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The Impact of Border Management Practices on International Trade between Kenya and Tanzania: A Case of Namanga Border Point

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Abstract. International or cross-border trade remains one of the most controversial elements of international relations for decades now. Despite the need for working systems to enhance cross-border or international trade between Kenya and Tanzania at the Namanga One-Stop Border Post, there are indications that the border point could be facing challenges in terms of collaboration, coordination, and communication among border agencies from across the two countries. The main objective of this paper was to explore the impact of border management practices on international trade between Kenya and Tanzania, a case of Namanga One-Stop Border Post at the Kenya-Tanzania common borders. The following specific objectives were addressed: to examine the effect of collaboration between state border agencies on international trade between Kenya and Tanzania, to assess the impact of coordination between state border agencies on international trade between Kenya and Tanzania, and to examine the influence of communication between state border agencies on international trade between Kenya and Tanzania. The paper utilized secondary data to address its objectives where the systematic literature review was anchored on export base theory. The literature review noted that there is no doubt that border management practices play a significant role on international trade between Kenya and Tanzania, especially with reference to Namanga border point. To a greater extent, there is no harmonization of the operations of key border control agencies for effective facilitating of trade between the two countries. It also emerged that there are inadequate collaboration efforts, ineffective coordination, and weak communication strategies for strengthening international trade relations between Kenya and Tanzania. Therefore, a lot still needs to be done where the two governments and other key non-state stakeholders in international trade can operate under harmonized policy and practice structures for enhanced interstate trade facilitation.

Key words: border management, interstate, international trade, trade practices

Introduction

Background of the Study

In international trade, coordinated border management and effective facilitation of all transactions at the border is critical in ensuring that all involved players play their respective roles in a fair manner. According to the Department for International Development (DFID), effective transacting of goods and services, fair policies, good practices, reasonable transaction costs and free movement of people as well as goods and services constitute the hallmark of effective border management that in turn enhance international relations among different countries sharing common borders (DFID, 2008). However, according to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), the aforementioned elements of good international relations among countries are rarely achieved due to varying interests of the countries concerned (UBOS, 2017).

The need for freedom and fast movement of goods and services across the border has been linked to the increasingly liberalized trade worldwide. There is therefore the need for proper synchronization of trading systems and processes as well as rules to ensure that international movement of goods and services is streamlined to remove unnecessary bottlenecks that could inconvenience the flow. In a broader sense, international trade facilitation encompasses removal or lowering of non-tariff barriers to trade through harmonization of trade procedures, including the exchange of information and handling of paperwork between different parties in the supply chain (Suleymenova, 2017).

The global objective of trade facilitation is to enhance smooth flow of trade across borders by ensuring faster, cheaper, and more foreseeable processes while at the same time observing strict compliance to set business regulations that are favourable to partner countries at any given time. Although the concept of cross-border trade facilitation may be broad in terms of its operational implications, according to Suleymenova (2017), there are four fundamental principles or pillars that define the concept. These principles include simplification, harmonization, standardization and transparency of systems and processes. The World Customs Organization (WCO) (2017) further observes that the four pillars must be observed at all times if the objective of cross-border or international trade facilitation has to be achieved. However, it may be difficult to achieve these principles unless there is conscious collaboration among intergovernmental agencies monitoring and controlling cross-border movement of goods and services and human traffic (DFID, 2008). Often border agency cooperation (BAC) acts as the underlying foundation upon which the success of cross-border trade facilitation can be defined. International relations experts have argued that for effective international trade must be founded on mutual trust amongst all the relevant agencies at the border points (Seck, 2017). Such a scenario will ensure increased viability of business transactions within each partner countries' jurisdictions. Border agency cooperation further ensures that synergy is created to enhance policies and structures for managing trade at border points.

