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Policy Brief

Key sanitary and phytosanitary issues constraining the efficient movement of agricultural products at the South African Development Community regional ports of entry and exit and how to address them

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) is a regional economic community comprising 16 Member States namely: Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Agriculture is a major source of exports in some of the SADC Member States, contributing approximately 13 percent to total export earnings and 66 percent to intraregional trade. It is also regarded as strategic to industrialization, political stability and socioeconomic growth, contributing between 4 and 27 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) of Member States, with 70 percent of the region's population depending on agriculture for food, income and employment. However, the widespread movement of plants, animals



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and products derived from these, as well as other regulated articles through international trade poses the risk of introduction and spread of plant pests and animal diseases.

The Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods in Africa in its commitment No. 5 urges Member States to triple, by the year 2025, intra-African trade in agricultural commodities and services. Likewise, two strategic objectives and three outcomes of the SADC Regional Integrated Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) 2020-2030 advocate for enhanced intra and extra SADC trade of agricultural and industrial products. Safe trade is anchored on the Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Annex VIII to the SADC protocol on trade, which contributes to increased intraregional trade, enhanced economic development and resource productivity of Member States, and the consolidation of a free trade area. Further, SADC Member States ascribe to additional frameworks as shown in **Box 1**.

Box 1: The key continental and global frameworks which address SPS issues:

- World Trade Organization (WTO), the only global body that deals with rules of trade between nations; all SADC Member States have assented to it.
- WTO Agreement on the application of SPS measures which sets out the basic rules for food safety, and animal and plant health requirements. SADC Member States are signatories to the agreement.
- The WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement whose objective is to boost global trade by expediting the movement, release and clearance of goods; SADC Member States have ratified the protocol.

- Article 12.3 of the SPS Agreement states "the (SPS) committee shall maintain close contact with the relevant international organizations in the field of SPS protection, especially with the Codex Alimentarius Commission, the International Office of Epizootics (now World Organization for Animal Health [WOAH]), and the Secretariat of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), with the objective of securing the best available scientific and technical advice for the administration of this agreement".

- The World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH) through its Terrestrial Animal Health Code (TAHC) and other standards, addresses animal diseases at the global level, safeguards world trade in animals and animal products, and promotes animal welfare.

- The IPPC whose mandate is to enable contracting parties to protect terrestrial and aquatic plant resources by preventing the introduction and spread of plant pests.

- The FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission focuses on food safety and ensures the protection of consumers' health as well as fair practices in the trade of food.

- The African Union (AU) Inter-African Phytosanitary Council coordinates phytosanitary issues at the continental level.

- The African Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources coordinates the use of animal.

- Resources for human well-being and economic development in all AU Member States.

- The African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) covers policy issues such as trade facilitation, and regulatory measures such as sanitary and phytosanitary standards.

- The AU SPS Policy Framework for Africa (2019 to 2024) whose objectives include strengthening collaboration and trade facilitation in the continent, and establishing harmonized science based SPS systems.



Table 1: SADC Regional ports of entry/exit assessed for key sanitary and phytosanitary issues hampering the efficient movement of agricultural products and their selection criterion.

Port of entry/ exit	Countries sharing border	Selection criterion
Chirundu One Stop Border Post (OSBP)	Zimbabwe and Zambia	Oldest OSBP in SADC region, serves road transport corridors which are critical for the regional flow of agricultural commodities, including the North-South Corridor (NSC) which is the busiest transport network in the SADC and facilitates trade in Southern and Eastern Africa and is the largest border post connecting Zimbabwe and Zambia.
Beitbridge	Zimbabwe and South Africa	Serves the NSC, handles a large number of trucks and passenger vehicles, an important border crossing between South Africa and Zimbabwe.
Mamuno-Buitepos	Botswana and Namibia	Connects with the Trans Kalahari highway, busiest port of entry in Botswana (a landlocked MS) and operates 24 hours daily.
Port Louis Harbour	Island thus not applicable	Represents the 4 SADC MS located in the Indian Ocean and handles agricultural commodities that are imported, on transit and for trans-shipment.
Kazungula	Botswana and Zambia	Connects Angola and several landlocked countries (Botswana, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zambia and Zimbabwe among other SADC Member States). Passengers and diverse agricultural commodities are ferried across the post.
Namanga	United Republic of Tanzania and Kenya	Is an OSBP linking some SADC Member States to their northward COMESA trading partners, located along the NSC, over 1 000 trucks transporting agricultural commodities use the port monthly.
Kasumbalesa	Zambia and Democratic Republic of the Congo	Is an OSBP and one of the busiest inland border posts in Africa, about 1 000 trucks cross daily, links large copper and other mineral mines to Dar es Salaam seaport, serves several countries and commercial vehicles using the post travel from and are destined to South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia, Namibia and Mozambique among others.
Zobue-Mwanza border	Malawi and Mozambique	Is a key port when travelling between Malawi and Mozambique, located on the busy Tete Corridor that links Malawi with Zimbabwe and South Africa, is a critical pathway for the spread of Banana Fusarium Wilt Tropical Race 4.



