What would it take for a 'no-stop' border in Africa?

PAPER

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This study explores the feasibility and implications of establishing 'no-stop' borders in Africa as a means to deepen regional market integration and reduce the costs and delays associated with cross-border trade.

While Africa has made notable progress in bringing down trade times and costs through trade facilitation measures, challenges persist, such as non-tariff barriers and rising congestion. These raise interest in the possibility of moving beyond one-stop to 'no-stop' borders, thus taking the use of trade technology and institutions beyond their current states.

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Acronyms

AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
AEO	Authorised Economic Operator
AU	African Union
AUDA-NEPAD	African Union Development Agency-New Partnership for Africa's Development
ABC	Automated Border Control
C-TPAT	Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
CTMS	Corridor Trip Management System

CTS	Cargo Targeting System
EAC	East African Community
e-CO	Electronic Certificate of Origin
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
FAST	Free and Secure Trade
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organisation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IPPC	International Plant Protection Convention
ITC	International Trade Centre
ITS	Intelligent Transport Systems
JBC	Joint Border Committee
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
MIDAS	Migration Information and Data Analysis System
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSBP	One-Stop Border Post
PCJ	Postes de Contrôle Juxtaposés
PIP	Partners in Protection
REC	Regional Economic Community
RFID	Radio-Frequency Identification
SACU	Southern African Customs Union
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SIGMAT	System for Interconnection of National Customs Systems
TFA	Trade Facilitation Agreement
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
TLIP	Trade Logistics Information Pipeline

TMA	TradeMark (East) Africa
TTTFP	Tripartite Transport and Transit Facilitation Programme
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
USCBP	U.S. Customs and Border Protection
UEMOA	West African Economic and Monetary Union
WCO	World Customs Organisation
WTO	World Trade Organisation

Executive summary

With recognition that 'thick borders' pose a barrier to genuinely integrating regional markets in Africa, recent years have seen a surge in regional and partner-supported initiatives to bring down costs and times for cross-border trade.

While Africa has made notable progress through the rollout of One-Stop Border Posts (OSBPs), challenges such as persistent trade barriers and rising congestion remain and raise interest in the possibility of a 'no-stop' border

This study explores the feasibility and implications of establishing 'no-stop' borders in Africa as a means to deepen regional market integration and reduce the costs and delays associated with cross-border trade within the regional economic communities (RECs) and in support of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

Although there are a range of ways to define a 'no-stop' border, from invisible borders in Europe to informal border crossing points, in Africa the 'no-stop' border concept would arguably best draw lessons from OSBP experiences.

The benefits of combining such approaches include reduced transaction and maintenance costs, enhanced trade efficiency, and improved government revenues.

The paper approaches the 'no-stop' border concept from three critical perspectives: technological feasibility, institutional requirements, and administrative and political realities.

A range of technological solutions already allow some 'smart border' and 'smart corridor' operations to take place - using cargo tracking, digital identities, and electronic customs systems and vehicle recognition.

Technologically, a 'no-stop' border is therefore feasible but the paper also seeks to look at 'who really wants a no-stop border' given the implications for current administrative mandates and reduced control of cross-border flows, what some have referred to as the 3s of: sovereignty, security and sustenance.

At an institutional level, OSBPs illustrate the range of agencies and processes that must be brought together, and thus how political and administrative interests and incentives can align. But numerous attempts at OSBPs have struggled to coordinate among the wide range of border agencies. A 'no-stop' border should therefore ideally build on an existing, functioning OSBP.

But digitalising borders and related processes also poses risks. Experiences include unintended consequences such as corruption, exclusion of small businesses due to new fees, and challenges around data security and individual rights. These would also arise with 'no-stop borders'.

The discussion underscores the need to pilot a 'no-stop' border where there is already a clear administrative benefit from reducing congestion, demand from the private sector, and willingness to invest in 'no-stop' technology for at least part of the traded goods or crossing vehicles.

The paper presents a checklist of steps for piloting a 'no-stop' border, beginning by defining an objective of what will constitute a 'no-stop' border and then defining a clear, inclusive change management path.

While the vision of frictionless borders in Africa is achievable in theory, its realisation will depend on balancing innovative technologies, political and administrative interests and incentives, and ensuring wider inclusive governance for those operating and working at and around the border.

1. Introduction

What would it take to have 'no-stop' borders in Africa? With recognition that 'thick borders' in Africa limit the benefits from nominally integrated regional markets (Brenton and Isik 2013), recent years have seen a surge in trade facilitation initiatives to bring down the costs and times for cross-order trade. This has been most notable with the introduction of a number of One-Stop Border Posts (OSBP) since the early 2010s (AUDA-NEPAD 2024). Some of these are becoming victims of their own success with rising congestion - in East Africa the Busia and Malabo borders connecting Kenya and Uganda along the Northern Corridor - raising the question of how to further reduce costs and times for regional trade. This leads to calls to introduce 'no-stop' borders, and thus the question, what would it take in practice?

Trade facilitation measures and support represent the practical side to political ambitions and decisions to: expand regional markets through trade agreements; realise the benefits of scope and scale that benefit producers and consumers through access to larger input and output markets, and thus wider choice and cheaper goods and services. Market integration has long been high on the political agenda in Africa, continentally and regionally, where the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) provides new impetus to market integration efforts, but where barriers to trade in goods remain important. Expansion of the network of OSBPs and digitalisation of trade processes ostensibly offer opportunities to further underpin these initiatives and provide lessons to move towards a 'no-stop' border concept.[1]

While border posts take different forms in different regions, the logic of trade facilitation is to lower transaction costs for traders and officials, reduce the numbers of different interactions and by extension the number of potentially arbitrary decisions that can lead to time delays and corruption. OSBPs represent one approach to doing so. At the same time, such initiatives have financial implications: they require financing to construct and maintain physical infrastructure, sometimes leading to fees to be charged; while increasing cross-border fluidity helps increase trade and thus revenues for the government to the extent that it increases the flow of traded goods that pay some form of duties and/or fees. For businesses improved border procedures can offer time savings, though for small and medium sized businesses increased border-use charges can be dissuasive, leading to avoidance. Balancing these objectives and interests is one of the challenges governments face when designing and implementing trade facilitation in the forpolicies.

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[1] Note, this paper does not analyse the effectiveness or impacts of OSBPs via-à-vis traditional borders.

This study provides an overview of the issues likely to impact on the establishment of a 'no-stop' border in Africa. It discusses how countries in Africa might build on existing technological solutions including cargo-tracking technology, digital passports and electronic customs processes to allow freer movement of goods, services and people across borders while retaining other objectives such as ensuring security and minimising the risk of surveillance that impinges on individual rights. Going further, the paper explores what steps might be taken by various actors, including government agencies and regional economic communities, towards the creation of smart corridors through linking these 'no-stop' borders.

On paper, a 'no-stop' border based on technological solutions is possible. That is, technological advances offer the possibility of entirely removing, or further reducing, the *time-costs* at borders while offering the possibility to also reduce the financial cost and lower the burden on the state for maintenance and upkeep. However, in practice, as we discuss here, new approaches can have unforeseen effects that in fact hamper trade, become obstacles or create an alternative system of rents. This means that steps towards a 'no-stop' border will have to combine different technologies but also actors and interests.

The paper examines evidence on what it would take for a 'no-stop' border from the continent from three angles: technological, institutional and political. The next section frames the paper by discussing different definitions of a 'no-stop' border before Section 3 looks at the mix of institutions and technological possibilities for one and 'no-stop' borders. Section 4 discusses some of the political and administrative challenges of moving towards digitalisation of borders and thus in Section 5 some criteria for thinking about where to potentially pilot the 'no-stop' border concept.

2. What is a 'no-stop' border?

Zambia's President Hichilema made perhaps the most high-level case for 'no-stop' borders in late 2024: "with technology, we can also operate non-stop borders which will make trade within ourselves much easier and seamless. By trading more amongst ourselves within the continent, we will be spending more resources locally within the continent" (H.E. Pres. Hichilema 2024).

But there are multiple ways of defining a 'non-stop' or 'no-stop' border. Informal border crossing points are themselves arguably 'no-stop' borders, allowing the free flow of goods and people but with the proviso that these cover unrecorded and unregulated trade.[2] At the other extreme, the European Union (EU) has a

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[2] UNECA (2021) estimates informal cross-border trade at 7-16 per cent of formal intra-African trade flows, rising to between 30-72 per cent of formal trade between neighbouring countries.

series of 'no-stop' borders, where intra-EU cross-border trade is not recorded either, but *is regulate*d through behind-the-border, common regional rules and regulations for goods and people within the common market.

The key regulatory underpinnings for 'no-stop' borders and free movement of people within the EU are summarised in Box 1. Although these would not be applicable within African regional markets at present given their lower levels of integration and regulatory harmonisation, the summary highlights the regulatory depth required, but also the importance of distinguishing between regulations for movement of goods and for people.[3]

Box 1. Key legislation and regulations underpinning the EU Common Market

Every region is different, implying that lessons can be only transferred from one region to another with great care for specific contexts. For the EU it is instructive that it took the bloc 11 years to go from being the European Economic Community (1957) to a customs union, while the 'invisible borders' for Schengen countries only emerged in the 1990s, more than 30 years later (Mold 2021).

The free movement of goods and people within the EU's common market (also called the single market or internal market) is underpinned by several key pieces of legislation:

For the **free movement of goods:**

- The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) - Articles 28-37 address the free movement of goods and prohibit customs duties and quantitative restrictions between member states
- The Customs Union legislation
- Various harmonisation directives that standardise product requirements across the EU
- The Mutual Recognition Regulation (EU) 2019/515, which ensures that products lawfully marketed in one member state can be sold in another

For the **free movement of people:**

- The TFEU - Articles 45-48 cover the free movement of workers
- The Free Movement Directive 2004/38/EC - outlines the rights of EU citizens and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the member states
- The Professional Qualifications Directive 2005/36/EC (as amended) facilitates the recognition of professional qualifications across member states

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[3] As discussed by Mold (2021) for the EU it took 11 years to move from the European Economic Community (1957) to a customs union and only in the mid-1990s to 'invisible borders' under the so-called Schengen Agreement.

> - The Social Security Coordination Regulations (Regulations 883/2004 and 987/2009)
>
> These fundamental freedoms form part of the "four freedoms" of the EU's single market, alongside the free movement of services and capital.
>
> Institutionally the legislation is overseen by the following institutions:
>
> - The European Commission, which monitors implementation
> - The European Court of Justice, which interprets the rules and ensures uniform application
> - National authorities, which handle day-to-day administration

Source: EP 2024.

Other examples of no-stop borders exist outside Europe but in specific contexts of technologically and administratively advanced countries. These include the US-Canada Border, and the Norway-Sweden border, where Norway is not in the EU. The Free and Secure Trade (FAST) programme is a bilateral initiative between Canada and the United States that streamlines border crossings for pre-approved, low-risk commercial drivers, carriers, and importers through enhanced security protocols and expedited procedures. Users must undergo rigorous risk assessments and maintain certification through programmes like Canada's Partners in Protection (PIP) or the U.S. Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism (C-TPAT). FAST members benefit from dedicated lanes, reduced inspections, and priority processing at major border crossings, provided shipments meet eligibility requirements and all documentation is properly presented (USCBP 2025).