Trade facilitation is a key product of well-coordinated and studiously managed border activities and practices where all stakeholders are actively involved. However, bureaucracies encountered in coordination of multiple federal, state, and local government agencies as well as several grassroots stakeholders may tend to force different international trade players to work at cross-purposes (WCO, 2017). Despite different strategies by different countries when it comes to streamlining cross-border trade systems, such things as disharmonized customs tariffs can discourage thriving of foreign investments and enhanced regional integration. Some of these impediments can directly be linked to disruptive and high administrative costs which together may hamper efficiency of modern international transport and logistics transactions (Ruiter, Hadley & Li, 2017). According to World Bank (2010), such disruptions and high costs can only be effectively addressed through active cross-border trade facilitation where there is adequate representation from all concerned countries.

Effective international trade relations must be anchored on the principles of interstate cooperation and coordination among various stakeholders at different levels. For instance, in Asia, Abu Dhabi and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are the epitome of cross-border trading due to strong intergovernmental cooperation (Arvis et al., 2016). Yet, due to what is sometimes viewed as high level of sovereignty within each of the countries in question, this kind of trade relationship may not translate to gains for other countries in the region. The multiple agencies operating in strategic border zones more often than not espouse conflicting administrative directives, and this creates border management challenges that end up hampering harmonized international trade facilitation (Ruiter et al., 2017).

In Africa, the Chirundu One-Stop Border Post between Zimbabwe and Zambia can illustrate the dynamics of a functional cross-border management and trade facilitation facility.

The border post serves as trade gateway for Zambia with other African countries, including South Africa (Otieno, 2016). Initially with over 20 government agencies from both Zambia and Zimbabwe operating independently in handling different international trade-related roles at the same time, this scenario led to increase of operational costs and disjointed decision-making, which together made it difficult to coordinate and facilitate cross-border trade in a more efficient way (DFID, 2008).

In the East African region, cross-border trade plays a critical role in the economic development of the partner states, both within and outside of their borders (Republic of Kenya, 2017). Effective management of border points encourages free movement of goods and services, hence improving the livelihood opportunities for citizens of these partner states. However, due to disjointed international business rules and regulations, unfair competition among the member countries and operational differences in other subsectors make it difficult to have reliable and more commonly accepted structures for cooperation (Otieno, 2016). Despite the anticipation of the One-Stop Border Post (OSBP) at Namanga in Kenya-Tanzania border to ease cross-border trading between the two countries, there are still persisting challenges (Ondari, 2021).

The Problem Statement

International or cross-border trade remains one of the most elements of international relations for decades now. There are a number of factors that make it possible for countries sharing common borders to effectively engage in cross-border trade facilitation in terms of policy and practice. Despite the need for working systems to enhance cross-border or international trade between Kenya and Tanzania at the Namanga One-Stop Border Post, there are indications that the border point could be facing challenges in terms of collaboration, coordination, and communication among border agencies from across the two countries.

In theoretical terms, Kenya and Tanzania, like various other countries keen on strengthening trade entities and enhancing structural border reforms, are supposed to work on their international relationship. Yet, in practice, agencies working at the border tend to work at cross-purposes hence failing to ascribe to common operational procedures for easier cross-border trade facilitation. Enhancement of international and interagency cooperation eventually leads to eradication of unnecessary bureaucracies in international trade, hence establishing a likely levelled market for all the players.

There is also the question of harmonization of tariffs and removal of all unnecessary restrictions on the movement of goods and services across the border points. Despite the importance of enhanced trade facilitation at the border points, there are still challenges that need to be addressed. Lack of common principles of collaboration, coordination, and communication among various key border control agencies may be a precursor for weak customs checks that could further derail meeting of international standards for transit goods. This paper aimed to explore the impact of border management practices on international trade between Kenya and Tanzania, with a focus Namanga border point.

Main Objective

The main objective of this paper was to explore the impact of border management practices on international trade between Kenya and Tanzania, a case of Namanga One-Stop Border Post at the Kenya-Tanzania common borders.

Specific Objectives

This paper addressed the following specific objectives:

i. To examine the effect of collaboration between state border agencies on international trade between Kenya and Tanzania.

ii. To assess the impact of coordination between state border state agencies on international trade between Kenya and Tanzania.
iii. To examine the influence of communication between state border agencies on international trade between Kenya and Tanzania.