To contribute to the actualization of the SADC protocol on trade, selected SADC regional ports of entry/exit were assessed to determine key SPS issues hampering the efficient movement of agricultural products and to provide recommendations to address them. The assessment was conducted in 2021, based on a desk review as well as inputs from SADC Member States, and it focused on the ports of entry/exit shown in **Table 1**. This policy brief is based on findings of the assessment² and the SADC Cross Border Road Transport Agency (C-BRTA)^{3,4} report. The mandate of the C-BRTA includes eliminating barriers that constrain the flow of passengers and freight across regional borders, reducing operational constraints that have a negative impact on cross-border road transport industries, and granting market access to freight transport operators.

Facilitating trade at SADC regional ports of entry/exit

Within the SADC region, there are over 205 gazetted ports of entry, which can be accessed by road, railway, and air or water transport.⁵The responsibility of protecting MS interests at the designated ports is vested in several state agencies, and the key regulatory agencies involved in the handling of agricultural commodities at the SADC regional ports of entry/exit include those collecting revenue, and those enforcing technical standards, SPS measures, import and export restrictions and prohibitions. Additional regulatory agencies also handle the commodities at either ports of entry or post entry.

The SADC Member States have made provisions to facilitate trade in agricultural commodities through pre-arrival clearance of the commodities at some ports of entry, giving priority to the inspection of sensitive consignments, provision of cooling facilities at certain ports of entry, the use of scanners in-order to minimize physical

handling of goods at some ports of entry, and post-entry inspection of sensitive commodities. Furthermore, to facilitate the fast clearance and release of commodities, there is a shift, albeit limited, towards joint operations, as well as cooperation among regulatory agencies facilitating trade at ports of entry/exit. Even with these efforts, several SPS issues are hampering the efficient movement of agricultural products in the SADC regional ports of entry/exit as illustrated in **Box 2**.

Box 2: Key SPS issues hampering the efficient movement of agricultural products in the SADC regional ports of entry/exit:

1. **Delays in clearing cargo**, traders and other travellers, especially during heavy traffic flow at most ports of entry/exit:
 - negatively affect the quality of traded perishable agricultural commodities;
 - compromise the sanitary status of food and feeds;
 - stress animals destined for slaughter and for livestock production;
 - lower the quality of vegetative propagation materials traded;
 - increase congestion at the ports as well as the cost of doing business.

According to the SADC C-BRTA (March 2021 report)⁴, at the Beitbridge border post trucks can queue between two to three days while waiting for their documents to be processed and at the Chirundu One Stop Border Post, refrigerated trucks and oil tankers moving in a northerly direction experience time delays of



up to 28.5 hours while heavy and containerized trucks, moving in the same direction, are delayed for up to 40.5 hours.

2. **Non-compliance of imported or transit consignments at several ports of entry/exit owing to:**

- documentation errors such as the lack of or presentation of expired SPS certificates, incomplete declaration of consignments or absence of valid required treatment certificate;

- Presence of prohibited commodities.

Non-compliance could result in regulated plant pests, prohibited and restricted plant commodities, unsafe food of animal origin, animal feeds and animal diseases being introduced into the territories of importing countries.

3. **Insufficient infrastructure at some ports of entry/exit such as:**

- the lack of cold storage warehouses, inspection bays and basic facilities for rapid tests, processing and storage of reference specimens, and limited access to inspection kits which are vital for the inspection process;

- the lack of facilities for storing intercepted non-compliant plant materials, holding and quarantine for isolation of suspect animals and plants at some ports of entry;

- insufficient office, parking facilities and signage at some ports of entry;

- borders which are porous and therefore difficult to control resulting in them being easily bypassed especially by small-scale traders and smugglers;

- insufficient reference materials and inspection tools;

- poor condition of some road networks especially in the precinct of the border posts, and slow movement contribute to congestion and delays at the ports;

- absence of dedicated fast lanes for compliance and pre-cleared vehicles at most borders.