The Norway - Sweden border is one of the most advanced customs solutions in the world, being "the only model that uses all the basic modern components of the international standards from the World Customs Organisation" (EP 2017). It features automated lanes for commercial vehicles carrying pre-registered goods, utilising RFID technology and a "green corridor" system that allows trusted traders to cross without stopping. Electronic customs declarations are submitted in advance, streamlining the process (Tullverket 2025). The system relies heavily on pre-existing Nordic cooperation frameworks and technological integration. Since implementation, customs revenue rose by 12% over five years, driven by increased compliance and trade volume.

Between the extremes of informal and invisible borders within a common market, African countries and regions have seen an explosion in OSBPs in recent years - known as Postes de Contrôle Juxtaposés (PCJ) in Francophone countries.

Although there are nuances in definitions, discussed in Section 3, AUDA-NEPAD (2024) counts 32 operational OSBPs in Africa and 85 under consideration, shown in Figure 1. Though few in number compared to traditional border posts, these represent the current 'best practice' model being proposed to simplify border procedures in Africa.

Figure 1. Operational and planned OSBPs

Figure 1.2: Map of the Operational OSBPs and Potential OSBPs

One - Stop Border Posts

● OSBP
● Borders currently being considered for transformation into OSBP/JBP

32 Operational OSBPs

85 Border Posts Prepared for Evolution to OSBPs

Source: This OSBP Status Report

Source: AUDA-NEPAD (2024)

As Figure 1 shows, there is a particularly high concentration of these among the East African Community (EAC) countries. This reflects numerous factors: the political priority given to facilitating trade within the EAC, including through the so-called 'coalition of the willing' along the Northern Corridor in the mid 2010s (Verhaeghe and Mathieson 2017); the (albeit incomplete) EAC customs union

process; and support from key partners such as the long-running TradeMark (East) Africa OSBP programme in supporting their creation and maintenance (TMA 2025).

But the OSBP concept is expanding into West and Southern Africa. Whether or not these represent a necessary step towards a 'no-stop border', they offer potential lessons on how different cross-border harmonisation approaches work. They also offer insights into how other regions might leapfrog traditional joint border post models altogether towards 'smart' digitalised borders and 'no-stop' borders. Indeed, with the expansion of corridor approaches in Africa, advocated by the African Union through the AfCFTA (AU 2023), and by the EU through their Global Gateway Strategic Corridors (JRC 2021), the 'no-stop' border approach could also play a role in movement towards 'smart' corridors across the continent, further discussed below.[4]

To further situate the 'no-stop' border concept in the above discussion, Figure 2 presents a continuum of border types. This characterisation runs from informal crossing points at one end (1), to invisible/ borders as in the EU at the other (5). In this continuum, OSBPs sit between the two extremes (3).

Figure 2. A continuum of border types
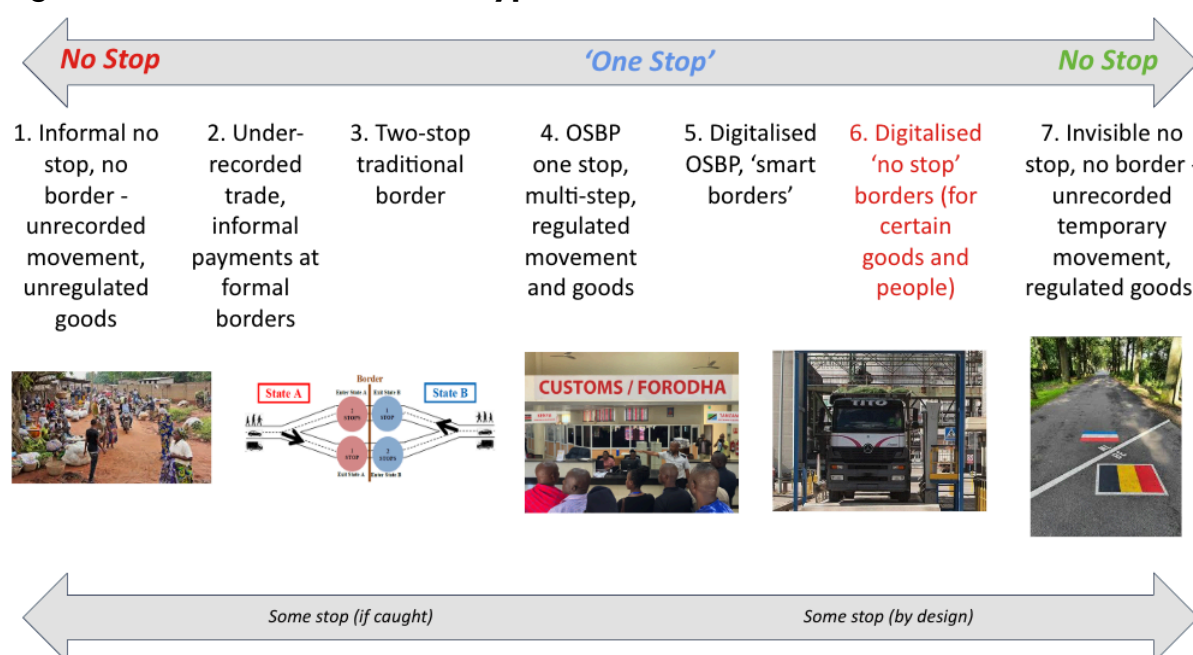
Source: Authors[5]

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[4] Under the AU's Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA), the AU agreed on a definition for Smart Corridors in 2016 (AU 2016). The smart corridor concept connects the idea of trade facilitation and digitalising trade and transport processes through 'Safety, Mobility and Automated Real-time Traffic Management' (SMART) (AU 2018) for cargo, vehicles and people from ports to borders and everywhere in-between.

[5] The photos show informal Niger River crossing points (Premium Times 2024), the Namanga One-Stop Border Post between Kenya and Tanzania, and the 'invisible borders' between the Netherlands and Belgium in the EU.

In this schema, unrecorded and under-recorded trade also takes place at formal border posts, situated between fully informal crossing and OSBPs (2), through informal systems of corruption and collusion between traders and officials (discussed by Byiers et al. 2021). At the other end of the spectrum, between OSBPs and 'invisible borders', there is therefore scope for other forms of border control that offer a means to simplify procedures, reduce steps and thus time and costs, while maintaining regulatory control, including digitalised procedures for 'smart borders' and 'no stop' borders, which could be for certain goods and people. That is, 'some stop' rather than a blanket " for all goods or people.

'Smart borders' (5) might further facilitate trade and lower clearance times by further combining these steps within an OSBP, along with pre-clearance of goods and vehicles, and digital documentation. The WCO (2020) cites four guiding principles for transforming traditional borders into 'smart borders': create a safer border by employing risk-based decision-making; improve standardisation and visibility by normalising data requirements and partnering across borders; increase cost savings by consolidating functions at the border; and innovate at borders by creating an accessible ecosystem that provides commercial and community solutions. 'Smart borders' therefore entail applying technologies to address illegal activities, but also to improve border functioning using artificial intelligence and blockchain technologies, better decision-making support, database sharing and thus increased tax revenue management and strengthened trade between African countries. "These smart borders can increase not only security but also mobility of goods and services" (AUDA-NEPAD 2021). While OSBPs require resilient off-grid critical systems to ensure continuity of operations, the needs rise with greater reliance on digital systems for smart and 'no-stop' borders.

The above discussion highlights the nuances around border types and what could constitute a 'no-stop' border, but also the potential need to define a 'no-stop' border according to the treatment of different types of trade. While for certain goods, people or vehicles there may be the potential for no to limited stops, for others, regulatory requirements may mean 'no stop' is not feasible for all traffic. That opens up the possibility of combining elements of OSBPs, smart borders and for goods and vehicles that fulfill certain conditions and move towards a 'substantive' proportion of goods.

One working definition of a 'no-stop' border could be that 50% of vehicles passing through a border post do so without a physical stop. Although somewhat distant from the EU definition, this would offer a measurable objective for movement towards a 'no-stop' border. Alternatively, the definition could relate instead to the times taken for traffic to clear, where to qualify as a 'no-stop' border, a majority of

trade would need to be cleared around a baseline 'no stop' figure, thus allowing border agents to decide on a risk-assessment basis.

Regardless of the number of stops at a border post, whether in Africa or Europe, customs officials have the prerogative to stop and inspect cargos outside border areas. At some OSBPs, for example, there is a 5km zone within which locals can move and trade goods, but beyond which can be subject to customs controls. This then might be combined with some of the above elements in pursuit of a border while reassuring those with safety and security concerns.

The following section looks at the key necessary elements for an OSBP as well as the organisational aspects. This is followed by discussion of the technological solutions already being applied to some of these steps, before discussing some of the between and within-country political economy challenges of moving from existing border practices, digital or otherwise, towards some form of 'no-stop' border.

# 3. Learning from 'one-stop' to get to 'no-stop'

3.1 OSBP basics

Movement towards a 'no-stop' border' should learn from the experience of cross-border and regional cooperation for OSBPs. This section breaks down the different steps necessary for an OSBP and, in particular, the organisation issues they involve that would also need to be taken into account, providing examples of where these different steps have already been digitalised or automated around the continent.

The rise in OSBPs in Africa partially responds to international agreements such as the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). Article 8 of the TFA regulates border agency cooperation and requires both national border authorities/agencies and those of neighbouring countries to cooperate with each other and coordinate border control, for instance through the alignment of working days and hours, harmonisation of procedures and formalities, development and sharing of common facilities, joint controls, and establishment of OSBPs. This is further backed by the Revised Kyoto Convention that lays down the principle that customs inspections of goods should take place in coordination with the inspections performed by other competent authorities (WCO 2017).[6]

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[6] Beyond these, several African countries are implementing the WCO SAFE framework with the aim of facilitating trade while ensuring the security of their borders, again incorporated in the processes at OSBPs (UNCTAD 2022). Other measures implemented through the SAFE framework include the establishment of procedures for Authorised Economic Operators which provides accelerated trade facilitation measures for certain verified economic actors.

In broad terms, the OSBP approach seeks to bring together the multiple steps and agencies of a 'traditional' two-stop border, by harmonising border operations on either side of the border before proceeding to joint customs control and cross border cooperation in specific areas and then harmonisation of cross border customs operations, as illustrated in Figure 3. The OSBP approach can retain two separate buildings but generally brings together the representatives of the different agencies from both countries *under one roof* for incoming trade and traffic in each of the respective countries. Representatives of each of the agencies for both states essentially 'share a desk' to reduce the distance that documents must travel for inspection or approval.

