As part of the north bound route from Beitbridge, the road divides into 2 major ones, with one leading to Bulawayo City (Western part of the country) also called A6 road and the other heading to Masvingo City (to the north) also known as R1 (continues to link Chirundu OSBP through

Harare – the Capital). As part of the South bound road from Messina border post, is a highway (also called N1) that passes through Pretoria (administrative capital city of South Africa) through to Johannesburg. There exists an alternative mode of transport being a railway line that interconnects these two adjoining border posts. The railway splits into three lines on the Zimbabwean side. This makes the border a strategic logistics hub along the North-South or South-North Corridor as a total of 3 railway lines converge on Beitbridge border post. Beitbridge is a distinct trade and logistics node in the North-South corridor and the Cape to Cairo road network. It is also a major part of both the Regional Trunk Road Network and the Trans-African Highway Network.

Beitbridge Border Post is tagged as one of the busiest ports of entry on the continent. Prior to the outbreak of Covid-19, it used to handle at the minimum, 1 200 commercial heavy trucks, 3500 light motor vehicles, 120 buses and 15 000 travellers on a daily basis⁹. At the effective completion of the border upgrade, the government anticipates that the modernised border will have the capacity to deal with at least five times these numbers. All this transforms Beitbridge Border Post into a centre of enormous potential and gateway for facilitating economic growth, intra-African trade and development particularly the context of regional integration.

Of the upgrade and the modernity-what are the key features?

The World Bank concludes that poor infrastructure in sub-Saharan Africa diminishes economic growth by 2 per cent and business productivity by about 40 per cent. It further suggests that costs related to insufficient infrastructure services may be twice as much when compared to the rest of the world¹⁰. In a development that may be seen as a declaration against these challenges, the African Union (AU) through its Agenda 2063 and the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) has come to prioritise infrastructure development and industrialisation as critical and complementary in the attainment of the objectives of the AU's ambitious continental flagship programme of the AfCFTA.

⁹ See Zimbabwe: Infrastructure Development Sparkled in 2021, at <https://allafrica.com/stories/202112240216.html>

¹⁰ Sustainable Infrastructure Development in sub-Saharan Africa: A view from the ground; see http://www.mcgill.ca/isid/files/isid/j_saghir_research_to_practice_policy_brief.pdf

One of the key objectives of PIDA is to build cross-border infrastructure that will eventually accelerate the process of regional infrastructure integration, aid in addressing poverty levels, reduce income disparities, and stimulate regional socio-economic development. Cross-border infrastructure, information and communication technology (ICT) are some of the sectors covered under the PIDA Priority Action Plan. Under the infrastructure sector, Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) have been touted as having the potential to substantially assist African countries to attain their infrastructure targets, in the process reducing poverty levels. PPPs are a collaboration between government (or its public entity) and a private sector entity wherein the private-sector company is the investor who finances, builds and operates big infrastructural projects such as public logistics networks and border upgrade and modernisation. Worldwide, 15 to 20 per cent of total infrastructure investments in 134 developing countries is contributed by PPPs¹¹. In February 2011, a SADC PPP Network was launched in Midrand, South Africa as a vehicle for promoting PPP policy coordination, experience and information exchange as well as the actual nurturing of the capacity in these partnerships.

The Beitbridge border upgrade and modernisation project is founded on a PPP between the government of Zimbabwe and ZimBorders under the build-operate transfer (BOT) which will run for a period of about 17.5 years. ZimBorders operates as a consortium comprising a group of individuals and investors, international entrepreneurs and financial institutions that provide the necessary foreign direct investment and financial backing to deliver on the project. On completion of the project, the private partner will administer and maintain the infrastructure for the duration of concession under the BOT system, while Customs authorities and the rest of the border stakeholders will enjoy unfettered occupation of the facilities so as to primarily focus on effectively and efficiently delivering on their respective statutory mandates in ways that are consistent with enhancing cross-border trade facilitation

On 31 August 2022, Zimbabwe officially commissioned the USD300million Beitbridge border post upgrade and modernisation project. The Beitbridge border post project was launched in July 2018 and was scheduled in three progressive phases. Modernisation efforts making up the entire project include

¹¹ World Bank Group Support to Public-Private Partnerships; see <https://ieg.worldbankgroup.org/evaluations/world-bank-group-support-ppp>

a separate area for clearance of commercial traffic (called Freight Terminal), roadways, and ICT facility upgrades (Phase 1), a standalone area for clearance of cross-border passenger buses called Bus Terminal (Phase 2), a light vehicle terminal and out-of-port works (Phase 3). Phase 1 and 2 were completed and are already functional, while Phase 3 (Pax Terminal) went live on the 26th of November 2022.