Underlying Questions

The paper was guided by the following research questions:

i. What is the effect of collaboration between state border agencies on international trade between Kenya and Tanzania?
ii. What is the impact of coordination between state border state agencies on international trade between Kenya and Tanzania?
iii. How does communication between state border agencies influence international trade between Kenya and Tanzania?

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Literature review was based on three specific objectives of this paper, including collaboration, coordination, and communication between state border agencies from different countries in an international trade relationship.

Theoretical Framework: Export Base Theory

Naturally, economic cross-border activities of most countries can be viewed in terms of exports and imports. However, this may not strictly be the case as border pints are commonly known for informal trading across neighbouring countries where traders buy and sell goods without necessarily following legal inter-country trading procedures. The export base theory was founded by North (1957) to advance the argument that any country's economic growth is fundamentally accelerated through its produce for export which guarantees foreign exchange earnings. Through exports, a country expands its market for regional growth in terms of output and employment creation.

The export base theory further postulate that based on the assumptions of elasticity of input supply and export demand, a country's economic growth will greatly be enhanced not only through direct exports, but also through Keynesian income multiplier. This means that the increase in export market for a given country or region will cause increase for demand of the local goods, hence further creating more income opportunities for the country or region (Leichenko, 2000). The theory further states that many countries' rate of economic growth is determined by their level of export markets for their local products. Furthermore, other subsidiary industries in a country are also influenced by that country's export market for its core produce as this ensures creation of employment for majority of the people, and improves political stability for the possibility of expanded businesses in different trade domains. However, other factors must also come into play in order for interstate trade to be effective and achieve the economic and international relations of the countries in question. This includes effective management of the border areas through the right international business practices.

The export base theory further emphasizes the need for young economies to support one another in regional blocs to encourage economic expansion for the common prosperity of a given region. This would ideally be expected of Kenya-Tanzania trade practices at the Namanga border point. Countries must capitalize on technology and research to enhance the viability of their staple commodities and increase their competitive advantages in foreign markets. Based on this study, the export base theory makes a lot of sense as it emphasizes the need for trade facilitation at all levels for any country to realize its socio-economic potentials and uplift the lives of its people. Although the theory does not expressly dwell on the happenings at border points in terms of coordination of business transactions and facilitation, the emphasis on exports as the foundation of any country's economic development and growth is indirectly touching on systems and activities at border areas since exports must be handled at such locations. Increased demand on exports will increase the demand for the same commodities at local levels thereby increasing investment not only in the export industry, but also in other economic subsectors as well. Gradual expansion on investment on other activities in the economic ecosystem will eventually cause other upcoming products to access the foreign market.

According to Tiebout (1956), the export base theory is not only limited to the concept of export base, but encompasses other variables of the economy such as income growth as related with a wide range of economic activities. Furthermore, since the exports and locally sold goods are interrelated in the economy, a country or region must optimize other local outputs. However, by and large, the export base theory continues to apply in regional economic planning and development, especially in the analysis of international trade development and growth (Brown, Coulson & Engle 1992). The idea that exports provide an engine of growth is also frequently applied in studies of the regional and national impacts of foreign export growth (Webster, Mathis & Zech 1990).

Interstate Agency Collaboration and International Trade at Border Points

In Africa, cross-border trade is progressively increasing, thus offering jobs to thousands of citizens from different countries and helping to cement international trade facilitation. A study by Kahariri (2018) on the state of cross-border trade in Kenya and Tanzania established that regional integration initiatives on the continent have resulted into tremendous growth of trade across the borders. The study further revealed that cross-border trade has particularly improved following the expansion of intraregional trade initiatives where all stakeholders are in one way or the other involved through fairly well-defined systems and processes. The study however noted that despite the good progress witnessed in the growth of cross-border trade in different sectors which is clearly driven by local communities in terms of production, consumption and exchange of the produce across borders, poor collaboration between different countries at the common border points tends to hurt cross-border trade facilitation.