4. **Limited adoption of information and communication technology.**

- In most SADC Member States, the regulatory agencies enforcing compliance to SPS issues are operating on manual systems, which hinders real-time data and information sharing to aid decision-making. The time lag contributes to congestion and delays in clearing cargo and traders and constrains the coordination and cooperation among the national agencies involved in joint operations.

- The absence of or very limited use of scanners for cargo at some ports of entry, necessitates physical handling of the agricultural commodities and contributes to delays in clearing consignments. The scanners are used for the verification of consignment identity and integrity as described by accompanying documents, to detect plant and animal materials, products and other regulated articles in checked-in and hand luggage of travellers.

- Scanners are used for SPS inspections in Mauritius airports (main island and Rodrigues) and the Namanga OSBP among others (Personal observation.) There is a need for more capacity building of the SPS agents to interpret the results from the scanners.

- Lack of reliable connectivity and limited access to computers hinders real-time sharing of data and information with inland inspectors for more efficient movement of consignments.



- Lack of adoption of an electronic tracking system to facilitate traceability of transit goods, which could address the offloading and trans-shipment of transit goods at isolated border posts, a potential loophole through which non-compliant agricultural commodities, restricted as well as prohibited goods could be smuggled into a country.
- Limited integration among the different national customs ICT systems.
- Existence of “several windows” (as opposed to a single window) which disrupts the seamless flow of traffic across borders.

5. Administrative challenges.

- At multiple ports of entry/exit and mainly at OSBP agencies enforcing compliance to SPS issues are constrained by the limited harmonization of working hours, procedures, technical standards and use of cargo scanners.
- Limited functioning of the relevant border management committees.
- Few port operating hours since most ports do not operate 24 hours a day.
- Limited information sharing among agencies manning the ports of entry/exit.

The SADC C-BRTA (March 2021 report)⁴ also cited the challenges of “inherently inefficient border management systems; unharmonized; cross-border charges, customs systems and border operating hours, especially for key agencies” as requiring immediate attention. Further, the report highlighted that “the seemingly simple act of information sharing amongst law enforcement agencies in the SADC is compromised by “invisible barriers” such as a lack of trust between role-players, security, regulations, and management decisions”.



Disruptions due to the COVID-19 Outbreak

Delays witnessed at ports of entry/exit resulting from the measures introduced at regional and Member States levels to control the spread of COVID-19. The measures included:

- Trucks being disinfected (in some instances) and mandatory testing of truck drivers and crew resulted in delays in the movement of cargo at border posts.⁶
- Shortening of working hours affected clearance of goods at ports of entry/exit.
- Curfews in certain Member States affected the smooth flow of traded commodities since trucks were not allowed to move between certain times of the night and even if they could move, most businesses including fuel stations were closed. Thus, truck drivers were forced to wait until the next day when fuel stations resumed business for them to re-fuel and continue their trips.
- Skeleton staff at most strategic ports of entry/exit in the SADC region slowed down the clearance and release of consignments.



General impact of the challenges encountered at ports of entry/exit on intra-SADC Trade

Agriculture is a major source of exports in some of the SADC Member States, contributing approximately 13 percent to total export earnings and 66 percent to SADC intraregional trade 1.

However, intra-SADC trade flows as a percentage of total imports and exports (noting that 66 percent of the exports are agricultural) remain low as depicted in **Figure 1**.

The trend is partly attributed to excessive border delays as the SADC C-BRTA March 2021 report states

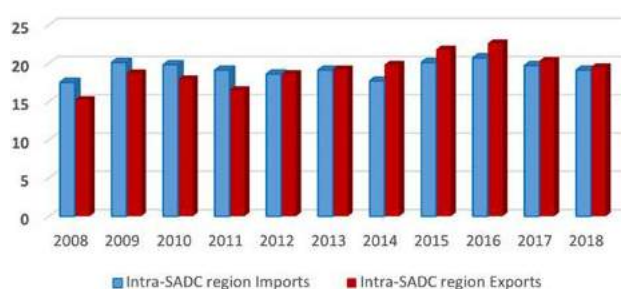


FIGURE 1: Intra-SADC imports and exports of goods as a percentage of total imports and exports in the period 2008 to 2018 (SADC Cross Border Road Transport Agency report, March 2021 report).

