



The AfCFTA

The challenge of non-tariff barriers

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The challenge of non-tariff barriers

In addition to Africa's infrastructure deficit, non-tariff barriers are a notable constraint to trade in Africa and African trade with the rest of the world. Non-tariff barriers include onerous regulatory procedures, expensive visa requirements, corruption and inefficiency. They include import prohibitions, quotas, export subsidies, export restrictions, technical barriers to trade (such as regulations, standards and assessment procedures) and rules about food safety and animal and plant health standards.

At the Beitbridge border post between South Africa and Zimbabwe, for example, it took a truck an average of **35 hours** to clear the border. In response, the South African cabinet adopted a One-Stop Border Framework in 2018 with the first phase of improvements launched in 2021. The result is a noticeable improvement in clearance efficiency with average processing times having dropped under two hours for compliant trucks.

Significant progress has also been made in East Africa, where border crossing times have reduced from several days to about three to six hours as part of the reforms associated with the East African Community (EAC) — a demonstration of potential progress possible elsewhere.

The [World Bank's](#) Ease of Doing Business Index for 2020 (the last year before it was discontinued) includes only nine African countries in the top 100. The [COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Free Trade Area](#) website lists examples of 25 non-tariff barriers to trade, which range from import bans and product classification to corruption. However, progress in eliminating these barriers is slow, as each non-tariff barrier reflects a vested interest or a local practice along a border region, sometimes spanning several generations, on which the livelihoods of communities may depend.

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About the authors

Dr Blessing Chipanda joined the African Futures and Innovation (AFI) programme in January 2023. Before joining the ISS he worked as an assistant lecturer/research assistant at the University of Pretoria, Department of Economics. He is particularly interested in tasks within the wider realm of international trade, development economics, public policy, monetary policy, and econometric modelling. Equally interested in economic and socio-economic activities that impact social welfare. Blessing has a PhD in economics from the University of Pretoria, South Africa.

Dr Jakkie Cilliers is the ISS's founder and former executive director. He currently serves as chair of the ISS Board of Trustees, head of the African Futures and Innovation (AFI) programme at the Pretoria office of the Institute, and is an extraordinary professor at the University of Pretoria. His 2017 best-seller *Fate of the Nation* addresses South Africa's futures from political, economic and social perspectives. His three most recent books, *Africa First! Igniting a Growth Revolution* (March 2020), *The Future of Africa: Challenges and Opportunities* (April 2021), and *Africa Tomorrow: Pathways to Prosperity* (June 2022) take a rigorous look at the continent as a whole.

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