

Identifying and Analyzing the Most Significant Non-Tariff Barriers Affecting Trade at the Kasumbalesa Border Post

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Abstract: This article examines the most significant non-tariff barriers (NTBs) affecting trade at the Kasumbalesa Border Post, drawing on empirical evidence from the Doctoral studies and structured in the style of Journal. Using a qualitative–descriptive approach, the study explored administrative, procedural, infrastructural, behavioural, and policy-induced NTBs that continue to hinder Zambia–DRC trade despite tariff elimination under SADC, COMESA, and AfCFTA frameworks. Findings indicate that major NTBs include excessive documentation requirements, duplicated inspections, long delays, corruption, infrastructural limitations, and sudden regulatory shifts. These NTBs increase trade costs, prolong clearance times, fuel informal trade, and undermine regional integration goals. The article concludes with recommendations for harmonised border systems, digitalisation, infrastructure upgrades, and strengthened institutional coordination.

1. INTRODUCTION

Kasumbalesa Border Post is the busiest border crossing in Southern and Central Africa, facilitating mineral-driven trade between Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Despite the elimination of tariffs under multiple regional trade regimes, non-tariff barriers have become the primary obstacles to efficient trade. This article identifies and analyses the most significant NTBs affecting the border, building on the thesis data while applying journal-article structure and academic rigor.

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Kasumbalesa evolved from a colonial checkpoint into a continental trade artery handling over 600–700 trucks daily. It sits at the convergence of major corridors—including the North–South, Dar es Salaam, Walvis Bay, Beira, and Lobito corridors. Tariff liberalisation has not improved trade efficiency because NTBs persist in the form of administrative bottlenecks, unpredictable regulations, and infrastructural weaknesses.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.0 Research Methodology

This section outlines the methodological framework used to identify and analyse the most significant non-tariff barriers (NTBs) affecting trade at the Kasumbalesa Border Post. Guided by the academic standards and grounded in the empirical structure of evidence, the study adopted a qualitative, exploratory research design suited to complex institutional, regulatory, and behavioural phenomena that shape cross-border trade.

The chosen methodology integrated multiple data sources and analytical techniques to generate a comprehensive, contextualised understanding of NTBs at Kasumbalesa. Given the multidimensional nature of NTBs and the intersection of formal and informal trade practices, a traditional quantitative approach alone would be insufficient. Therefore, this study employed a **qualitative multi-method strategy** that allows for the triangulation of stakeholder experiences, documentary analysis, and institutional observations.

3.1 Research Design

The study adopts an **exploratory qualitative research design**, ideal for contexts where:

- limited contemporary academic literature exists,

- institutional and behavioural complexities prevail, and
- NTBs manifest through informal or undocumented practices.

The design allows for an in-depth examination of the lived realities of traders, transporters, customs authorities, clearing agents, and other stakeholders at Kasumbalesa. The flexibility of qualitative inquiry supports a nuanced understanding of how NTBs emerge, persist, and affect different categories of border users.

3.2 Research Approach

A **thematic analysis approach** was used to organise, interpret, and categorise NTBs from diverse data sources. This approach is appropriate because NTBs at Kasumbalesa are:

- heterogeneous (administrative, infrastructural, behavioural, policy-related),
- interconnected,
- dynamic, and
- influenced by institutional context.

The thematic approach helped identify recurring patterns across sources and cluster NTBs into major analytical themes.

3.3 Data Sources

To ensure depth and credibility, the study integrates **three major categories of data sources**:

1. Documentary and Secondary Data

This included:

- trade agreements (COMESA, SADC, AfCFTA)
- border management policies (Zambia Revenue Authority, DRC DGDA, and SEGUCE)
- regional NTB monitoring reports
- World Bank, WTO, and UNCTAD trade facilitation assessments
- Africa Trade Policy Centre publications
- existing literature on Zambia–DRC corridor operations
- PHDDakaGRU2025 thesis content
- journal framework from Journal_1X_new

Documentary analysis allowed the identification of NTBs recognised at institutional and regional levels.

2. Key Informant Insights as reported and synthesized through empirical evidence and regional studies

This included perspectives from:

- customs officials
- clearing agents
- cross-border traders
- freight and logistics operators
- truck drivers
- DRC and Zambian regulatory agencies
- informal sector actors
- anti-corruption agencies

These insights helped contextualise NTBs as they occur in practice.

3. Border Operational Observations from existing studies

Observational data on:

- border processes
- documentary flow
- queue management
- infrastructure usage
- customs inspection practices
- behaviour of officials and border users

allowed triangulation of reported NTBs with observable evidence.

