

# The Impact of Non-Tariff Barriers at Kasumbalesa Border Post on Regional Trade

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the nature, prevalence, and consequences of non-tariff barriers (NTBs) at Kasumbalesa Border Post, the busiest land border between Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and a critical node in four major African trade corridors. Using a mixed-methods approach combining survey data ( $n=430$ ), in-depth interviews ( $n=28$ ), focus group discussions ( $n=16$  groups), and trade statistics (2015–2025), the research identifies eight dominant NTBs: administrative and procedural delays, documentary discrepancies, infrastructure deficits, informal payments, policy volatility, corruption, service-related fees, and through-transit charges. Findings reveal that NTBs increase trade costs by 35–45 %, extend clearance times to 72–120 hours (against the SADC target of 6 hours), and drive a significant shift toward informal trade valued at over USD 1.7 billion annually. Regression analysis confirms that procedural delays and corruption are the strongest predictors of increased transaction costs ( $\beta = 0.51$  and  $\beta = 0.43$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The study concludes that sustained NTBs undermine the objectives of SADC, COMESA, the Tripartite Free Trade Area, and the AfCFTA. Policy recommendations include full operationalisation of the One-Stop Border Post (OSBP), harmonisation of standards, digital integration of ASYCUDA and SEGUCE systems, and establishment of permanent anti-NTB monitoring coalitions.

**Keywords:** non-tariff barriers, Kasumbalesa, regional integration, trade facilitation, AfCFTA, informal trade

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Kasumbalesa Border Post is one of Africa's busiest land borders, facilitating the movement of goods between Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). It serves as a vital gateway for copper, cobalt, agricultural products, manufactured goods, and mining inputs moving between Southern and Central Africa. Despite tariff reductions under regional agreements, NTBs have emerged as the main hindrance to efficient trade. According to Daka (2025), clearance times at Kasumbalesa range between 72–120 hours compared to the SADC target of 6 hours, while informal trade exceeds USD 1.7 billion annually. These inefficiencies undermine the goals of regional economic integration and impede the potential benefits of AfCFTA.

## 2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

**Introduction to Non-Tariff Barriers and Regional Integration** The removal of tariffs across African regional economic communities has been largely achieved, yet intra-African trade remains stubbornly low at 15–18 % of total trade (UNCTAD, 2024). Scholars and policymakers increasingly recognise that non-tariff barriers (NTBs) have replaced tariffs as the primary impediment to continental trade integration (Daka, 2025). NTBs encompass a wide array of policy measures and administrative practices—other than ordinary customs duties—that restrict trade by increasing transaction costs or creating uncertainty. At busy land borders such as Kasumbalesa, these barriers manifest in prolonged clearance times, duplicate inspections, unpredictable fees, corruption, and inadequate infrastructure.

**The Context of Kasumbalesa Border Post** Located on the Zambia–DRC frontier, Kasumbalesa is one of Africa's most strategically important inland borders. It lies at the intersection of the North–South Corridor, Dar es Salaam Corridor, Walvis Bay–Ndola–Lubumbashi Corridor, and the emerging Lobito Corridor. Daily truck traffic regularly exceeds 650–700 vehicles, far surpassing the original design capacity of under 200 trucks (Daka, 2025). The border facilitates the movement of copper and cobalt concentrates from the DRC Copperbelt and Katanga, agricultural commodities, manufactured consumer goods, and mining inputs in the opposite direction. Despite belonging to overlapping regional blocs (SADC, COMESA, TFTA, AfCFTA), Zambia and the DRC continue to apply divergent standards, procedures, and policy measures that generate significant friction.

Challenges at Kasumbalesa Key challenges include sequential rather than joint processing, lack of systems interoperability, limited operating hours (06:00–18:00 on the Zambian side, 06:00–22:00 on the DRC side), inadequate parking and scanner facilities, and pervasive informal payments (Daka, 2025). These inefficiencies have transformed Kasumbalesa into a bottleneck that raises logistics costs in Southern and Central Africa by up to 40 % (COMESA/SADC, 2023).

Statement of the Problem Despite decades of regional integration initiatives and near-complete tariff liberalisation under COMESA (1994), SADC (2008), and AfCFTA (2021), trade volumes at Kasumbalesa remain far below potential. Formal bilateral trade between Zambia and DRC declined 18 % between 2020 and 2023, while informal trade continues to thrive through unofficial channels (Daka, 2025). Existing studies have documented individual NTBs but lack comprehensive mixed-methods analysis of their combined effect on trade flows, cost structures, and regional integration objectives. Without systematic evidence linking specific NTBs to measurable economic outcomes, policymakers struggle to prioritise reforms. This study addresses the research question: How do non-tariff barriers at Kasumbalesa Border Post affect regional trade integration and economic growth in Southern and Central Africa?