Figure 3. Typical steps in a traditional two-stop border post
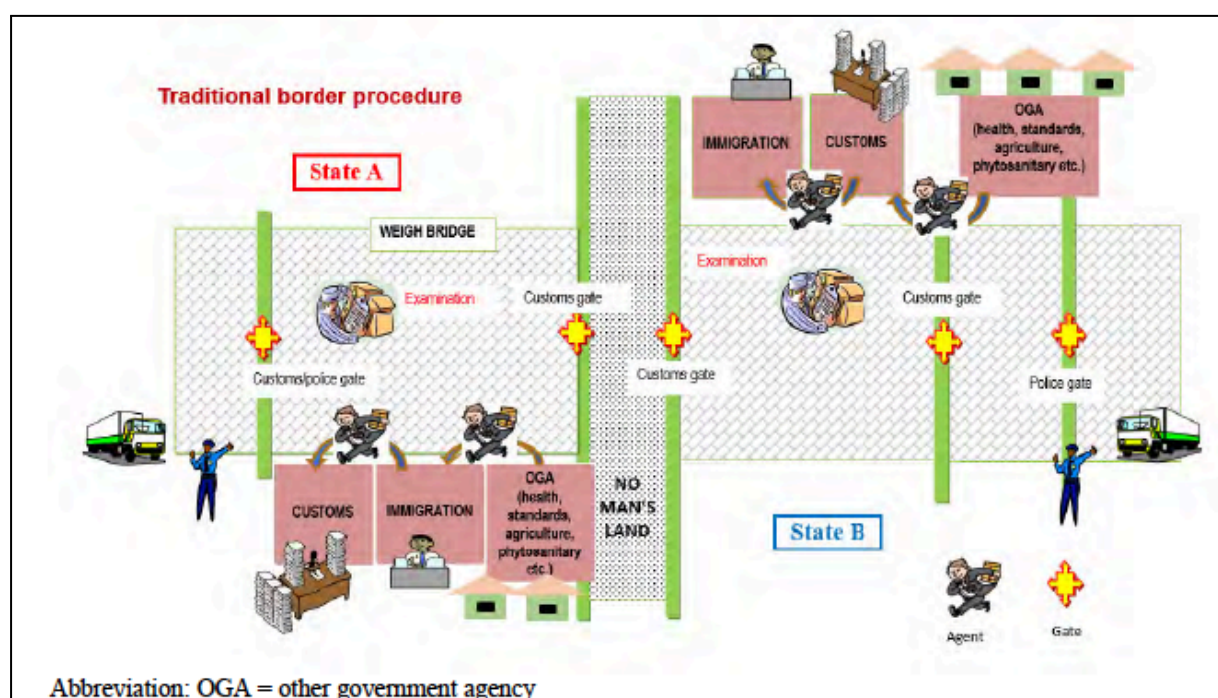
Source: (AUDA-NEPAD 2022)

Importantly, the OSBP concept nonetheless still often entails *multiple steps* - that is, while customs agents and migration officers from the two countries ostensibly 'share a desk', the different agency joint-approvals remain at separate windows within the OSBP building, usually on the side of the incoming country. National law in both countries must therefore allow officers to apply their procedures in a 'common control zone' in the neighbouring state through 'extraterritorial jurisdiction' with facilities to host foreign officials (AUDA-NEPAD 2022).[7]

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[7] The WCO (2009) distinguishes between Joint Border Posts (JBPs) and OSBPs, while others also distinguish between a juxtaposed OSBP (joint procedures for the import side), and a 'straddling OSBP' where both imports and exports are housed in one single building physically on the border, or a OSBP for both sides situated in one of the countries (AUDA-NEPAD 2022).

Even for OSBPs, border controls are undertaken by a wide number of governmental departments and agencies. This can involve bringing 'inland' agencies to the border to ensure that clearance and approval processes are done at the same time as customs processes to avoid further delay and checks when the goods enter the destination or transit country. The main agencies include the following (AUDA-NEPAD 2022):

1. Police,
2. Immigration,
3. Customs and Revenue Authorities,
4. Security agencies,
5. Health,
6. Agriculture, Animal and Plant Inspection,
7. Roads and Transport,
8. Others (e.g., Standards, Environment).

To facilitate the discussion in the remainder of the paper, we distinguish between the border treatment of goods, operators and vehicles, where in administrative and documentary terms, each of the three categories is associated with different requirements:

- **Types of goods** can helpfully be distinguished between bulk quantities of uniform goods and mixed goods; perishable and non-perishable goods; and transit and intra-regional goods given the different demands these place on customs. These have different requirements in terms of certificates of origin, regulatory documents, payments, health and other certificates, with implications for their treatment and its digitalisation at borders.

- **Types of operators** also have implications for treatment at borders. Beyond the distinction between formal and non-formal (informal) operators who, by definition, carry out unrecorded trade, the scale of formal operators may also have implications in terms of the form of identity required and whether or not a simplified trade regime is in operation with implications for documentary requirements and duties to pay (Apiko and Byiers 2024). Larger operators can also benefit from Authorised Economic Operators (AEOs) schemes, with implications on the types of checks that will be carried out.

- **Types of vehicles** also have implications for customs procedures, with the simplest cases being for single-good bulk transporters such as fuel or minerals. Sealed containers create demand for scanning and some (risk-based) inspections, while open-backed trucks can lead to the greatest time cost for documentary inspections if these include multiple goods and

consignments. The vehicle itself is also subject to insurance and licensing requirements.

3.2 Borders as administrative integration

While there are increasing numbers of, and rising demand for OSBPs, even the most successful of these face challenges: (periodically) high waiting times, linked to high volumes and slow procedures even if under one roof; traffic congestion caused by the waiting times and driver behaviour; continuous arrival of trucks; and an absence of harmonised systems between countries (TMA, 2025).[8] Establishing a OSBP therefore implies the search for efficiency gains through 'coordinated border management (see, e.g. WCO 2025b)':

1. organisation and coordination of multiple agencies within and between countries
2. data-sharing between agencies within and between countries
3. jointly developed, coordinated standards of operating procedures, especially in risk management, customs clearance, immigration, border security issues
4. streamlining and removal of unnecessary steps

Although this implies a range of investments in physical infrastructure, for new buildings, lanes and parking, arguably the main challenge is that of creating systems to coordinate and cooperate across jurisdictions, discussed further below.

This has been the broad approach undertaken for the 35 OSBPs highlighted in Figure 1, and that of TradeMark (East) Africa (TMA), the lead behind most East African OSBPs. Since 2010, TMA has supported the development of 13 OSBPs across East Africa and is currently developing six more.[9]

Beyond East Africa, the Zambian government has been active in expanding OSBPs. This enthusiasm relates to its landlockedness and thus reliance on access to different ports around Southern and East Africa (see Byiers and Vanheukelom 2014b). Reports talk of the advanced stages of negotiations to establish a one-stop border post (OSBP) at the Katima Mulilo border post with Namibia (TMA 2024a) where an internal government MoU was recently signed to reduce the number of government agencies present at the border from over 18 at large border crossings to six (Gov. of Zambia 2023). Zambia has also streamlined procedures and information flow for coordinated border management that cuts across agency lines and serves as the foundation of integrated risk management,

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[8] Building on TMA Border Approach 2.0 (TMA 2024d).
[9] These are: Busia Uganda OSBP, from the TMA Border Approach 2.0 (TMA 2024d).

with support from WCO (WCO 2024). For Zambia the newly reduced number of border authorities are as follows, nonetheless highlighting the high number of agencies that need to be present:

1. Zambia Revenue Authority (ZRA),
2. Immigration Department,
3. Zambia Compulsory Standards Agency (ZCSA),
4. Port Health,
5. Department of Plant Quarantine and Phytosanitary Services,
6. National Livestock Epidemiology Information Center.

In West Africa, 8 OSBPs have been rolled out through the two overlapping RECs - UEMOA and ECOWAS - with several more under preparation.[10] Consultations are underway to create OSBPs at key points on the Abidjan-Lagos Corridor, for example at Seme-Krake between Benin and Nigeria (ITC 2024), where trade relations between the two countries have often been hostile due to the high levels smuggling through Benin into Nigeria (Karkare et al. 2022). As an indication of the priorities of stakeholders, and the potential for different forms of 'no-stop' borders, the consultations there led to the following recommendations (ITC 2024):

- Implement a 'green' priority lane system for perishable goods.
- Establish a formal risk strategy to regulate truck traffic and ensure efficient transportation flow at border crossings - lack of traffic management creates operational inefficiencies and delays.
- Strengthen the existing Joint Border Committee (JBC) to further enhance collaboration among officials in Benin and Nigeria with resources, capacity and a clear legal mandate to react to arising border issues.
- Upgrade the pedestrian passage to ensure smooth passage of traders on foot, including local community members and other travellers.
- Increase the inclusivity of existing trade information and support systems for operators involved in agri-food trade through greater information sharing.

Though specific to the Benin-Nigeria border, these recommendations seem a useful basis also for thinking about 'no-stop' borders.

The expansion of OSBPs in Africa relates in great part to the positive impacts experienced. In East Africa, TMA estimates $26m in savings by traders and 45 percent less transactions for gov. agencies in 2021 thanks to OSBP initiatives (TMA 2024b). Analysis of eight OSBPs from across the continent suggest a 42% reduction in average dwell times after they were introduced, translating to both

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[10] See UEMOA (2023).

government and private sector savings (AUDA-NEPAD 2024). At the same time, many OSBPs bring benefits to border community residents and citizens by offering simplified clearance processes: Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda issue interstate passes for citizens and residents with the presentation of a national ID (AUDA-NEPAD 2022). Ayele et al. (2023) analysed the Busia (Kenya–Uganda) and Taveta–Holili (Kenya–Tanzania) OSBPs to assess the impact on consumer prices as a link between OSBPs and poverty in East Africa, finding substantive impacts on prices for maize and rice. Survey evidence backed this up, with close to half of business traders saying that OSBPs had reduced the prices of commodities they traded across the border.[11] The Kazungula Bridge One Stop Border Post (OSBP), launched in May 2021 between Botswana and Zambia, streamlines cross-border trade through shared infrastructure and coordinated operations. Using a juxtaposed model, both countries conduct import and export procedures under one roof, enhancing border crossing efficiency. Standard Operating Procedures agreed between both countries harmonise customs, immigration, and inspection processes, reducing delays and redundancies. Both countries also have established a clear legal framework that ensures extraterritoriality and enables enforcement of national laws within the shared facility (WCO 2023), all leading to lower waiting times and thus costs for cross-border trade.

While these initiatives lead to time savings at key borders and thus lower trade and production costs, they also increase revenue collection with the growth in trade and traffic. That is, there is a positive case to be made for investing more in OSBPs but potentially also beyond.

But certain borders are reportedly now victims of their own success, with increasing flows leading to renewed congestion, for example at Busia and Malaba already in 2022 (Business Daily 2022), thus increasing competition from other corridors, in this case the Central Corridor to hinterland states in East Africa. Although the Ugandan and Kenyan governments have taken steps to open new alternative borders (New Vision 2023), and implying the potential opportunity for further gains through digitalisation.

Further, as will be discussed below, some OSBP experiences have been less positive. Analysis of the Cinkassé OSBP on the Lomé-Ouagadougou corridor between Togo and Burkina Faso, in operation since 2010, appears to some as "an institutionalisation of abnormal practices on the road" (Méyébinesso 2020). According to that study, the continued slowness of formalities and the collection

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[11] In household surveys, a quarter of respondents said that since the arrival of the OSBPs, there had been an increase in the number of jobs and new businesses; one-third of respondents reported that incomes had increased; 87% of households at both border posts reported that the impact of the OSBP on the economy of the area had been positive; 6% reported that there had been a negative impact while 7% said there had been no impact or they were not sure about the impact (Ayele et al. 2023).

of informal payments remained a problem even with the interconnection of the customs administrations of the two countries while the objective of reducing the waiting time from 2 to 3 days to 1 to 2 hours had not yet been achieved in 2020.