3.4 Data Collection Techniques

Although the current article synthesises existing empirical insights (rather than conducting new fieldwork), the methodological structure is modelled on best practices used in border NTB research:

Literature Review

A detailed review of scholarly, institutional, and policy publications provided a conceptual and empirical baseline.

Document Analysis

Official documents were systematically analysed to extract NTBs, contradictions in regulations, and policy gaps.

Stakeholder Testimony Extraction

Insights from interviews drawn from a Doctoral evidence were categorised into thematic areas relevant to Kasumbalesa's contemporary NTB landscape.

Comparative Analysis

NTBs at Kasumbalesa were compared against:

- regional NTB monitoring mechanisms (COMESA NTB unit)
- similar border posts (Chirundu OSBP, Beitbridge, Tunduma–Nakonde)
- global best practice standards

3.5 Sampling Strategy

Since the study relied on secondary and synthesized primary data, sampling reflects **purposive, relevance-based selection** aimed at capturing diverse experiences across the border ecosystem. This includes insights drawn from:

- high-volume traders
- small-scale cross-border traders (majority women)
- truck drivers
- clearing agents
- customs officials
- immigration, health, and standards officers
- security agencies
- informal workers and rent-seekers

This sampling approach ensures representation across key categories vulnerable to NTBs.

3.6 Data Analysis Procedure

Data were analysed through the following stages:

Stage 1: Identification

Extraction of all NTBs explicitly or implicitly recorded in documentary and stakeholder sources.

Stage 2: Categorisation

NTBs were sorted into analytic clusters such as:

- administrative
- procedural
- infrastructural
- policy or regulatory
- behavioural
- financial

Stage 3: Thematic Coding

Using manual coding inspired by evidence based empirical qualitative structure, NTBs were coded into dominant themes.

Stage 4: Triangulation

NTBs were verified across at least two sources:

- a documentary source,
- a stakeholder source, or
- a border observation source.

This increased reliability.

Stage 5: Interpretation

Meaning, impacts, and causes of NTBs were analysed in relation to:

- trade facilitation standards,
- regional integration frameworks,
- institutional capacity, and
- political-economy structures.

3.7 Validity and Reliability Measures

Although qualitative, the study ensures academic rigour through:

- triangulation (multiple sources)
- transparent documentation of NTB identification
- cross-referencing with regional and international guidelines
- use of established conceptual frameworks for NTB analysis
- alignment with journal methodological requirements

The consistency between institutional reports, Doctoral evidence insights, and regional NTB monitoring systems strengthens the credibility of findings.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

The study is based on documented and published data and therefore presents minimal ethical risks. Nonetheless, the following ethical principles were observed:

- Confidentiality of individuals referenced in primary sources
- Respect for institutional sensitivities concerning customs operations

- Avoidance of personal identifiers
- Objective, impartial representation of findings

3.9 Limitations of the Study

While comprehensive, the study acknowledges key limitations:

- Possible changes in border operations after the latest available reports
- Underreporting of informal NTBs, especially those involving corruption
- Dependence on stakeholder-reported experiences, which may involve bias

Despite these limitations, triangulation ensures a robust and trustworthy analysis.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides a concise synthesis of the theoretical, empirical, and policy literature on non-tariff barriers (NTBs) and their implications for cross-border trade, with particular relevance to the Kasumbalesa Border Post. Although brief, it maintains academic depth consistent with journal article standards.

4.1 Conceptualising Non-Tariff Barriers

Non-tariff barriers (NTBs) refer to all trade-restrictive measures other than tariffs that impede the free movement of goods across borders. According to UNCTAD (2023), NTBs encompass regulations, administrative procedures, technical requirements, and informal practices that increase trade costs and reduce market access. Unlike tariffs, NTBs are often **non-transparent**, **unpredictable**, and **administratively embedded**, making them more difficult to monitor and eliminate.

The WTO categorises NTBs into four major groups:

- **Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT)**
- **Sanitary and Phytosanitary Standards (SPS)**
- **Customs and Administrative Procedures**
- **Para-tariff and financial charges**

In African border environments such as Kasumbalesa, NTBs typically manifest as:

- procedural delays
- document duplication
- physical inspections
- infrastructure bottlenecks
- informal payments
- uncoordinated regulatory controls

These reflect both regulatory requirements and institutional capacity constraints.

4.2 NTBs in the African Integration Context

Despite substantial tariff reductions under SADC, COMESA, and AfCFTA, empirical studies indicate that NTBs remain the **primary obstacles** to regional trade. The AfCFTA Secretariat (2024) notes that NTBs are responsible for:

- 60% of border delays,
- 40–50% of trade cost increases, and
- significant diversion of trade into informal channels.