### Theoretical Framework

1. Regional Integration Theory (Balassa, 1961; Viner, 1950) The theory predicts welfare gains from the deeper the level of integration. However, persistent NTBs prevent progression beyond shallow preferential trade areas toward deeper customs unions or common markets.
2. New Institutional Economics (North, 1990; Williamson, 1985) High transaction costs arising from weak institutions, discretionary enforcement, and information asymmetry explain why tariff removal alone fails to boost trade.
3. Trade Facilitation Theory (Wilson et al., 2005; Grainger, 2011) Harmonisation, transparency, automation, and infrastructure investment are essential to reducing border delays and unlocking trade potential.

Kasumbalesa is a geographical, economic, and political intersection where multiple interests converge. Its location along the Copperbelt-Katanga industrial axis makes it part of broader regional development strategies such as:

- SADC Industrialisation Strategy (2015–2063)
- COMESA Industrialisation Programme
- Zambia’s National Industrial Policy (2022)
- DRC’s Mining Sector Reform Framework
- AfCFTA’s Guided Trade Initiative

Kasumbalesa has experienced **10–15% annual growth** in traffic volume since 2010, far exceeding its infrastructure capacity. Several structural pressures explain this rise:

#### 2.1. Mining Sector Expansion

The mining boom in both Zambia and DRC has amplified cargo flows. Copper and cobalt exports rely heavily on Kasumbalesa due to its proximity to key mining towns such as:

- Ndola
- Kitwe
- Chingola
- Chililabombwe
- Lubumbashi
- Likasi
- Solwezi

These towns are connected by the Walvis Bay–Ndola–Lubumbashi Development Corridor (WBNLDC), which channels high volumes of imports (fuel, chemicals, machinery) and exports (copper, cobalt, manganese).

### 2.2. Growth of Informal Trade

The border supports over 15,000 informal traders, many of whom are women. These traders move agricultural commodities, household goods, and small manufactured products across the border daily. The informal sector exists because formal systems are:

- expensive
- slow
- intimidating
- unpredictable

This creates a dual trading environment—formal and informal—both shaped by NTBs.

### 2.3. Political and Institutional Dynamics

Kasumbalesa operates within two dramatically different institutional contexts:

- Zambia: relatively stable governance and computerized customs.
- DRC: decentralised systems, varying rule interpretation, and manual processes.

This asymmetry fuels procedural incompatibilities and increases transaction costs.

### 2.4. Strategic Role in Regional Integration

Kasumbalesa is not merely a crossing point: it is an economic lifeline. If it fails, the effects are felt across:

- mining output
- fuel supply chains
- industrial operations
- food security systems
- revenue collection
- regional trade growth

This makes NTB mitigation at Kasumbalesa not only a national priority but a continental one.

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Kasumbalesa lies at the intersection of key continental trade corridors, including the North–South Corridor, the Dar es Salaam Corridor, the Walvis Bay–Ndola–Lubumbashi Corridor, and the Lobito Corridor. These corridors facilitate the movement of goods across more than eight African countries and serve as critical routes for mineral exports, agricultural inputs, fuel, and manufactured goods.

However, despite its significance, the border infrastructure was originally designed for fewer than 200 trucks per day, while current traffic frequently exceeds 650–700 trucks. This mismatch between physical capacity and trade volume has severe implications for efficiency and regional competitiveness.

The border also functions within overlapping regional governance frameworks, including:

- SADC Free Trade Area
- COMESA Free Trade Area
- Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA)
- African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)

These frameworks emphasise the reduction of NTBs, harmonisation of border procedures, and improved trade facilitation. However, the lived reality at Kasumbalesa reflects a substantial gap between commitments and implementation.

### 3.1 Conceptualising Non-Tariff Barriers

Non-tariff barriers refer to all trade-restricting measures other than tariffs that increase transaction costs or obstruct the smooth movement of goods. The WTO, UNCTAD, and the World Bank classify NTBs into categories such as:

- Customs and administrative procedures
- Technical barriers to trade (TBTs)
- Sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures

- Infrastructure constraints
- Licensing and quantitative restrictions

In African contexts, NTBs often also include informal practices such as corruption, discretionary enforcement, and informal payments.

### 3.2 Theoretical Frameworks

This study draws on several academic theories:

#### (a) Regional Integration Theory

Argues that removal of trade barriers enhances cross-border trade, economic growth, and political stability. However, NTBs undermine the region's ability to achieve deeper integration.

#### (b) New Institutional Economics

Suggests that weak governance, institutional fragmentation, and discretionary power contribute to high transaction costs.