One of the striking features of the new look border is the expansive layout which has resulted in Beitbridge border becoming a massive inland port of entry characterised by 3 border posts in 1 (3BPn1) for sub-Saharan Africa and even beyond. A novel idea of segregating border traffic by type from the onset led to the construction of three separate and self-contained terminals - the Freight Terminal, Bus Terminal and Individuals and Private Motorists Terminal (Pax Terminal). Situated in the middle of these 3BPn1 is the Administration block which serves as Customs administrative hub for expedited recourse and handling of appeals. The block also houses other leading border stakeholders' administrative functionaries, for example Immigration and the border security agencies.

All commercial trucks including any other merchandise carrying vehicles are cleared at the Freight Terminal. All buses and other passenger-carrying vehicles are cleared at the Bus Terminal, while individuals, pedestrians and private travellers, motorists and tourists are separately cleared at the Pax Terminal. Each of these terminals is structured to have north-bound and south-bound traffic lanes with no room for lateral cross-over. On entering the border premises, respective traffic by type takes the route that leads to the respective terminal for either north-bound or south-bound clearance. The physical demarcation of these terminals is by gated palisade fence which is electrified for enhanced orderliness, safety and security.

Each terminal has a separate large parking and traffic holding bays interconnected by in-border feeder roads. At the Freight Terminal the north bound feeder road filters into three. The feeder on the far left is the green lane (low-risk commercial cargo – not subjected to any form of physical or non-intrusive checks). The middle feeder leads to the new scanners (caters for high-risk cargo). The far right feeder leads to the search area for physical examination. Determination of the feeder route to take is according to select system-based Customs risk management criteria applied on all cargo.

The new faster and efficient non-intrusive inspection scanners have been installed for both north and south-bound commercial traffic at the Freight terminal, while a good number of baggage scanners have been installed at the Bus Terminal for expedited non-intrusive inspections. This modern equipment for scanning cargo actually hastens the inspection of goods for smuggling, fraud and, potential threat detection, identification of contraband, radioactive substances, explosives and many more.

Vehicle queue movement and management within the border terminals is managed through a newly installed ICT System which provides for automatic queuing as well as payment systems for the vehicle drivers. This system is characterised by boom gates that automatically open upon scanning of the respective vehicle gate passes. In the holding bays, there are giant electronic and digital screens, that communicate the next vehicle to proceed by displaying the respective vehicle registration numbers. Table 7 below lists in summary format some of the key features that define upgrade and modernisation at this port of entry.

Table 7: Modernisation Programme – key highlights

<i>Selected key operational trade facilitation features of Beitbridge border upgrade</i>
Product of Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) and build-operate-and-transfer (BOT) arrangement
A composite inland port of entry characterised by 3 border posts in 1 (3BPn1)
Border traffic segregation by type along the South–North and North-South Corridors
Distinct Customs administrative hub for expedited recourse and administrative justice
Automation and digital transformation of essential cross-border processes
Non-Intrusive Inspections- use of modern scanners
Electronic Temporary Import Permit (e-TIP) System for Preclearance of Visitors Private Motor vehicles. This goes a long way in reducing vehicle border dwell times by effective use of automation in the vehicle queue management
Effective real time public communication through voice and print media (Giant informative public screens and the voice Public Address Systems)
Easily convertible structure to One Stop Border Post (OSBP) when need arises
Disaggregated parking space by vehicle type
Standard road infrastructure network (Vehicle Inspectorate Department Weighbridges, Boom gates that open automatically upon scanning of vehicle gate pass)

Presence of service providers for NTMs for example Plant Inspector, Environmental Management Authority (EMA), Agriculture and Veterinary.
Modern holding facilities for animals (Animal Shed) in line with Veterinary regulatory prescriptions
Modern restrooms and ablution facilities, that effectively cater for women in cross-border trade's needs and conveniences
High capacity generators as back-up to the use of electricity
Introduction of the Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (drones) to assist in curbing illegal cross-border activities along the border line and ensuring safe and secure supply chain