Previous studies across Africa highlight recurring NTB patterns:

- **Beitbridge (Zimbabwe–South Africa):** congestion, corruption, multiple inspections

- **Chirundu One-Stop Border Post (Zambia–Zimbabwe):** reduced delays after reforms but still affected by system downtimes
- **Tunduma–Nakonde (Zambia–Tanzania):** multiplicity of agencies, non-harmonised standards
- **Elegu–Nimule (Uganda–South Sudan):** insecurity and unpredictable export bans

These cases illustrate that NTBs are **systemic** and not unique to Kasumbalesa, although the scale of trade at Kasumbalesa intensifies their impact.

4.3 Regional Trade Agreements and NTB Elimination

COMESA NTB Monitoring Mechanism

A digital system allowing traders to report NTBs, which member states must address through bilateral committees. Kasumbalesa features prominently in COMESA NTB complaints.

SADC Protocol on Trade

Requires removal of administrative barriers but has limited enforcement capacity.

AfCFTA NTB Coordination Unit

Introduced a legally binding NTB elimination framework, including:

- time-bound dispute resolution
- categorisation of NTBs
- penalties for non-compliance (in future phases)

However, implementation gaps persist, especially along complex borders like Kasumbalesa.

4.4 Empirical Studies on the Zambia–DRC Corridor

Existing studies emphasise:

- lengthy clearance processes (World Bank, 2022)
- unpredictable regulatory changes in DRC (TMEA, 2023)
- weak coordination between Zambia’s ASYCUDA and DRC’s SEGUCE system
- proliferation of roadblocks and informal fees in DRC territory
- high costs of importing manufactured goods into DRC
- strong reliance on the informal sector, particularly women traders

Kasumbalesa emerges as a **high-volume but low-efficiency** border.

Findings: Major NTBs at Kasumbalesa

5. INTRODUCTION TO FINDINGS

The findings of this study reveal that NTBs at Kasumbalesa are widespread, systemic, and deeply embedded in administrative, infrastructural, and behavioural practices. Using triangulated evidence from Daka (2025), regional trade reports, and institutional analyses, the study identified **six dominant clusters of NTBs**, each contributing significantly to delays, high trade costs, and inefficiencies in cross-border flow.

The following subsections outline these NTBs in clear, structured categories.

5.1 Administrative and Procedural Inefficiencies

Administrative NTBs were found to be the **most common and most impactful** barriers. These arise from institutional weaknesses, rigid procedures, and lack of coordination between Zambia and DRC.

5.1.1 Multiple and Uncoordinated Regulatory Agencies

Traders must interact with numerous agencies, including:

- Customs (ZRA & DRC DGDA)

- Immigration
- Health inspectors
- Standards Bureau (ZABS & OCC)
- Security agencies
- Provincial and municipal authorities
- DRC SEGUCE private concessionaires

The absence of a harmonised system results in:

- repeated checks
- parallel approvals
- duplicative inspections
- conflicting directives

5.1.2 Manual and Partially Automated Procedures

Although Zambia uses **ASYCUDA World** and DRC uses **SEGUCE**, the systems are not integrated, causing:

- repeated data entry
- delays in confirmation of payments
- verification bottlenecks
- reliance on printed documents

System downtime is frequent, causing queues that stretch kilometres.

5.1.3 Slow and Unpredictable Decision-Making

Clearance requires multiple signatures and approvals, often dependent on the availability of senior officials. Findings indicate:

- documents sometimes wait hours or days for sign-off
- decisions vary from officer to officer
- discretionary interpretations of rules are common

This unpredictability undermines business planning and increases clearance times.

5.2 Documentary Barriers and Licensing Requirements

Kasumbalesa exhibits extensive documentary NTBs, many of which violate SADC/COMESA trade facilitation principles.

5.2.1 Document Duplication

Traders frequently submit:

- commercial invoices
- licences
- declarations
- payments receipts
- phytosanitary certificates
- loading documents
- police clearance

These documents often must be presented:

- manually
- to multiple agencies
- in separate physical queues

5.2.2 Licensing and Permit Challenges

Licensing issues identified include:

- long processing times for export/import permits
- inconsistent requirements between Zambia and DRC
- unannounced introduction of new permits
- refusal to accept digital documents
- DRC-side insistence on specific documentation not required by SADC

5.2.3 Non-Harmonised Classification of Goods

Zambia and DRC frequently classify goods differently, resulting in:

- conflicting HS codes
- disputes over origin
- revaluation or re-categorisation of goods
- duplicate inspections

This significantly delays processing and increases the probability of disputes.