4. Digitising OSBP processes

OSBPs are increasingly being digitalised, resulting in so-called 'smart borders' as technologies emerge to replace specific processes. Efforts to digitalise different stages of the clearance process for goods, operators and vehicles clearly offer opportunities for further lowering border-crossing times and costs. They have also led to "innovative approaches for simplification of clearance procedures, sharing of information between and among border agencies (on both sides of the border), paperless processing of declarations, and more effective shared risk-management approaches" (AUDA-NEPAD 2022).

Box 3 highlights the key steps that are relevant for each of the three key border processes, before the remainder of this section discusses existing cases and their implications for a 'no-stop' border. As the section highlights, given existing technologies, a 'no-stop' border is less a technological challenge than an administrative, coordination and political one.

Box 2. List of digitalised steps for '' cross-border trade

Goods (domestic and transit)
- *Electronic Single window*
- *Digital payment*
- *E-certificates of origin*
- *Connected customs and risk-based systems*
- *Electronic cargo tracking*
- *Cargo scanning*
- *Block chain technologies - e.g. document verification*

- ***Transit goods (in addition to the above steps, transit goods may also require)***
- *Electronic cargo tracking*
- *Regional bonds/guarantees*
- *Electronic seals*

Operators
- *AEO schemes*
- *Driver tracking (SADC and EAC COVID driver registration)*
- *E-ID and passport use and recognition equipment*
- *Regional passports (e.g. EAC)/no passport agreements (e.g. Namibia-Botswana)*

> - *Immigration kiosks to streamline immigration and customs declaration processes*
> - *E-visas*
>
> **Vehicles**
> - *Electronic cargo tracking*
> - *Number-plate recognition*
> - *E-gates (see Mombasa port?)*

4.1 Goods clearance

A key concept for digitalising border posts, and therefore moving towards 'no-stop' borders relates to risk assessment which can be addressed through pre-clearance of goods and people. Under the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, "Members shall adopt procedures to allow the submission of import documentation and other required information prior to the arrival of goods", so-called pre-clearance (UNCTAD 2020), where data analysis can allow inspections to be reduced and based on risk-assessment according to operators and products.

Many countries have introduced so-called electronic single windows that aim to allow traders to submit all relevant trade-related data and information in one online place for approval prior to physically sending goods to the border. The single window supports interagency cooperation at the local, regional and central levels, between ministries or state agencies with different tasks relating to customs and border management.

As Figure 4 shows, the single window then serves as a platform for connecting relevant data with a range of institutions including customs and chambers of commerce. On paper, this allows data to be uploaded, payments made and approvals obtained in advance of arriving at a border, thus minimising the need for further controls and raising government revenues. UNCTAD estimates that the ASYCUDA single window system adopted in Rwanda, operational since 2015, has saved the economy an estimated $15 million to $20 million and saved transporters the equivalent of $6 million annually in clearance times (UNCTAD 2024).

While electronic single windows are being rolled out across the continent, these require digital infrastructures to be in place, where cross-border connections also require another level of cross-border and regional cooperation to ensure compatibility between systems. That area in itself is also often subject to competing interests within and between states whether in terms of harmonising

cross-border payment systems, data flows or digital public infrastructures, as summarised in Box 3.

Figure 4. Schematic diagram of an electronic single-window for trade
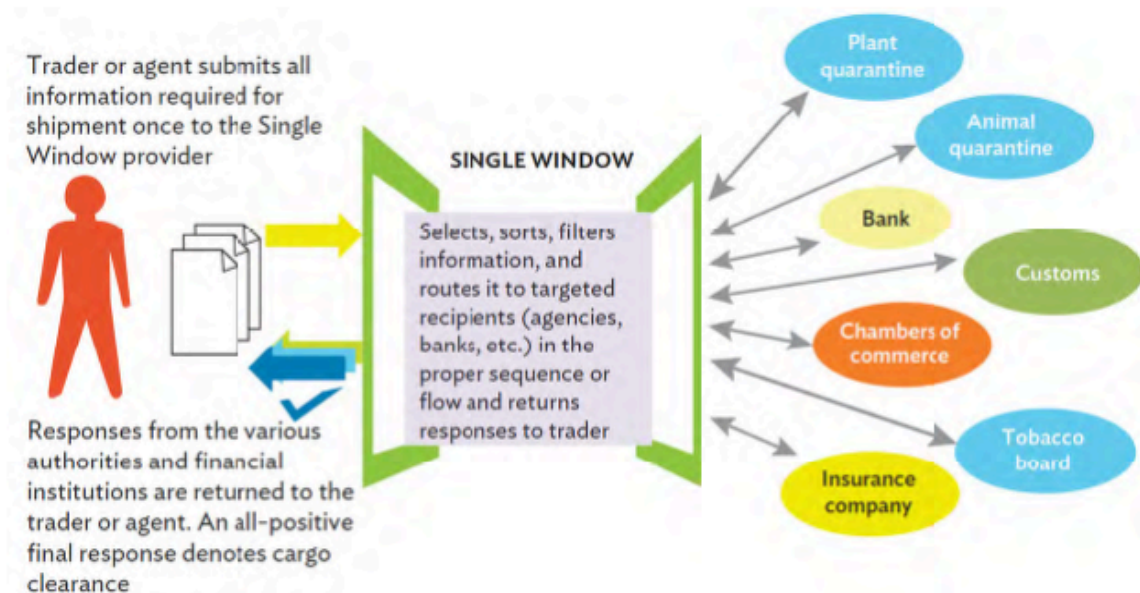
Source: AUDA-NEPAD 2022

Box 3. Seeking complementarity between digital public infrastructure and cross-border trade:

While the discussion in this section is primarily about the technologies that might be used to digitise specific aspects of cross-border documentary checks, it can build on ongoing efforts towards digital public infrastructure.

- Cross-border payments and interoperable digital IDs can help to deliver cross-border trade in both goods and services but require the physical and soft infrastructures to be in place to (Domingo and Teevan 2022; Musoni et al. 2023a).
- Cross-border data flows will be the basis of the digital trade protocol of the AfCFTA, and the bedrock for building meaningful data sets to drive innovation in the data economy and to build Artificial Intelligence (AI) that caters to African needs (Musoni et al. 2024).
- However, the process of deploying regional digital public infrastructures is complex, and depends on the interplay between dynamics at the national and regional levels.
- In previous work looking at interoperability of digital payments systems in East Africa (Domingo et al. 2023), our analysis suggested the need for a solid

regulatory framework at national and regional levels to allow for interoperability of digital payment systems, combined with the need for a truly inclusive multi-stakeholder approach to deployment.

In West Africa, ECOWAS has developed an interconnection module named SIGMAT to facilitate the interconnection of national customs systems across the region, connecting the UNCTAD ASYCUDA with other national systems (UNCTAD 2022).[12]

Across the continent there are also moves to establish *electronic certificate of origin* (e-CO) systems, often at the REC level. REC e-CO schemes include for SADC launched in 2022 (SADC 2022a), ECOWAS in 2024 (ECOWAS 2024), with a pilot scheme launched by COMESA in 2024 (COMESA 2024). For ECOWAS there is an e-hub based in Lomé, where countries must implement the issuance of e-COs (mostly issued by Chambers of Commerce) and link their database to the ECOWAS e-CO e-Hub so that the certificates are visible to customs. Although these schemes are in place it is not clear how fully operational they are across all REC members.

Other digitalisation initiatives for trade in goods include the creation of *electronic phytosanitary certificates.* The ephyto is the electronic equivalent of a phytosanitary certificate in XML format (FAO 2023). Some fourteen African countries currently have the possibility of using ephytos - including Uganda, South Africa with a concentration in West Africa, including in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Benin (IPPC 2025). The E-certificate is issued electronically by the Ministry of Agriculture of the exporting country and the database is linked to the IPPC (International Plant Protection Convention) e-hub where it is made available to the phytosanitary database of the importing Ministry of Agriculture as well as to the importer and his forwarder.

In addition to documentary approvals, part of the challenge for governing regional trade relates to goods in transit from ports to hinterland countries. States have procedures that allow transit goods to move across international borders under customs control without paying duties or taxes. This is usually supported by a financial guarantee managed by either regional organisations such as the RCTG-CARNET (COMESA 2021b) or international organisations such as the International Road Union (EC 2021). In some regions transit goods were until recently physically accompanied by customs escorts, with fees still paid until

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[12] This leads to two types of declaration: T1 declarations for goods in transit; and T2 declarations for regional goods under ETLS scheme. Although still under development, the T2 SIGMAT will allow regional goods to cross the border smoothly with a minimum of interaction as the initial customs declaration will be electronically visible to all countries' customs offices the truck is passing through.

recently on the Dakar-Bamako Corridor, with or without actual escort (Byiers and Karkare 2022).

But there has been growth in electronic cargo-tracking systems. Combined with digitalisation of the wider trade process these offer the potential to move towards 'no-stop' borders. The EAC has had an electronic cargo tracking system in operation on the Northern Corridor between Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda in the EAC since 2017 (WCO 2019a). The system comprises an electronic seal attached to transit cargo vehicles, thus giving real-time updates on vehicle location and speed to importers, transporters and revenue authorities, with data then transmitted to tracker satellites, central command centres in each of the revenue authorities in Nairobi, Kampala and Kigali (East African 2017). Uganda was the first country to launch the system in 2014, reportedly helping traders reduce transport times for cargo from Mombasa from six days to a one- and-a-half days before it was expanded along the corridor as (East African 2017). A similar system was launched along the Central Corridor in East Africa in 2023 (CCTTFA 2023) with efforts to connect the Central And Northern Corridor cargo tracking systems beginning in 2024 (EAC 2024) and the launch of an EAC Single Customs Platform in January 2025 (AllAfrica 2025).

During COVID-19 the EAC system was further expanded to include driver data. Similarly, SADC created the Corridor Trip Management System (CTMS) (SADC 2020), with five countries piloting a regional version of this in 2022 (SADC 2022b). Although this uses a mobile phone application rather than container seals, efforts are now underway to coordinate and combine with the SADC, COMESA and EAC systems under the Tripartite Free Trade Area (SADC 2023). That implies integrating the tracking system with immigration systems, allowing driver, crew, and passenger information to be transmitted to immigration at borders and other ports of entry. Importantly, the CTMS is a public good, freely available to multiple public and private sector users across the Tripartite and African continent (TTTFP 2024). This has allowed a broad rollout of the scheme across the region (Figure 5).

Figure 5. CTMS Roll-out Status 2024

Source: TTFFP (2024)

Cargo scanners are an additional tool being used to digitalise goods trade - though they arguably represent a *hurdle* for moving towards 'no-stop' borders. Recent upgrades to the EAC Single Customs Platform include sharing scanner images for customs transparency, beginning with Kenya and Uganda (AllAfrica 2025). Such data-sharing from scanner images has been carried out at other border-posts around the EAC. Zambia has reportedly also made efforts to digitise its borders and clearance procedures at the Nakonde border with a modern X-ray cargo scanner (TMA 2024c). However, as will be discussed below, the limited use of risk-assessment processes, and an underlying assumption that all cargoes are suspect - combined with the contracting and fees for scanning - often lead to overuse of scanning and thus delays, undermining the initial goal of lowering time costs associated with physical inspection.