Improved opening of cross-border trade in most countries in Africa has necessitated the need for removal of economic and regulation barriers to intrastate and intra-regional trade. In a study by Mbo et al. (2016) argue that understanding how collaborated border management and trade facilitation at the border points can help in boosting cross-border trade in food staples, the study noted that removal of barriers to regional trade would greatly translate to more business opportunities for the traders and increase revenue base for the countries in terms of tax revenues. Furthermore, the study revealed that in order for the African countries to benefit more from cross-border trade, concerted efforts are critical in management of activities at the border points under harmonized systems and processes allowing ease of traffic and easy movement of goods and services.

Better coordinated border management and trade facilitation would also reduce the cost of trade and improve profit margins for the traders and eventually encourage more investment for expansion of the economy. The study by the Mbo et al. (2016) however did not focus on specific countries hence giving room for speculations and generalizations. This paper specifically addressed the research problem with reference to Namanga border point at the Kenya-Tanzania boundary. This specific study site would enhance credibility of the findings for possible generalization to other areas with similar characteristics in the region.

Progressively, various bilateral, multilateral and regional trade treaties have been signed by a number of African countries to facilitate flow of trade between countries within the region and across the globe. This move is important for ensuring that there is liberalization of businesses, which would in turn increase completion rate and encourage expanded markets (Carballo, Georg & Christian, 2016). Yet, this study showed that for the international trade policies to be translated into actions, they will require harmonized systems and processes to allow common rules and perspectives on critical aspects of the trading process. This means that coordinated border management and trade facilitation at the border points provide a common ground for all key trade stakeholders to easily navigate through their challenges.

In a study by Duval, Nora and Chorthip (2016) to understand the dynamics of trade at cross-border areas in Africa, the findings revealed that as the debate for regional integration in trade intensifies, for this to be fully realized, formal systems of trade must be instituted. Yet, there is evidence that a good proportion of intra-regional and cross-border trade is carried out using informal structures which may not strictly adhere to common trade rules from different countries directly involved.

Like the study by Duval et al. *(*2016), another study by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID, 2017) indicated that a number of cross-border businesses that especially involved women and other less-financially able groups were conducted informally (USAID, 2017). Such a scenario ended up increasing the cost of doing business hence denying profits to the traders and tax revenues to the governments involved. The study by USAID (2017) further noted that agricultural trade which was mostly dominated by women was particularly affected by lack of proper coordination and trade facilitation at border points since their perishable produce often ended up rotting if they were not expeditiously cleared in order to reach the market in good time. On the other hand, storage costs went high due to delayed clearance at some of the disjointed relevant offices at the border.

Interstate Agency Coordination and International Trade at Border Points

Coordinated border management has several advantages when it comes to trade facilitation at border points. This concept provides room for bringing together various government ministries and state agencies of several countries together to institute harmonized trade systems and processes for the common good of the trading parties and the consolidated offices of the governments involved. However, due to various challenges as a result of the involvement of several players in the coordination of trade activities under the arrangement of coordinated border management, it sometimes becomes difficult to bring together all the border agencies so that they can speak in one voice on cross-border trade matters (Mbo et al., 2016).

Studies have also indicated that different policy perspectives from the various countries involved at any given time and border point sometimes make it untenable to push for certain trade rationalization policies, and this could render some systems dysfunctional for a long time. Some of the challenges may also have to do with rallying all the stakeholders to identify common challenges and opportunities with regard to important operational and monitoring structures at the border. The failure to come up with a common approach to pertinent trade issues is likely to derail important procedures, such as effective inspections of goods and expeditious clearing of their movement to intended destinations (Kugonza, 2016).

Varied vested interests by the countries sharing a common border point have also been identified as an impediment to coordinated efforts between cross-border agencies dealing with international or cross-border trade facilitation (Korma & Nimarkoh, 2016). For the Namanga case for instance, the one-stop border point (OSBP) on the Tanzania’s side was funded by the JICA which on completion in 2014, due to some pending issues, the project was not immediately handed over to the government as earlier anticipated. On the Kenyan side, the project was funded by African Development Bank (ADB). However, the delay of completion of the project complicated matters between the project contractor and the engineer as the latter decided to levy liquidated damages to the former for failure to honour their initial contractual terms. The standoff led to dragging of completion of the project. The exemplar of the Namanga OSBP is typical of what could derail collaboration among different players at the border points, which may in turn impede cross-border trade facilitation (Nzohabonimana, 2016).