Modernised Beitbridge border: addressing the challenges women face in cross-border trade

By disaggregating the once single border into separate 3BPn1 (Freight Terminal, Bus Terminal and Pax Terminal), the new look Beitbridge border has been reconfigured to fully address the challenges of women in cross-border trade in a special and modernised way. The government has demonstrated its support and desire to improve and empower women in cross-border trade (including other vulnerable groups of the society who are into cross-border trade) by constructing a separate Pax Terminal that specifically handles their imports and exports. At least 95 per cent of the pedestrian travellers cleared at the Pax Terminal is women in day-tripping, cross-border trade. In this context day-trippers are travellers that emigrate to Messina in the morning only to immigrate to Beitbridge in the evening (or vice-versa) of the same day to sell their wares or re-stock their supplies or both.

Furthermore, the majority of the passenger travellers cleared under the Bus Terminal are individuals who use buses for their transportation together with their exported and imported goods. Bus Terminal passengers are different from Pax Terminal individuals in that they are now more organised as they import and export quite considerable quantities of goods often in limited commercial quantities. The majority of these started off as day-trippers but have now made significant strides to become cross-border traders that use buses as a means of transportation of goods. They travel beyond the border towns and therefore spend a number of days in South Africa before they return. Notably, 85 to 90 per cent of the passengers currently being cleared at the Bus Terminal are women cross-border traders.

Women in cross-border trade using both the Pax and Bus Terminals at Beitbridge now enjoy prolonged business opportunities through faster clearances of the goods following documented flow of movement

that must be observed by all the border stakeholders that are involved in the clearance of their goods at any given time. Both termini operate 24 hours every day. Delays related to power outages are now a thing of the past as a 24-hour automatic power back-up system is in place. Non-intrusive inspection methods of their goods is through the use of baggage scanners resulting in improved queue management and optimum border turnaround times. Adequate ablution blocks are strategically positioned on either side of the borders and rest rooms which are user friendly for women with babies are provided for. There is 24-hour clean water supply at the border.

As part of the broader complementary efforts to empower informal cross-border traders, the majority of which are women, in August 2022, the government officially opened a passport issuing office in Beitbridge. This development has significantly reduced irregular migration as most of the locals were resorting to border jumping, not by choice but due to absence of such critical facilities within the locality. Irregular migration or entry happens when individuals cross the borders without complying with all the necessary legal and administrative entry requirements into a given country, for example passport

The opening of the passport office in Beitbridge came as a great relief especially to women as they were the most affected. Easy accessibility to obtaining and renewing passports means that women who used to be targeted by abusers when they tried to use informal ways to cross the border now enjoy the right of free movement as provided for in the SADC Treaty (1992). As a border district, Beitbridge has an estimated population of 250 000 residents (rural and urban included) and as being probably the busiest inland border post in SADC, prior to COVID-19 at least 15000 travellers would pass through the it on a normal day, and about 35000 would pass through it during peak periods¹².

Policy thrust and the new regional trade perspective

According to the country's trade policy makers, on completion of this upgrade, the modernisation project has multiple cross-border trade related objectives. It is envisaged to facilitate the smooth discharge of the statutory functions of all the government border stakeholders in the best interest of

¹² Beitbridge passport office cuts long trips for residents; see <https://www.herald.co.zw/beitbridge-passport-office-cuts-long-trips-for-residents/>

cross-border trade facilitation. It also gives prominence to the country's (as an active Member State to SADC and COMESA) commitment to the shared aspirations for greater regional integration and cooperation as outlined in the SADC Regional Infrastructure Development Strategy.

Notably, all these developments are happening at a time when a great deal of high-level trade discussions and the Guided Trade Initiative are happening under the auspices of the African Union's ambitious flagship programme of the AfCFTA.

In view of the above unfolding regional and continental trade realities, it is interesting to note that Zimbabwe has become one of the countries to invest seriously in border-related hard infrastructure reforms with the potential to make a meaningful positive impact in the region and possibly the rest of the continent.