In addition to these systems, blockchain based solutions are increasingly being used to facilitate customs and trade processes. Blockchain is a digitalised ledger that records transactions across multiple computers in a way that the registered transactions cannot be altered retroactively, thus increasing transparency, reducing fraud, speeding up processes and improving trust among stakeholders. Box 4 below discusses some of the solutions used in trade and customs facilitation that can be implemented in a border process.

Box 4. Blockchain solutions and borders

Blockchain solutions can help ensure fast, secure and transparent data exchange between all public and private parties engaged in trade involved. When integrated into customs processes, they can help avoid duplication and manual checks thus reducing time delays, for example through pre-clearance procedures that result in automated clearance decisions. Blockchain solutions can also help border agencies in risk management by using a full audit trail of the product's journey to identify low risk shipments which can pass without checks, while focusing on high-risk shipments.

Digital Trade Documents

Blockchain allows secure, tamper-proof storage and sharing of trade documents like:

- Bills of lading
- Letters of credit
- Certificates of origin
- Invoices

Blockchain allows for digitising the shipping supply chain. For example the now defunct TradeLens platform developed by IBM and streamlined document exchange, reduced paperwork, and sped up customs clearance. (Wragg 2022).

Supply Chain Transparency and Tracking

Blockchain provides end-to-end visibility of goods as they move through the supply chain. Each step can be recorded immutably. Its immutable nature means that once a transaction is recorded, it cannot be changed or deleted. This allows for precise tracking of products from their origin to the final destination, which is particularly beneficial for industries where product provenance is crucial, such as food, pharmaceuticals, and luxury goods (Njenga 2024). For example De Beers uses blockchain technology - Tracr-to track the journey of diamonds from mine to retail. This ensures that the diamonds are conflict-free and ethically sourced (De Beers 2022). Trade Mark Africa is also implementing the Trade Logistics Information Pipeline (TLIP) which aims to promote electronic exchange of trade information across borders and create more trust in the supply chain (TLIP, 2020).

Customs and Border Control

Blockchain can assist customs authorities in validating documents and verifying shipment data in real-time, thereby reducing delays and minimising fraud. Blockchain solutions can digitise end-to-end customs workflows, including provenance tracing and instant document processing, while maintaining compliance (Verstaen 2021). This aligns

with broader efforts to transition from paper-based customs workflows towards digital, secure, automated systems.

Trade Financing and Guarantees

Blockchain helps in verifying trade history, which reduces the risk for lenders, and enables small businesses to access financing more easily. Block chain can also be used in other trade financing measures for example, issuing regional transit guarantees for transit goods.

Interoperability Between Stakeholders

Blockchain creates a shared, trusted network where multiple parties (suppliers, logistics providers, ports, banks) can access the same information. However, different blockchain systems often struggle to communicate effectively, requiring frameworks like TradeTrust to bridge independent ledgers . This remains a persistent hurdle in creating seamless cross-chain data flows.

Beyond the above systems, customs risk management approaches are being applied to make more efficient use of customs resources. For example, to continue the example of electronic cargo-tracking in the EAC, tracking is only carried out for cargo that has been identified by the three Customs authorities as very high risk and sensitive. In 2018 one year after its launch, only 21% of the cargo in transit was actually being tracked (WCO 2019a).

In ECOWAS, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo have or are currently implementing the WCO Cargo Targeting System (CTS) while Benin is looking for finance for its implementation. The CTS is a cargo manifest risk assessment solution created by the WCO to enable WCO Members to use international best practice in cargo risk assessment, risk management and trade facilitation to implement key parts of the WCO SAFE Framework of Standards and the Kyoto Convention (WCO 2025a). Although the CTS is for now available for the maritime and airport side, the road version is not yet implemented.

While these different initiatives represent progress towards reducing trade times and costs, they face practical challenges and in some respects new challenges. Those relate to change management and how agencies interact, with particular questions around data access within and between national and regional systems, and duplication of processes. In particular, there is a risk that paper inefficiencies are maintained, or simply transmitted from paper to digital systems while underlying all discussions of digital systems is the risk of downtime when energy or connectivity fails. Further, the experiences in East Africa build on quite different institutional arrangements to those in West Africa, further discussed below.

4.2 People clearance

The necessity for coordinated border management also extends to information sharing between border agencies relating to people, including immigrations and customs agencies. At the level of movement of people across borders, a range of digitalised systems and initiatives are also being rolled out to benefit individuals, including traders and transport drivers.

Building on the different electronic cargo tracking systems in place, there are experiences of connecting this to driver data. Innovative approaches as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic helped fast track digital advancements in trade and the movement of people, amid concerns about drivers transmitting the virus. The tracking system was extended from cargos to drivers, implying gathering and sharing truck driver's health and other information via a smartphone app, building on the existing information with health information systems in Partner States. The Digital surveillance tracker would then interface and connect with designated laboratories to allow the States to control and generate COVID-19 test and attestation certificates (EAC 2020).

The Migration Information and Data Analysis System (MIDAS), the border management system developed by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), is in use across many African countries and can integrate different e-platforms (e.g., e-registration, e-resident permit, and e-passport applications to verify identity against headquarters databases and online visa applications) (AUDA-NEPAD 2022). This has the potential to connect with wider initiatives to create digital IDs with recognition across borders. In ECOWAS, all countries issue biometric ECOWAS passports. The ECOWAS Biometric ID is officially recognised as a regionally authorised travel document with Senegal, Benin, Guinea Bissau, The Gambia, Sierra Leone and Ghana currently issuing the biometric ECOWAS IDs.[13] Although all airports are equipped to read and register information from the passport and Biometric IDs that is not the case for all land borders, which often do not have adequate equipment to e-register passport data and read biometric ID (Abidjan-Lagos Transport and trade Facilitation study, Ecowas 2025). Biometric options that may be used within an OSBP include automated border control gates (ABC) gate (i.e., e-gate) systems used with facial recognition. Although these have primarily been introduced in airports they also might be extended beyond - African countries that have started to deploy ABC systems have included Rwanda at its land border with the DRC and at Kigali Airport, and Angola at Luanda Airport (AUDA-NEPAD 2022).

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[13] Reportedly, Côte d'Ivoire Biometric ID has all the ECOWAS security specifications, but the country did not include the ECOWAS logo, while Togo and Nigeria have not yet implemented the ECOWAS Biometric ID card.

At present ABC systems are primarily used only by citizens of the country with e-gates programmed to read the passports issued by their own country governments, for example in Nigeria and Kenya. Taking the automation a step further, the use of immigration kiosks at airports or land borders can help facilitate the documentary check process. Through these kiosks, regardless of nationality, passengers can scan, upload and verify their documents without the need to interface with an immigration officer. Primary Inspection Kiosks (PIKs) are used at international airports to streamline the immigration and customs declaration process, allowing travelers to verify their identity and submit declarations on-screen. Travellers can confirm their identity through facial recognition or biometric verification (ICAO 2024; Mahir 2024).

Combining people and goods, Authorised Economic Operator (AEO) schemes are also being set up across the continent to reduce compliance and control the burdens on approved traders, thus providing different treatments according to different types of actors crossing borders that might also facilitate borders. The EAC AEO programme was begun by their five member Commissioners of Customs in 2006, following adoption of the World Customs Organisation (WCO) SAFE Framework of Standards by the WCO Council in 2005 (EAC 2025). In the COMESA region, regional AEO Guidelines were adopted in 2019 along with training materials, and an AEO implementation roadmap adopted by a Council of Ministers meeting in 2021 (COMESA 2021a). The hope is that the AEO program will bolster movement of goods by accredited persons having 'green channel' clearance, already providing the basis for a 'some-stop' border post. In Southern Africa, the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), all of which are SADC members, adopted an AEO Mutual Recognition Agreement in May 2023 (WCO 2023). As laid out by the EAC AEO scheme, (EAC 2025), AEO registered companies can generally benefit from the following benefits, thus allowing lower trade times and costs:

- Automatic passing of declaration.
- No physical examination of goods, except for random or risk based interventions.
- ECTS requirement waiver where applicable.
- Expedited payment of refund claim.
- Reduced Customs security where applicable.
- Priority to participate in Customs initiatives.
- Guaranteed renewal of Customs license.
- Priority treatment in cargo clearance chain.
- Waiver of movement bond requirements for AEO.
- Self-management of bonded warehouses.

The WCO keeps a record of operational AEO schemes that have been notified, providing the information for African countries shown in Table 1. This shows 13 countries with WCO-recognised AEO systems, with different starting dates. The oldest is Morocco, followed by Kenya, who apart from Egypt, understandably also therefore have the most AEO operators. Clearly the number of AEO firms depends on demand, but also on the level of complexity of the accreditation criteria and the ability of firms to comply - these vary across countries. The regional SACU AEO system was in place in Botswana with only 3 firms, Eswatini with 2, Lesotho with 10, Namibia with 1, and South Africa 160 (compared to the 177 reported in 2025 in Table 1) (SACU 2023). As Table 1 also shows, the number of trade-related benefits also differ across countries.

Table 1. African AEO Systems in Operation, Criteria, Operators and Benefits (2025)

Country	Launch Date	Scope	Operator Type	AEO Operators	Accred. Criteria	General Benefits
Morocco	2006	Import, Export, Transit	Importer, Exporter, Customs Brokers, Warehouse, Carriers, Shipper	549	53	40
Kenya	2007	Import, Export, Transit	Importer, Exporter, Customs Brokers, Carriers, Shipper	372	53	23
Tunisia	2010	Import, Export, Transit	Importer, Exporter, Warehouse, Carriers, Shipper, Manufacturer, Freight Forwarder	105	50	20
Ethiopia	2010	Import, Export	Importer, Exporter, Customs Brokers, Manufacturer, Freight Forwarder	49	50	23
Mauritius	2012	Import, Export	Importer, Exporter	2	52	34
Uganda	2013	Import, Export	Importer, Exporter, Customs Brokers, Warehouse, Manufacturer, Couriers, Freight Forwarder	94	54	34
Zimbabwe	2013	Import	Importer	12	48	18
Egypt	2013	Import, Export	Importer, Exporter, Customs Brokers, Manufacturer	514	56	28
Burundi	2014	Import, Export	Importer, Exporter, Customs Brokers, Warehouse, Manufacturer	21	47	13
Rwanda	2015	Import, Export	Importer, Exporter, Customs Brokers, Warehouse, Carriers	78	46	26
Angola	2018	Import, Export	Importer, Exporter	38	37	23
Côte d'Ivoire	2021	Import, Export	Importer, Exporter	3	12	3
South Africa	2021	Import, Export	Importer, Exporter, Customs Brokers, Warehouse, Carriers, Manufacturer, Couriers, Freight Forwarder, Free Zones	177	55	14

Source: WCO Online AEO Compendium

More broadly, for borders that mainly handle freight, authorities recommend having two or more commercial channels for goods. A green channel can accommodate goods that can be cleared quickly, including pre-cleared goods and goods transported by AEOs, while a yellow/red channel can be created for goods that will require documentary checks and/or physical inspection (AUDA-NEPAD 2022). These systems are already in place at certain borders around the continent - in Côte d'Ivoire, goods under SIGMAT T1 (T1 is also used for export cargo) or T2 (If implemented) will be directed to a special lane allowing a minimum control of the goods and the vehicle. These approaches would provide a good basis for moving towards a 'no-stop' border.