The Namanga One-Stop Border Post commonly affecting Kenya and Tanzania in terms of cross-border trade facilitation is not only unique to the two countries. In Chirundu OSBP in the Zambia-Zimbabwe border for example, in terms of management of infrastructure, there is an agreement that Zambia as the host country would be responsible for maintenance and rehabilitation, supply and replacement of office equipment, fixtures, and furniture whenever it is necessary to do so. Additionally, there should be installation of new facilities and security infrastructure among other among other related costs. However, these promises are not always fulfilled, hence leading to occasional standoff between the two countries over management of the facility. The misunderstandings may naturally further strain the relationship between border agencies thereby making it hard for their coordination and trade facilitation.

According to the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA), the Namanga OSBP has been associated with a number of organizational challenges which could jeopardize collaboration between various border agencies both in Kenya and Tanzania and eventually make it impossible for proper coordination of trade activities between the two countries. Some of the purported administrative challenges include lack of clear procedures for cross-border clearance or movement of local people, erratic power supply, lack of a joint border committee for reviewing financial needs for the operation of the border point, and lack of enough drive-through scanners for vehicles carrying goods, as well as lack of power points for plugging in refrigerated carriers of perishable and fresh farm produce. Other challenges also revolve around inadequate common space for hawkers to conduct their business, and inadequate knowledge and sensitization regarding the benefit of a common trade between Kenya and Tanzania and the entire East African Community (EAC) region (EAC, 2017).

Interstate Agency Communication and International Trade at Border Points

Availability of relevant information commonly contributes to reduction of trade costs. Studies have indicated that a number of international freight forwarding firms in Serbia for example experienced unwarranted delays at the border due to inadequate documented information, which ended up causing about 30% of all the delays experienced in border trade transactions (Ehrich & Axel, 2018). These findings concur with past studies which suggested that lack of proper communication and inadequate information among agencies were some of the common delaying factors when it comes to exports globally. These weaknesses ended up causing major delays at clearing points hence eating into profits and loss of tax revenues for the concerned countries.

In their efforts to cement and institute proper communication channels, a number of countries through their agencies have actively tried to improve coordinated border management for the sake of effective cross-border or international trade facilitation. Streamlining and harmonization of business transaction procedures help border agencies to optimize their operations hence curbing the problem of roles duplication and in the process allowing efficient flow of goods and movement of people across the common border (Ehrich & Axel, 2018). Through open and transparent mechanisms amongst border agencies, there are high chances of rationalization of tax and customs administration, improvement in physical infrastructure at the customs crossing points, as well as introduction of automated customs systems to ease communication and flow of relevant information required for making critical decisions at particular levels of the trade facilitation chain (WCO, 2017). However, the impact of communication among agencies on cross-border or international trade facilitation at the border still remains unclear, hence the need to explore it further.

Apart from availability and sharing information, some agencies may be reluctant to commit to consistency in coordination and sharing. According to USAID (2017), this requires further interrogation of the broader question of communication and inculcation of a sense of reciprocity in information sharing among different agencies tasked with trade facilitation at the borders (WCO, 2017). The USAID (2017) further states that effective communication among state trade agencies facilitating business at the borders requires trained staff, up-to-date references, and constant touch with other key stakeholders as well as updated websites where the right and current information can always be picked with ease by those who need it.

Although it is important to have the right information for decision making by different agencies dealing with trade facilitation at the common border, the information should also be as consistent as possible. Hence, there is need for constant harmonization of information to ease communication amongst all the agencies involved in trade facilitation with respect to different countries in an international trade relationship. On this basis, intense border agency coordination and integration based on mutual recognition and respect should be encouraged when it comes to guiding the process (Ehrich & Axel, 2018). Mutual recognition agreements further help to move forward the process in a smooth manner, while at the same time eliminating chances of duplications in certifications and issuance of any relevant documents for trade (Pelkmans et al., 2016).