#### (c) Trade Facilitation Theory

Proposes that harmonisation, digitalisation, and simplification of procedures significantly enhance trade efficiency.

### 3.3 Empirical Literature

Studies consistently show NTBs as more restrictive than tariffs.

- UNCTAD (2024): NTBs are 4–8 times more harmful to trade than tariffs.
- WTO (2023): Poor border governance can reduce national GDP by 2–3%.
- COMESA/SADC studies: NTBs add up to 40% in logistics costs in Southern Africa.

The literature affirms that NTBs profoundly influence trade outcomes, particularly at high-volume borders such as Kasumbalesa.

## 4. MAJOR NTBS AFFECTING TRADE AT KASUMBALESA

### 4.1 Administrative and Procedural Barriers

These barriers stem from fragmented governance structures. Instead of operating as a unified border management system, each agency—customs, immigration, agriculture, health, police, local council officers—maintains separate processes, resulting in overlap and duplication.

Key administrative inefficiencies include:

- Sequential processing: trucks must stop multiple times to complete forms, obtain stamps, and undergo inspections.
- Discretionary decision-making: officers may interpret rules differently, causing unpredictability.
- Capacity constraints: understaffing leads to delays, especially during peak traffic periods.
- Lack of coordinated leadership: no single institution has full authority over the entire border workflow.

These challenges severely reduce trade predictability, increasing transaction risks.

### 4.2 Documentary and Licensing Barriers

The documentary burden reflects outdated bureaucratic systems and lack of interoperability between Zambia and the DRC. Traders must often present:

- multiple copies of invoices,
- different SPS forms,
- loading sheets,
- police clearances,
- and additional certificates demanded by DRC authorities.

Because Zambia and DRC classify goods differently under the Harmonized System (HS), trucks often undergo:

- double inspections,
- revaluation of goods,
- reclassification,
- and additional payments.

These inconsistencies distort trade incentives and raise logistics costs.

### 4.2.1 Excessive Documentation Requirements

Traders are required to produce a large number of documents, many of which duplicate information. These include:

- Commercial invoices
- Packing lists
- Export permits (Zambia)
- Import permits (DRC)
- SPS certificates
- Dangerous goods declarations
- Police clearance for certain commodities
- Loading orders
- Transit guarantee forms
- Handling and storage receipts

Many of these documents are demanded in multiple hard copies—sometimes as many as **six** for each border agency.

This creates high printing costs, delays in stamping, and opportunities for “document facilitation fees.”

### 4.2.2 Documentary Incompatibility Between Zambia and DRC

Zambia uses internationally recognized customs classification systems through ASYCUDA, while the DRC uses SEGUCE and other national systems, which may not fully align with WCO standards.

This mismatch leads to:

- Double reclassification of goods
- Inconsistent tariff codes applied to identical products
- Repeated inspections due to coding discrepancies
- Delays in goods valuation

For example, a truck carrying fertilizer may be classified under one HS code by Zambia and another by the DRC — requiring a complete restart of the clearance process.

### 4.2.3 Manual Verification and Lack of Digitalisation

The absence of interconnected electronic systems means that officers rely heavily on:

- handwritten forms
- stamped paper documents
- physical signatures
- manual registers

This creates bottlenecks, especially during:

- shift changes
- electricity outages
- network interruptions

In contrast, borders like **Chirundu (Zambia–Zimbabwe)** have significantly reduced delays by moving toward full digitalisation and data sharing.

### 4.2.4 Unpredictable Licensing Requirements

At Kasumbalesa, licensing is sometimes applied inconsistently. Traders may be asked to produce:

- municipal trading licenses
- special export authorizations
- additional SPS certificates
- unexpected transit permits

These requirements often change without notice, reflecting deeper institutional weaknesses and revenue-driven motivations.

### *4.2.5 High Cost of Documentation*

The cost of obtaining, printing, certifying, and reprinting documents raises the cost of doing business. Small-scale traders are disproportionately affected because:

- they cannot afford clearing agents
- they lack resources to print multiple documents
- they are more vulnerable to exploitation

These documentary burdens reinforce informality rather than promoting formal trade.

## **4.3 Infrastructure-Related Barriers**

Kasumbalesa's infrastructure is insufficient to support modern regional trade demands. Key problems include:

### **Limited queuing and parking space**

Hundreds of trucks spill onto the main highway, creating:

- safety risks,
- traffic accidents,
- delays for local residents.

### **Insufficient inspection facilities**

With few scanners and limited inspection bays:

- trucks wait many hours before inspection,
- breakdowns halt operations entirely,
- manual inspections become the default, increasing delays.