4.3 Transport vehicles

Finally, the documents for vehicles themselves can also be digitised to lower times and costs at borders, offering a basis for movement towards 'no-stop' movement of goods. A range of e-gate systems are in place and functional across the continent that can recognise vehicles and the associated documentation, again offering a basis for slow or approaches.

In West Africa vehicles require an ECOWAS Vehicle Laisse-Passer for temporary admission of an ECOWAS registered vehicle and an ECOWAS Brown Card for cross-border vehicle insurance. Although for most countries the vehicle permit is issued manually, in Côte d'Ivoire, for example, the vehicle laissez-passer is issued electronically to drivers who have registered their vehicle on a website before arriving at the internal border. Insurance registration and issuance is also in the process of being made electronic, with smart-gate cameras that read the vehicle number plate and allow the vehicle to enter or exit according to its customs status scheduled for certain borders for June 2025 (at the entrance and exit of its land border (Noé and Ouangolodougou). The Zambian Nakonde border cited above will also include "installation of smart gates to reduce truck dwell times by 84% to less than 10 hours from 64 hours currently" (TMA 2024c).

4.4 From 'smart borders' to 'smart corridors'

As mentioned above, the concept of 'smart borders' and 'smart corridors' has been gaining traction under the AU and the World Customs Union. Through the Tripartite Transport and Transit Facilitation Programme (TTTFP) combining SADC, COMESA and EAC, this includes integration of customs management systems, of cargo scanning systems, weigh bridges and other technologies, incorporation of e-commerce and digital logistics, promulgation of necessary regulatory instruments (TTTFP 2024). As the TTTFP project sets out, the objective of this is to reduce the volume of documentation, simplify, streamline and harmonise

procedures, but especially to" exceed the benefits achieved by existing OSBPs without the need for large scale capital expenditure to further reduce turnaround times" (TTTFP 2024). Box 5 below discusses the concept of SMART corridors and some of the challenges in implementing the pilot measures.

Box 5. SMART Corridors in Africa

Smart corridors are emerging as a key tool to enhance trade flows and regional integration. The African Union and several regional economic communities are already developing or planning these cross-border platforms to better connect trading stakeholders and support economic growth.

"SMART" stands for "Safety, Mobility, Automated, Real-time Traffic Management". The AUC and its stakeholders have a common understanding of the concept of Smart Corridors and its key features adopted in 23-24 February 2016 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The definition includes Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) requirements, helping corridors evaluate their current systems or define what they need from vendors when transitioning to smart corridors.

The African Union has an ambition to implement SMART corridors across the continent. These corridors are implemented through coordinated regional initiatives focusing on policy harmonisation, technological integration and pilot projects to reduce inefficiencies in transportation networks. These corridors integrate Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) and standardised trade procedures to minimise delays and reduce costs (AU 2016).

The North-South Corridor (NSC) and Dar es Salaam Corridor (DC) were chosen as pilot projects based on multi-criteria assessments, including trade volume and existing infrastructure (AU 2018). Smart corridors aim to use technological solutions to reduce transport costs by streamlining procedures and reducing trade barriers through addressing fragmented regulations.

However, beyond deploying technological solutions to develop smart corridors, there also has to be institutional reforms to support corridor management. Establishing corridor management bodies could be one way to ensure coordination and the standardisation of procedures through harmonised policies and established legal frameworks (EU 2016).

Some of the challenges of implementing smart corridors faced in the pilot projects include issues with infrastructure and maintenance, border inefficiencies, lack of harmonised policies, technological gaps, high implementation costs and disparities across countries in a region. There have also been challenges with coordination across several stakeholders, especially among the governments, private sector and regional economic communities - especially where the interests vary. In order to address some

of these challenges, JICA has proposed the introduction of SMART+I borders, where "I" includes innovation aimed particularly at addressing social issues arising out of implementing these corridors (JICA 2022).

Perhaps more importantly, and discussed below is the need to "re-engineer business processes at borders" (TTTFP 2024). That includes connecting different government agencies in one country. To illustrate, Zambia's Electronic Government Interoperability Standard is seen as good practice in facilitating the interconnection and exchange of data and information between various Government Information Systems and Applications owned by different public service institutions (Gov. of Zambia 2025). In this line, Zambia, for example, has a SMART Zambia institute with a mandate for promoting e-governance, with calls for the Southern African region to take the lead in developing a regional Digital Identity Governance system to support trade facilitation, "creation of borderless countries, and non-stop borders" (SZI 2024).

More importantly, the need to re-engineer business processes at borders necessarily impacts on organisational cultures, administrative mandates and opportunities for rent-seeking.

5. Administrative-political realities

Even if a range of technological solutions exist, and there is increasing political rhetoric around introducing no-stop borders, administrative-political realities must still be considered. Indeed, beyond policymakers and partners, 'who really wants a no-stop border'? Often, there are competing interests that undermine the move towards simplification, sometimes due to vested interests and rents, though also linked to what some call the 3Ss: sovereignty, security and sustenance. These are woven through the following identified key issues for thinking about 'no-stop' borders.

5.1 Change management as key

The previous discussion is all based on the assumption that stakeholders are interested in and keen to see the (further) lowering of trade times and costs. While the assumption that greater border efficiency will provide public benefits and thus find public and private support seems logical, a growing literature on the political economy dimensions of trade corridors highlights the concept of 'profitable inefficiency' (Lamarque 2019). The OECD cites how OSBPs reveal the limits of institutional integration and "call into question the financial interests linked to the informal flows of people and merchandise crossing borders." (OECD 2019). They

cite examples in West Africa where, even during the construction phase, different coalitions of public and private-sector actors sought to *delay* the implementation of OSBPs, in some cases for a number of years (OECD 2019).

That is, some 'inefficient systems' at borders have a history and a raison d'être, partly based on path dependency, but sometimes based on specific interests and rent-seeking. *Inefficiencies* can also be more inclusive – whether in terms of how freight is shared out among truckers or the livelihoods created by helping truckers navigate bureaucratic hurdles at borders, the Abidjan-Ouagadougou corridor being one example (Byiers and Vanheukelom 2014a). There is therefore a need to acknowledge that borders are key points where informal payments and rents accumulate and are distributed, and that reforms will unavoidably affect these.

It is therefore important to consider basic change management dynamics in bureaucracies; but also broader questions about:

1. Who really wants to see simpler, digitalised and potentially 'no-stop' borders, and why?
2. What mandates, roles and interests will be affected and how?
3. What does this mean for current and future rent-seeking and distribution?
4. How to navigate infrastructure deficits, especially with the potential for 'downtime' (which can also be used to 'get around' the digital system').

As experiences from OSBPs attest, the shift from 'old' ways of working to new ways take time. These relate to several aspects:

Physical infrastructures remain fundamental. Even where attempts have been made to allow for 'green channels' or 'fast lanes' for certain types of transport, this can be complicated if bottlenecks occur prior to the border. Interviews highlighted past proposals in West Africa to use rest stops close to the border as sorting yards to send homogeneous groups of trucks such as fuel tankers down a cleared road, using time slots for separating the flows instead of separate lanes. Though this approach only works when traffic is relatively homogeneous or includes a limited range of types and forms of cargo and containers, it offers a further way of thinking about reducing stops even with existing infrastructure.

The overall complexity of working with multiple agencies and processes between two countries. Drawing from the WCO's Change management module, the process emphasises structured transition planning, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive leadership to address resistance, ensure transparency, and align new technologies with organisational culture (WCO 2019b). By fostering data-driven decision-making, inclusive practices, and long-term cultural shifts, change management equips customs agencies to sustainably adopt innovations while maintaining trust and compliance across the trade community. But beyond

these technical aspects, issues of human behaviour, informal trade and corruption also need to be acknowledged as a reality.

Implication: To successfully transition to no-stop borders, effective change management is essential in guiding both the technical transformation and the human elements involved.

Institutional variations shape OSBP possibilities and outcomes. In East Africa, where most successful, an EAC Act establishes the institutional basis and rules for OSBPs (EAC 2016). That establishes a basis for governments to enter into bilateral arrangements, the arrangement that controls will take place on the import side, that officers can move freely in the control zone, and indeed the establishment of a cross-border community. That then provides a solid basis for coordinating customs. In West Africa there are two competing ways of running OSBPs, both of which get around the question of how to allow officials to operate 'extra-territorially' by designating border areas regional, as ECOWAS or UEMOA land, though UEMOA borders are also within the ECOWAS zone. Anecdotally, this disempowers the national and local stakeholders, for whom the border, and its design and running become regional. Further, some UEMOA borders have been concessioned to private operators on a Build Operate Transfer Public Private Partnership basis (Cinkasse, Laleraba) leading to even less regional or national oversight of what takes place. In some cases this has led to private companies taking decisions without prior consultation with the necessary agencies.

Implication: The selection of locations for smart and 'no-stop' borders should be guided by existing OSBP practices, often defined at a regional level.

The time from actual decisions being made to their application. For example, the decision to replace the manual COMESA Certificate of Origin with the eCO was adopted by the COMESA Council of Ministers in 2014, while the draft regulations to implement the COMESA eCO system were only adopted in 2019. Subsequently, a Technical Working Group (TWG) on Rules of Origin was tasked to review the Rules to facilitate implementation of the COMESA eCO and other trade facilitation instruments with the eCO only then developed for pilot testing (COMESA 2021a).

Implication: Moving to digital and then 'no-stop' procedures should arguably therefore be something that is fast-tracked in specific borders rather than seeking regional approaches.

The time for different agencies and operators to adapt. Even where new procedures are adopted and implemented, administrative practices often continue to exist, whether out of habit or a sense of control. Even if physical documents are often obsolete once information has been made digital, as the picture from Namanga Border Post (October 2024) shows, paper continues to be

collected and stamped. Given a generalised understanding among many customs services that all cargoes are suspect, there is often a reluctance to do away with physical inspections, never mind cargo-scanning. Nugent and Soi (2020) identify a "stubborn persistence of routines that sit uneasily alongside the goal of a fully integrated and paperless world", pointing to the "enduring trust in paper, which leaves a distinct trail in the shape of stamps and signatures". This can relate to perceptions of control, but also to the payments associated with emitting documents - in West Africa, even for zero duties customs agents can often nonetheless charge for what is called *Travail supplementaire* (extra work) or the *Taxe informatique* (IT Tax) that is paid to the local office in cash, and potentially not accounted for at central level. Beyond these though, they also point to the need for paper when the power or IT systems fail and there is a need to revert to paper to avoid long delays.

Implication: Moving towards digital and procedures will require working with and understanding the perceived and real need for physical documentation and finding gradual ways to end current procedures. The emphasis should be on switching attention from low-risk to high-risk consignments.