Findings and Supportive Evidence

In an existing by Kahariri (2018) on the implications of simplified trade regime on informal cross-border trade among small scale traders in Namanga, there is evidence that border management practices have significant impacts on international trade between Kenya and Tanzania. For instance, regarding the influence of interagency collaboration on international trade, 28% of the traders had the feeling that sharing of important resources or information among different agencies at the border between the two countries was not sufficient. It was also noted that different border control agencies rarely collaborate in holding common meetings to understand the issues that cut across their operations so that they can be effectively addressed. Generally, it would appear that there is no joint cooperation amongst all the agencies at the border when it comes to charting a common stand regarding how best to strengthen the trade relationship between Kenya and Tanzania.

Furthermore, in a study to understand the effect of coordinated border management on trade facilitation at Namanga border in Kenya, Ondari (2021) noted that there are no streamlined mechanisms for coordinating activities by all the border trade facilitation agencies from Kenya and Tanzania. In this regard, only 24% of the cross-border traders thought that there were harmonized ways for assisting the businesses to thrive as they should. There were disjointed operations when it came to such important processes as verifications, inspections, and border patrol activities, among other critical undertakings. Equally important to note was the lack of formal complaints and conflict resolution channels between all the important international trade agencies at the Kenya-Tanzania common border of Namanga.

Regarding interagency communication and how this could impact on international trade between Kenya and Tanzania at the Namanga border, both Kahariri (2018) and Ondari (2021) noted that while each of the international trade facilitation border agencies in both Kenya and Tanzania had existing communication and public relations structures, they did not use their systems for a common good. Rather, these institutions tended to display a sense of unhealthy competition which ended up jeopardizing international trade at the common border areas of Kenya and Tanzania. For instance, the findings by Kahariri (2018) indicated that there are no clear policy guidelines on how international trade facilitation institutions at the Kenya-Tanzania common border should collaborate with the aim of streamlined operational structures. This was especially the case when considering one-on-one business transactions between individual traders or private small and medium enterprises.

Although trade facilitation border agencies at Namanga were generally keen on embracing the principle of interagency communication for the sake of improved services for the cross-border business people, a lot still needed to be done to achieve this goal. The question of unhealthy business competition between Kenya and Tanzania tended also to affect the operations of international trade facilitation players from the two countries. For instance, at one time during the reign of the late President Magufuli of Tanzania, the impounding of chicks being exported from Tanzania to Kenya on allegations that they did not meet health standards created interstate business tensions among various individual business and government players in international trade between the two countries.

A similar incident involving arrest of Kenyan herders and seizure of their animals by Tanzania's authorities on allegations of trespass into their lands created bad blood at the time between the two countries at that level. All these incidences point out the manner in which border management practices can impact international or cross-border trade and generally enhance or jeopardize international relations between neighbouring countries in both the short and long-terms.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that border management practices play a significant role on international trade between Kenya and Tanzania, especially with reference to Namanga border point. To a greater extent, there is no harmonization of the operations of key border control agencies for effective facilitating of trade between the two countries, especially when it comes to individual-to-individual as opposed to government-to-government transactions. There are inadequate collaboration efforts, ineffective coordination, and weak communication strategies for strengthening international trade relations between Kenya and Tanzania. Therefore, a lot still needs to be done where the two governments and other key non-state stakeholders in international trade can operate under harmonized policy and practice structures for enhanced interstate trade facilitation.

Recommendations

Given the importance of collaborative efforts for international trade between Kenya and Tanzania, there is need for the governments of Kenya and Tanzania to create a harmonized business environment that enhances interagency collaboration, coordination, and communication between the two countries for enhanced cross-border or international trade between them. Both governments and other relevant agencies should create a policy which compels all trade facilitation border control agencies at Namanga one-stop border point to collaborate on key areas in order to maintain effective international trade relations.

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