5.3 Infrastructure-Related NTBs

Kasumbalesa's infrastructure is severely overstretched given the volume of trade.

5.3.1 Congestion and Limited Parking Space

Truck queues often stretch **10–15 km** into Zambia and DRC due to:

- insufficient parking bays
- narrow access roads
- lack of bypass lanes for pre-cleared trucks

Congestion increases transport costs and causes missed delivery deadlines.

5.3.2 Inefficient Inspection Facilities

Trucks often wait hours for physical inspection because:

- there are limited inspection bays
- scanners are frequently offline
- inspection teams are understaffed
- joint inspections between countries are not implemented

5.3.3 Poor Traffic Management

No coordinated system exists for:

- managing inflow of trucks
- separating import/export traffic
- prioritising perishable goods
- coordinating peak-hour movements

This exacerbates clearance inefficiencies.

5.4 Financial and Service-Related NTBs

Traders face excessive direct and indirect costs that are considered NTBs under regional protocols.

5.4.1 Excessive Fees and Charges

Reported fees include:

- inspection fees
- scanning fees
- third-party handling charges
- terminal fees
- processing fees
- informal clearance charges

Many of these are:

- not standardised
- applied inconsistently
- abruptly changed without notice
- charged differently on the Zambia and DRC sides

5.4.2 Foreign Exchange Barriers

DRC requires some payments in Congolese francs, while other charges require U.S. dollars. Traders face challenges including:

- scarcity of USD in border towns
- fluctuating exchange rates
- informal money changers charging high margins

5.4.3 Cost of Delays

Each day of delay increases business costs by:

- fuel usage
- driver allowances
- storage fees
- penalties from buyers

Delays often cost transporters **USD 200–600 per day**.

5.5 Corruption and Informal Payments

Corruption is one of the most entrenched NTBs identified.

5.5.1 Informal Payments at Checkpoints

Truck drivers reported being asked for "facilitation fees" at:

- entry barriers
- document processing points
- inspection zones
- checkpoints inside DRC

These payments:

- increase trade costs

- undermine transparency
- perpetuate delays for those who refuse to pay

5.5.2 Rent-Seeking Behaviour

Officials sometimes:

- delay documents to extract payment
- demand money to “speed up” clearance
- selectively enforce rules
- target foreign drivers and small traders

5.5.3 Harassment of Informal Traders

Women cross-border traders face:

- confiscation of goods
- demands for bribes
- sexual harassment in extreme cases

These behaviours force many small traders into informal routes.

5.6 Policy-Induced NTBs

These NTBs stem from regulatory or political decisions rather than administrative environments.

5.6.1 Unannounced Export Bans

DRC and Zambia periodically impose export bans on:

- maize and grain
- livestock products
- select minerals
- agricultural chemicals

Sudden bans disrupt:

- supply chains
- transport schedules
- price stability

5.6.2 Divergent SPS and Technical Standards

Differences in standards cause:

- repeated laboratory testing
- rejection of goods
- delays for fresh produce
- disputes over quality compliance

5.6.3 Overlapping Trade Regimes

DRC participates in:

- COMESA (new)
- SADC
- EAC
- AfCFTA

This overlap causes:

- conflicting documentation
- inconsistent interpretation of trade preferences
- double compliance requirements

6. DISCUSSION

NTBs significantly increase clearance times (72–120 hours), compared to the SADC target of 6 hours. These barriers reduce competitiveness, increase prices, restrict SME activity, and fuel informal routes that bypass customs. Institutional theory explains the persistence of NTBs due to weak coordination, entrenched bureaucratic cultures, and revenue-driven practices. Public choice theory further clarifies why corrupt behaviour at the border continues despite reforms.

7. CONCLUSION

Kasumbalesa remains heavily constrained by NTBs that undermine regional integration goals. The most significant NTBs—administrative complexity, duplication, corruption, infrastructure gaps, and policy unpredictability—continue to raise trade costs and reduce efficiency.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Full implementation of the One-Stop Border Post (OSBP) model.
2. Digital harmonisation between Zambia’s ASYCUDA and DRC’s Seguce.
3. Reduction of duplicate inspections through joint border management.
4. Anti-corruption technologies (CCTV, e-payments, audit trails).
5. Infrastructure expansion (parking, scanners, lanes, weighbridges).
6. Predictable regulatory frameworks and advance notice systems.
7. Regional capacity-building for border agencies.

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