Figure 6. Feeding the administrative need for physical documents

The range of stakeholders who need to be included, informed, trained and engaged. AUDA NEPAD (2022) rightly highlights the need to involve the private sector while considering the introduction of new technologies in an OSBP, and to get input from clearing and forwarding agents, traders and transporters, as well as the border community. Box 6 offers a snapshot of the very wide number of actors and agencies with some form of interest in how border procedures are adapted and applied. At the continental level the AU Border Governance Strategy also suggests the need for cooperation and coordination, capacity building, and community involvement, encouraging collaboration between border

management stakeholders (AU 2020). While important for digitalising OSBPs, these same actors are likely to be important to consider in thinking about border posts.

Implication: Many border posts are now surrounded by formalised border communities. Where they do not exist, they can be created. For a border, they should of course be part of discussions on implications and ways to avoid disruptions to livelihoods.

Different perspectives on trade facilitation. Even where there is broad agreement among stakeholders on the need to reduce trade times and costs, this must be achieved in a context of different perspectives on what that means. A guided visit to Namanga OSBP between Kenya and Tanzania highlighted very clearly the different underlying culture around OSBP roles, with Kenyan officials underlining measures to facilitate trade, while Tanzanian officials underlined security and control. Others cite the default position of customs authorities that all consignments are suspect and need physical inspection. Similarly, different border agencies are differently prepared to adopt trade facilitation measures - interviews cite how customs services are generally more prepared for digitalisation than other regulatory authorities, for example for health or agricultural purposes.

Box 6. Indicative list of stakeholders for border post coordination

1. Government Agencies and Authorities

    Customs and Revenue Authorities

    Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA)
    Uganda Revenue Authority (URA)
    Rwanda Revenue Authority (RRA)
    Tanzania Revenue Authority (TRA)

    Transport and Infrastructure Ministries:

    Ministry of Transport, Infrastructure, Housing, Urban Development, and Public Works (Kenya)
    Ministry of Works and Transport (Uganda)
    Ministry of Infrastructure (Rwanda)
    Ministry of Works, Transport, and Communication (Tanzania)

    Trade Ministries:

    Ministry of Industrialisation, Trade, and Enterprise Development (Kenya)
    Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Cooperatives (Uganda)
    Ministry of Trade and Industry (Rwanda)
    Ministry of Trade and Investment (Tanzania)

    Regional Organisations:

4. Private Sector Stakeholders

    Transport and Logistics Providers:

    Truckers' Associations (e.g., Kenya Transporters Association, Uganda National Transport Alliance)
    Freight Forwarders' Associations
    Logistics and clearing agents operating at borders

    Exporters and Importers:

    Exporters of fresh fruits, vegetables, flowers, and other goods relying on border crossings.
    Importers of goods into landlocked countries such as Uganda, Rwanda, and DRC.

    Cross-Border Traders:

    Associations representing small and medium enterprises (SMEs) involved in informal trade.
    Women-led trade organisations.

    Business Membership Organisations (BMOs):

    Federation of East African Freight Forwarders Associations (FEAFFA)

East African Community (EAC)
 	
Northern Corridor Transit and Transport Coordination Authority (NCTTCA)
 	
2. Development Partners
    European Delegations (EUDs):
    EU Delegations in Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and Tanzania.
    Development Finance Institutions (DFIs):
    European Investment Bank (EIB) and other European DFIs
    TDB, AfDB, AfriExim and other similar institutions.
 	
3. Local Communities
    Border Communities:
    Community-based organisations (CBOs) near border areas.
    Local leaders and representatives from communities affected by border operations.
	East African Business Council (EABC)
	
	5. Environmental and Social Organisations
	    Environmental Bodies:
	    National Environment Management Authorities (NEMAs) in respective countries.
	    Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) focused on environmental sustainability.
	    Social Welfare Organisations:
	    Organisations advocating for gender equality and women's empowerment in trade.
	    Groups addressing community impacts of border projects.
	
	6. Technical Experts and Consultants
	    Technology Providers:
	    Companies offering ICT solutions for customs and border management systems.
	    Providers of off-grid renewable energy solutions for greening initiatives.
	    Consulting Firms and Specialists:
	    Firms conducting technical, financial, legal, and environmental studies.

Source: (UNCTAD 2020)

Though anecdotal, such evidence plays a role in shaping the openness of different administrations to considering smart borders and the possibilities of 'no-top' borders. This then relates to the above discussion on risk management processes but the inherent need to balance motivations or interests to: (i) provide a better balance between border controls and trade facilitation, (ii) enhance the focus on high-risk movements of goods, (iii) improve compliance with laws and regulations, and (iv) reduce release times and transaction costs (AUDA-NEPAD, 2022).

Implication: Movement towards borders will need to take into account that the starting point of different government agencies from border countries may be different, including trade facilitation, revenue-seeking, or security, requiring systems and interests to align between these objectives.

5.2 Livelihoods and border systems

Connected to the above discussion on interests, stakeholders and change management, is the observation that borders are at the centre of wider 'systems' of cultural, social and economic exchange and connection. Promoting 'no-stop'

borders therefore impacts on the communities and exchanges taking place around these, potentially also leading to resistance to 'modernisation'.

At a broad level, Africa's borderlands play host to more than 270 million inhabitants, more than any single state on the continent. These communities are "well-known for adapting to new and difficult circumstances, often innovating with very limited resources. In improved circumstances, borderland communities could thrive from the abundant resources that they possess – both natural and in human capacity" (UNDP 2021).

Implication: The fact that borderland livelihoods are often made based on the facilitation of and arbitrage opportunities around border-crossing procedures, means that smart and 'no-stop' borders may in fact undermine some livelihoods and lead to resistance.

Beyond the livelihoods that build on price differences across borders, the interactions between traders and officials are increasingly framed as 'systems' involving exchanges and informal payments. More broadly, border agency enforcement officers and traders can interact based on rules as an outcome if both seek this way of working - that is, it is 'a system not an error" (Byiers et al. 2021). But other outcomes are possible depending on the desires or ability of officers and traders to respectively enforce or comply with trade regulations. Figure 7 provides a caricature of some of the potential outcomes, showing that 'full compliance' is only one of multiple potential outcomes.

Implication: For applying border strategies, this points towards a need to ensure that procedures would only apply to a certain type and form of trade.

Border markets are a lifeline for the economy of border regions, but can be affected by trade facilitation reforms. 'No-stop' borders hold the potential to revolutionise African border markets by improving trade efficiency and fostering formalisation. Yet, their success will depend on addressing deep-rooted challenges such as ethnic divisions, protectionist policies, inadequate infrastructure, and geopolitical tensions. It is equally important to ensure that the introduction of 'no-stop' borders does not unintentionally disrupt the economic activities of border markets and their surrounding economies. These markets often exist in a delicate balance between informal practices and structural trade dynamics *designed* to sidestep internal taxes. Economic operators, especially small-scale traders, frequently bypass official border points to evade taxes—especially in low-income regions where informal trade forms a substantial part of economic activity (Wiseman 2022). This can also involve unofficial crossings where tax enforcement is weaker or nonexistent.

Figure 7. Potential outcomes of official-trader border interactions
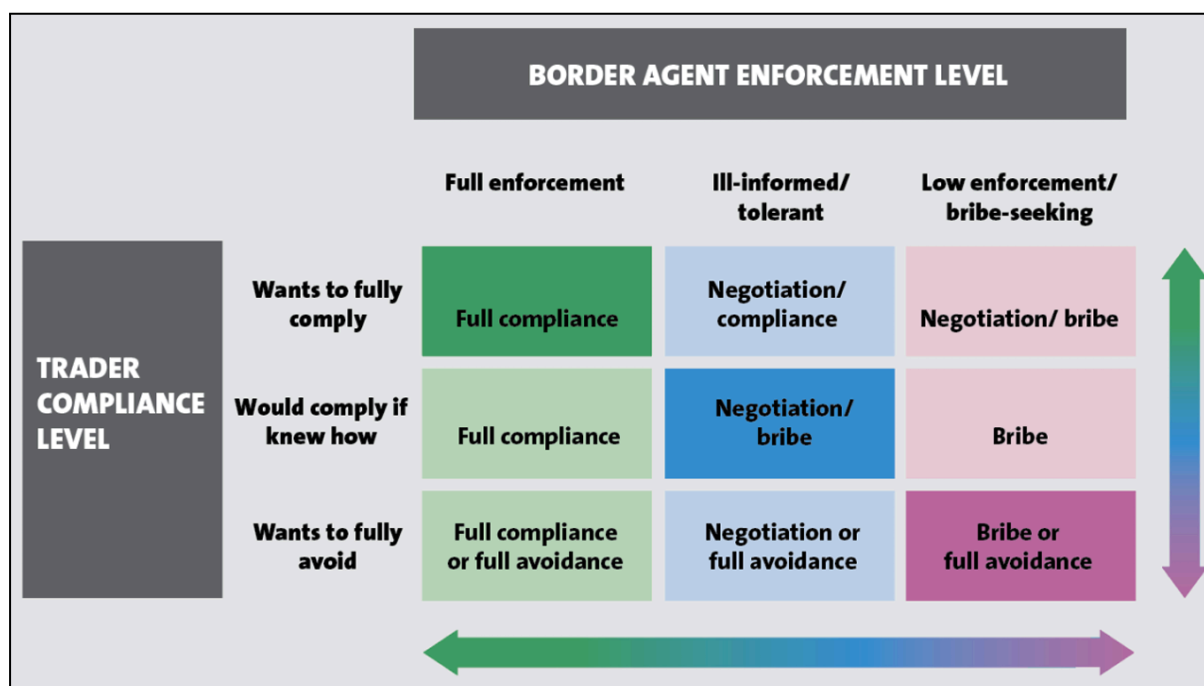
Source: Byiers et al. 2021.

According to interviews, in West Africa there is often a high level of informal behaviour by what are considered 'formal operators' (i.e. identified by Customs as a tax entity). In Figure 7 this would put them *between* the categories of those who 'would comply if they knew how', and those who 'want to fully avoid', while interviewees put most truck operators in the 'fully avoid' category. In a similar vein, border agencies are generally considered to be in the final two columns.

Where digital border processes are put in place, studies suggest that these are often undermined by 'workarounds' that incorporate informal practices into the digital arena. A study on four OSBPs in East Africa between Uganda-Kenya and Uganda-Rwanda finds that while there has been progress on data sharing in Customs, the construction and management of OSBPs reflects the persistence of distinct institutional cultures within each country, with "working practices involve practical workarounds which belie notions of a paperless border" (Nugent and Soi 2020).[14] That is, face-to-face meetings are still used to resolve recurrent issues, while the sharing of electronic data "does not replace older bureaucratic practices, but is layered across them (ibid).

The difficulty of encouraging customs practices to change with digitalisation and cross-border customs exchange is highlighted for the Dakar-Bamako Corridor in ECOWAS, where Byiers and Karkare (2022) describe how the Senegalese customs

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[14] The four OSBPs at Busia Uganda/Busia Kenya; Malaba Uganda/Malaba Kenya; Mirama Hills/Kagitumba and Katuna/Gatuna (both on the Uganda/Rwanda border) were selected for closer investigation.

agency continued to rely on payments for physical escort fees long after the escorts themselves had ceased, and the reluctance to use the SYGMAT system as this would, in essence, reduce opportunities for rent-seeking. In a similar line, Chalendard et al. (2023) analyse customs data from Madagascar where a system was introduced to randomly assign consignments to customs officers through an online system. They find manipulation of the assignment of import declarations to inspectors, and that these "are more at risk of tax evasion, yet less likely to be deemed fraudulent by inspectors, who also clear them faster." They estimate tax revenue losses associated with the corruption scheme are approximately 3% of total taxes collected and are highly concentrated among a select few inspectors and brokers.

