

1 **Challenges at Chirundu One-Stop Border Post**

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5 **Sean Woolfrey, tralac researcher, and Elisha Tshuma, tralac intern, discuss the**
6 **challenges faced at Africa's first one-stop border post**

7 Efforts to boost intra-regional trade have become increasingly prominent elements
8 of African regional integration and economic development agendas. Among other
9 things, these efforts seek to address issues relating to the poor quality of trade-
10 related infrastructure in the region and to promote trade facilitation initiatives
11 aimed at making it easier for cross-border trading in the region. Given this focus on
12 trade facilitation and improving trade-related infrastructure, it is disappointing to
13 read news reports that Chirundu border post between Zambia and Zimbabwe was
14 temporarily closed last week as truck drivers blockaded the border in an attempt to
15 get Zimbabwean customs authorities to speed up border clearances, following
16 weeks of heavy congestion and queues at the border extending five kilometres.

17 Chirundu border post, the principal border crossing for traffic travelling between
18 Harare and Lusaka, is Africa's first – and thus far only – example of a 'one-stop
19 border post' (OSBP). OSBPs differ from ordinary border posts in that a bilateral
20 agreement between the bordering countries gives each country authority to enact
21 its rule on the other country's side of the border, meaning only one stop for those
22 crossing the border, which in theory should result in reduced costs associated with
23 long delays at the border. At Chirundu OSBP those travelling from Zambia to

24 Zimbabwe complete all their formalities on the Zimbabwean side, and those
25 travelling from Zimbabwe to Zambia complete all their formalities on the Zambian
26 side. This is made possible through efforts to keep systems in both countries as
27 similar as possible and to move towards a process and tool oriented approach to
28 integrated border management.

29 Since it was implemented in December 2009, Chirundu OSBP has been hailed as a
30 notable success and an important step towards greater integration in southern
31 Africa. In particular, the implementation of an OSBP at Chirundu has been credited
32 with reducing the time and number of processes required for passenger and
33 commercial clearance at the border. Various studies and reports note that prior to
34 the implementation of the OSBP, cumbersome border procedures resulted in very
35 long clearance times at Chirundu. Estimates of the average border crossing time for
36 commercial vehicles before the implementation of the OSBP range from two to nine
37 days, and some sources note that it could take up to 20 days for cargo trucks to be
38 cleared at the border. Sources suggest that since the implementation of the OSBP,
39 clearance times at Chirundu have been reduced to a matter of hours and that most
40 vehicles are now cleared within a day.

41 Reduced clearance times translate into cost savings, and TradeMark Southern Africa
42 has estimated that savings from reduced border delays could be as high as
43 US\$600,000 a day, with transporters, brokers, traders producers and consumers all
44 potentially benefiting from reduced costs. Furthermore, the increased efficiency of
45 operating systems at Chirundu, coupled with greater traffic flows through the border
46 post have led to an increase in government revenue, without tax rates having been
47 increased. Between 2009 and 2012, tax collection on the Zambian side increased
48 from US\$10 million to US\$20.3 million a month.

49 Despite these apparent successes, Chirundu OSBP has not been immune to sporadic
50 episodes of dysfunction, and the recent delays and subsequent chaos at the border
51 were not isolated incidents. In July this year, Chirundu experienced similar scenes as
52 congestion at the border resulted in queues of commercial trucks extending more
53 than five kilometres. That occasion saw a brief demonstration by truck drivers, some
54 of whom had been forced to wait at the border for almost a week for clearance, and
55 necessitated a crisis meeting involving the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority, clearing
56 agents and other border agencies. The joint committee established at this meeting
57 found that the delays at the border were a result of increased commercial traffic
58 passing through the border and the fact that Chirundu OSBP was only open to
59 commercial traffic between 8am and 5pm, and not 24 hours a day like Beitbridge
60 border post.

61 Nevertheless, regardless of how big a role increased traffic and insufficient opening
62 hours have played in recent delays at Chirundu OSBP – and anecdotal data does not
63 provide strong support for the increased traffic argument – the smooth functioning
64 of the border post faces additional challenges. These stem largely from the fact that
65 the Chirundu border post was not originally designed as an OSBP and was instead
66 modified so as to incorporate the main features of an OSBP.

67 One of the most significant challenges currently facing operations at Chirundu is the
68 lack of information and communications technology (ICT) connectivity between the
69 Zambian and Zimbabwean sides of the border. This has resulted in certain clearance
70 procedures having to be duplicated as Zimbabwean Revenue Authority officers on
71 the Zambian side of the border are unable to connect to the ASYCUDA system for
72 computerised customs administration used on the Zimbabwean side. To overcome
73 this problem, procedures are being completed manually on the Zambian side and
74 then inputted on the computer system on the Zimbabwean side. Zambian border
75 agents based on the Zimbabwean side face a similar problem in not being able to
76 access the electronic systems used in Zambia. The lack of connectivity between the
77 two sides of the border has also prevented the designated ‘fast track’ lane from
78 becoming fully functional.

79 Other challenges facing operations at Chirundu include a need for training of new
80 border agency staff, significant downtime of the electronic customs systems,
81 insufficient office space on either side of the border for officers from the other
82 country and a lack of appropriate signage on the approach to the OSBP and inside
83 the customs control zone.

84 It is very important that, in the rush to proclaim the ‘success’ of Chirundu and to use
85 Chirundu OSBP as a model for similar OSBPs throughout the region, these and other
86 defects in the current operation of Chirundu OSBP are not simply glossed over.
87 Identifying and addressing these shortcomings will not only serve to improve
88 operations at Chirundu – and thereby facilitate increased trade flows in the region –
89 but will also go some way to ensuring that any OSBPs established in the region in the
90 future avoid the same pitfalls that have hampered operations at Chirundu.

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