“Different studies indicate that the reasons for low trade flows between SADC countries lie in the existence of several non-tariff barriers including; lack of adequate transport infrastructure, poor condition of regional road networks, excessive border delays and a lack of integration into value chains.

Social economic impact of COVID-19 on trade in agricultural commodities: The case of the United Republic of Tanzania

As in other countries across the globe, African MS were affected by COVID-19 and a significant impact on agriculture, food and nutrition security was imminent. Countries took diverse containment measures including limits on movement.

Nevertheless, it remained critical to facilitate the movement of goods in the region during the pandemic and collective commitments were made in the FAO/AU Agriculture Ministers Declaration, signed on 16 April 2020.

Thereafter, the FAO Regional Office for Africa (FAORAF) developed guidelines for the COVID-19 assessment of impacts and responses on food systems, agriculture and food security in African countries.

The Government of the United Republic of Tanzania in collaboration with FAORAF undertook a survey in order to ascertain the impact of COVID -19 on the cross-border trade of agricultural commodities in the United Republic of Tanzania for the period March to October 2020. The key findings of the assessment⁷ include the following:

- The cargo transit time from Dar es Salaam to several destinations in the neighbouring countries more than doubled between January and April 2020.
- Delays caused deterioration of truckloads of perishable goods such as fruits and vegetables, increased operating costs due to extra accommodation expenses for the crew



awaiting COVID-19 testing, tests results, and the relay of COVID-19-positive drivers (drivers who test positive for COVID-19 handover the truck to drivers who are negative for COVID-19).

- According to Trademark East Africa, the cost of moving goods around the region rose by an initial 30 percent, although this figure has since decreased as countries adopted a more coordinated response.
- Traders operating across all borders recorded smaller revenues during the pandemic when compared to the pre-COVID-19 period.
- Reduced trade was witnessed.
- Sanitary impact evidenced by records of high rates of COVID-19 infection among truck drivers and border communities at some borders posts which was partly attributed to the truck drivers seeking accommodation in local hotels and mingling with local populations due to the limited border infrastructure, including designated and equipped areas where drivers could wait for their COVID-19 test results).

Recommendations

To address the key SPS issues hampering the efficient movement of agricultural products in the SADC regional ports of entry/exit, it is recommended that the SADC Member States undertake the following:

1. Prioritize the shift to e-CERT systems, which eliminates paper processing, reduces fraudulent certificates and increases administrative transparency as a means to curb the prevalent documentary-related challenges at several ports of entry/exit, and also leverage the innovation to enhance safe trade in agricultural commodities.



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2. Make provisions for the complete harmonization of working hours, procedures, technical standards and the installation of cargo scanners with the appropriate specifications for use in SPS inspection in more ports of entry/exit as a means to enhance coordination and cooperation among regulatory agencies involved in the handling of agricultural commodities, so as to expedite their clearance and release.

3. Mandate additional ports of entry/exit to operating 24 hours daily, especially during festive seasons when there is heavy traffic flow, in order to minimize congestion and delays, and enhance efficient movement of agriculture products.

4. Continue to increase investment and adoption of information and communication technology (ICT), install cargo and passenger scanners at additional ports, provide computers and reliable connectivity for agencies handling SPS issues, automation of the SPS systems and incorporate the same into the national single window as a means to facilitate coordination and cooperation among national regulatory agencies handling agriculture products for more efficient clearing and release of consignments. This will improve the real-time sharing of information and data among agencies at border posts.



5. Improve infrastructure at ports of entry/exit (where the need exists), including the provision of inspection bays; facilities for cold storage warehousing, processing and storage of reference specimens; holding and quarantine facilities for isolation of suspect animals and plants; mini-laboratories to support rapid testing, diagnosis and inspection; sampling tools; reference materials/ relevant SPS databases; and continue upgrading the isolated poor road network leading to ports of entry/exit.

6. Address the knowledge and information gap among traders.

7. Promote risk based SPS joint inspections.

8. Accord additional support to national regulatory institutions handling SPS issues to include.

- Increase the number of skilled experts and make provision for regular training.
- Provision of vehicles to facilitate more efficient execution of their mandate.
- Provision of basic tools including inspection kits, computers, reliable connectivity, additional equipment and infrastructure to support rapid pests and disease diagnosis.

9. SADC in partnership with FAO to consider holding periodic need-based regional training workshops including study visits and experience exchange programs for representatives of key border agencies involved in the handling of agricultural products at ports of entry/exit as a means to foster networking and learning.



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