Implication: Even moves to digitalisation of border processes can be manipulated - suggesting that borders should be focused on goods and operators with homogeneous goods requiring little discretionary decision-making.

5.3 E-service provider payments/rents

Finally, the move to digitalisation of border services is creating a new market for government procurement. Companies are required to provide the software and services to create electronic single-windows, electronic cargo tracking, e-gates, and all the other digitalised border steps discussed in Section 4.

Anecdotally, the way these companies are selected and contracts signed is raising concerns about whether or not they are indeed helping lower trade times and costs, or simply shifting costs. News reports from Ghana in 2018, for example, cited 'confusion' at the awarding of a third single window contract by the Ministry of Trade (GhanaWeb 2018). One of the firms has since taken the government to court for alleged unpaid arrears, revealing that the company was earning a fixed percentage on all transactions going through the system (GhanaWeb 2023). 2020 also saw tensions as the government sought to force existing platform firms to hand their software to new contract-holders (Kumah 2020).

Elsewhere in West Africa, UEMOA has been working with a private company, Scanning Systems, as a 'preferred partner' to design, finance and implement OSBPs *(Africa50 2025).*[15] The Scanning Systems company has been operating the Cinkansé between Burkina Faso and Togo for 10 years and is constructing two additional JBPs in Zégoua (Côte d'Ivoire-Mali border) and Laléraba (Burkina Faso-Côte d'Ivoire border). The contract award came about as UEMOA

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[15] Africa50, the pan-African infrastructure investment platform and Tassec Investment Holdings Africa, announced the completion of Africa50's equity investment into Scanning Systems, a company specialised in the design, financing, and implementation of One-Stop Joint Border Posts (JBPs) in Africa (Africa50 2023).

construction costs were higher than expected, leaving the infrastructure empty for some time. Scanning Systems International (SSI) LLC, therefore approached UEMOA with a proposal to complete and operationalise the JBP under a 20-year agreement, signed in September 2009 (JICA 2020). Reportedly, the concessionaire is responsible for constructing buildings, parking areas, and warehouses; providing scanners and a satellite telephone system; installing an electronic document management system; and developing a cargo tracking system and the legal right to establish a OSBP on the Burkina Faso-Mali border (ibid). While this PPP approach ostensibly addresses the problem of bringing private finance to support a public problem, anecdotally, the prices for using the facilities are high and rising. Further, doubts are raised about the way in which the contract was awarded, which are further undermined by the close proximity of the Scanning Systems CEO to the OUattara family (e.g. AfrikiPress 2020).

Although these cases do not represent clear cut cases of misconduct, they point to the challenge of finding suitable means to improve border processes with the private sector while avoiding the capturing of rents. This requires working with companies through transparent procurement processes and contracts and to engage the private sector in digitalising borders and moving towards 'no-stop' borders while actually lowering trade costs and times. When contemplating the implementation of these measures, a key question for the stakeholders to consider is ultimately who bears the costs between traders and the state. For the state, options include achieving border efficiency and digitisation with limited resources or opting for concessions with private companies. Traders on the other hand, will weigh their willingness to comply based on whether the costs are higher than their profit margins, potentially choosing to move to other border crossings, or avoid official border crossings, if the trade off is unfavourable.

Implication: Contract provision for digitised and 'no-stop' borders should be carried out on a transparent contractual basis, and ensure that revenues raised can cover border post maintenance but only reasonable profits.

6. Conclusions

6.1 Summary

Given the visible and financial benefits of OSBP approaches in East Africa in particular, and rising congestion at some, there is increasing interest in moving beyond OSBPs to 'no-stop' borders. Rising congestion leading to increased border crossing times therefore offers a strong rationale for greater investment in the 'no-stop' border concept. But as this paper asks: what would it take to get there?

Other regions and countries around the world have invisible or 'no-stop borders', but these are based on deep integration and harmonisation of behind-the-border regulations. For African regions, the opportunities for 'no-stop' borders relate more to creating special channels and procedures for certain goods or vehicles, using digital technologies to replace the multiple steps and interactions currently in place to allow cross-border trade to take place, particularly at OSBPs.

Although digital technologies are increasingly used for different documentary checks and controls of people, goods and vehicles at borders across Africa, they have yet to be fully exploited in combined form as 'smart' or 'no-stop' borders. Rather, different mechanisms have been applied at different border posts, to mixed effects.

Nonetheless, the conclusion is that a 'no-stop' border based on technological solutions is possible. There is also the possibility to integrate these border crossings into Smart Corridors as envisaged by the AU and build on existing regional solutions along specific corridors, for example the Northern Corridor in the EAC. However, the focus should also be on ensuring coordination of digital solutions, ensuring interconnectivity and interoperability across the various systems implemented.

However, experiences with OSBPs point to the difficulties of achieving administrative cooperation and harmonisation. The rise in digital border solutions also underlines the risk of rent-seeking around contracts, while informal payments often remain even in the presence of digital solutions.

Adopting a 'no-stop' border system therefore requires more than just technological upgrades - it demands a comprehensive change management approach. By understanding the incentives and interests behind current practices, integrating structured planning with leadership and stakeholder engagement, border agencies can better navigate the complexities of moving towards a 'no-stop' border while fostering trust, compliance, and long-term sustainability.

6.2 Ways forward

The above discussion suggests that a 'no-stop' border approach would best be considered for *some goods*, traded by *some companies* at *some border posts.* A practical place to start would be with green lanes with e-gates for vehicles carrying uniform goods, in the context of an AEO scheme. This would best be piloted where there is space to separate traffic prior to bottlenecks that create congestion.

Piloting a 'no-stop' border should build on an existing successful OSBP where administrations have succeeded in harmonising procedures and cooperating across borders. Given the above discussion about interests and incentives, the 'no-stop' should also be introduced at an OSBP currently faced with rising congestion and therefore demand, *both from the public and private sectors, to reduce* clearance times.

More broadly, an approach to 'no-stop' borders should build in, and upon, a detailed understanding of current practices and the 'workarounds' discussed above. This would acknowledge the rent-seeking and informal practices that characterise border transactions, and thus the perception that reforms can undermine administrative mandates and agent legitimacy. This requires that change management procedures seek to be gradual and 'reassure' agents on both sides of the border that their role is being supported, not undermined, allowing them to focus on higher risk trade consignments. This could be done through piloting, with sequencing planned to start with low-risk products, operating with AEOs (regionally recognised) and green lanes. Ultimately, the private sector must play a role while communities must be taken along.

The selection of a border at which to pilot a 'no-stop' border should therefore be based on:

1. A starting **objective** of what will constitute a 'no-stop' border - this could be 50% of traffic flows, of vehicles, or only of specific types of goods;
2. **Data collection** of likely time, traffic volume and therefore revenue gains for government to clearly make the case for investment;
3. A clearly stated **political and administrative** *need* among political and agency actors - where congestion and thus the potential for *rising* revenues stands out as a key political driver;
4. Based on the above, some **consensus among border agencies** and a lead agency to drive the process, building on OSBP experience - this might be reached through a shared corridor or regional agenda (RECs, or AU), or if more pragmatic through bilateral agreements. The message can and should be that **o**fficials have more time to focus on high-risk shipments rather than routine checks;
5. **Private sector demand**, for specific types of goods or shippers - where *time gains* stand out as a driver;
6. A currently **functioning OSBP system** that can be adapted through further digitalisation - where the borders in East Africa of Malaba or Busia seem likely candidates to be examined.

To date, there are no examples in Africa that can be drawn on to illustrate the benefits of a 'no-stop', though the gains from OSBPs could potentially be

extrapolated based on data on cross-border trade flows of specific goods (e.g. fuels and/other minerals) and the payments that they imply.

The financial imperatives will be key to understand, both in terms of the potential revenues to be gained from introducing the 'no-stop' concept, but also in terms of the cost of putting in place the necessary soft and hard infrastructures to allow green channels with electronic gates based on digital pre-clearance, scanning and the various technologies discussed above.

Based on this, we provide the following checklist for establishing a 'no-stop' border.

6.3 Checklist for establishing a 'no-stop' border

1. Assess the trade and traffic volumes
- [ ] Confirm high and consistent volumes of cross border trade, volume of traffic and movement of people.
- [ ] Identify the dominant trade flows, including cargo types (e.g. bulk), time sensitivity and peak times
- [ ] Validate the border's strategic location within key regional trade corridors or within strategic corridors (e.g. Northern corridor, Central corridor)

2. Secure political and institutional buy-in
- [ ] Secure formal commitment from governments involved (e.g. through MOUs, bilateral agreements or as part of REC implementation plans)
- [ ] Ensure coordination between national border agencies (customs, immigration, health, security)
- [ ] Align with regional economic communities (REC) commitments

3. Ensure private sector engagement
- [ ] Involve traders, freight forwarders, logistics companies and SMES in planning the transition to no stop borders
- [ ] Facilitate consultation forums and create feedback loops for private sector input.
- [ ] Address concerns of small scale traders including costs, language, documentation, access to digital platforms or solutions, and gender specific barriers

4. Infrastructure and technology
- [ ] Set up interoperable ICT systems for customs, immigration, SPS and other checks.
- [ ] Ensure data sharing agreements are in place between agencies and countries.
- [ ] Develop or upgrade shared facilities and develop standard operating procedures for their use including inspection bays, scanners and fast lanes

5. Harmonise legal and regulatory framework

- ☐ Harmonise or mutually recognise customs procedures, inspection protocols and tariffs and duties
- ☐ Ensure that overlapping trade regimes are aligned or managed effectively (especially for countries in more than REC, or implementing several FTAs)
- ☐ Clarify rules for issuance and implementation of rules of origin, certificates of origin and product standards
- ☐ Develop dispute resolution mechanisms for border related issues

6. Ensure a balance between security and trade
- ☐ Deploy real-time smart surveillance technologies to ensure secure trade (cargo tracking, CCTV at borders)
- ☐ Design risk based inspection systems to minimise stops and checks
- ☐ Train border officials in implementing risk management systems including non-intrusive screening and profiling
- ☐ Build trust through joint border committees and regular coordination meetings

7. Facilitating the movement of persons
- ☐ Create procedures that allow for joint immigration controls and pre-clearance of travellers
- ☐ Implement biometric verification systems
- ☐ Implement visa facilitation measures for specific groups of travellers
- ☐ Set up procedures that ensure the respect of travellers rights
- ☐ Set up protocols for special groups of travellers e.g. border residents, informal cross border traders

8. Financing and cost consideration
- ☐ Identify sources of funding (public-private partnerships, trade facilitation programmes)
- ☐ Consider the costs vs. use balance when determining pricing of services
- ☐ Design a sustainability plan including maintenance and staffing

9. Monitoring, evaluation and continuous improvement
- ☐ Establish performance indicators
- ☐ Build in feedback mechanisms for users and operators
- ☐ Run pilot tests before full implementation
- ☐ Implement a real-time data monitoring system to identify bottlenecks.

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