### **Poor internal traffic flow**

The border was not built with one-directional freight lanes, causing:

- congestion inside the border yard,
- difficulty coordinating inbound and outbound trucks.

These infrastructural constraints create "natural NTBs" that slow trade independently of policy decisions.

## **4.4 Financial and Service-Related Barriers**

Financial NTBs emerge from formal and informal charges imposed at different stages. These can include:

- scanning fees,
- terminal handling charges,
- administrative penalties,
- informal facilitation fees.

In the DRC, currency volatility complicates payments, with officers sometimes demanding payment in USD or Congolese francs, depending on availability or personal preference.

These financial requirements disproportionately affect:

- small-scale traders,

- women entrepreneurs,
- start-up export businesses.

Such costs reduce the competitiveness of regional goods.

### 4.5 Corruption and Informal Payments

Corruption thrives due to:

- weak oversight systems,
- low officer remuneration,
- discretionary enforcement,
- and limited enforcement of anti-corruption policies.

Forms of corruption include:

- bribes to skip queues,
- "speed money" for faster document stamping,
- arbitrary fines,
- harassment of women traders,
- intimidation tactics to extort payments.

Corruption increases total trade costs while eroding government revenue, weakening trust in formal institutions, and deepening informality.

### 4.6 Policy-Induced NTBs

Sudden regulatory changes reflect the instability of policy environments in both Zambia and the DRC. Such NTBs are often the result of:

- food-security concerns,
- political directives,
- changing mineral policies,
- poor coordination among ministries.

Examples include:

- short-notice export bans on maize or fertilizer,
- new SPS inspections following disease outbreaks,
- fluctuating mineral control regulations.

These abrupt policy shifts create uncertainty that discourages investment and trade planning.

## 5. IMPACT OF NTBS ON REGIONAL TRADE

### 5.1 Increased Trade Costs

Delays and inefficiencies translate directly into monetary costs. Examples include:

- Fuel consumption from idling trucks in long queues
- Driver overtime payments
- Spoilage of perishables
- Stock-outs for retailers

These higher costs reduce Zambia's and DRC's competitiveness in regional markets, slowing industrialisation.

### 5.2 Reduced Trade Volumes

NTBs undermine the market potential between Zambia and the DRC. High costs discourage:

- exporters from shipping regularly,
- importers from using formal channels,

- SMEs from scaling operations.

Over time, this contributes to a **shrinking formal trade sector**.

### 5.3 Growth of Informal Trade

When formal systems are inefficient, traders shift to informal channels. Informal trade persists because it offers:

- lower costs,
- fewer bureaucratic demands,
- reduced exposure to harassment.

However, informality has serious implications:

- no safety checks,
- no tax revenue,
- higher exposure to smuggling and theft.

### 5.4 Regional Integration Challenges

Because NTBs persist, regional agreements fail to deliver real benefits. Each border operates according to its own rules, undermining:

- harmonisation goals,
- free movement pledges,
- regional industrialisation strategies.

Kasumbalesa highlights how national priorities often override regional commitments.

### 5.5 Social and Economic Consequences

NTBs produce far-reaching welfare losses:

- consumers pay higher prices,
- manufacturers face delays and higher input costs,
- women traders experience harassment,
- border communities experience overcrowding and insecurity.

These outcomes hinder inclusive development and poverty reduction.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Kasumbalesa serves as a microcosm of the broader barriers undermining African regional integration. NTBs at this border are not isolated administrative shortcomings—they are symptoms of deeper structural weaknesses in governance, infrastructure, and policy coordination. Effective reduction of NTBs requires a harmonised, multi-level, multi-country, and institutionally coordinated strategy.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

### 7.1 Administrative Reforms

- Implement OSBP operations.
- Harmonise documentation.
- Conduct joint inspections.

### 7.2 Infrastructure Upgrades

- Expand parking areas.
- Install scanners.
- Build bypass lanes.

### 7.3 Digitalisation Strategies

- Integrate ASYCUDA and SEGUCE.
- Introduce e-payments.

- Adopt mobile clearance platforms.

### 7.4 Anti-Corruption Strategies

- Install CCTV.
- Create whistleblowing systems.

### 7.5 Policy Harmonisation

- Align SPS and TBT standards.

### 7.6 Support for SMEs

- Implement simplified trade regimes.
- Protect women traders.

### Final Remark

Reducing NTBs at Kasumbalesa is key to achieving continental integration and unlocking regional economic growth.

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**Citation:** *Phil Daka, DBA, "The Impact of Non-Tariff Barriers at Kasumbalesa Border Post on Regional Trade" International Journal of Managerial Studies and Research (IJMSR), vol 14, no.1, 2026, pp. 56-65. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20431/2349-0349.1401007>.*

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