**AfCFTA will it Succeed or Fail???**

The recently launched Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement is under threat before it even gets started. The 54 African Countries that have signed up for the CFTA unfortunately still act very much in isolation from one another especially when it comes to the Revenue Authorities. Historically African Countries are perfectly capable of talking about issues at a technical level and reaching signed off agreements at Heads of State level, but when it comes to implementation it all falls apart and very seldom does it ever reach reality on the ground level.

A group of people sitting at a table in a restaurant

Description automatically generatedOver and above this the current status of inter state or regional trade in Africa is being hampered by multiple tariff and non-tariff barriers presented at the many still legacy or two stop border posts mostly in Southern, Central, West and North Africa. Only East Africa thus far has taken bold steps forward by the implementation of the One-Stop Border Post (OSBP) concept at most East African border crossing points, this coupled with the introduction of a Single Customs Territory Regime (SCT) has seen massive time reductions in excess of 50% and improved efficiency at most OSBP’s now operational in East Africa.

In Southern Africa a bleak picture of border bureaucracy, technical inefficiencies and resulting backlogs of trucks queueing for days to pass through key SADC transit points has once more emerged, with the regular congested crossing of Kasumbalesa yet again at the center of road haulage holdups.

A scene of logistical snags right across the region, with the worst problems being experienced in Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

At the crossing between Zambia and the DRC, which has regularly made headlines for all the wrong reasons, there are hundreds of tankers, including acid and fuel parked due to the DRC authorities starting to introduce seals. The electronic tracking and locking devices are attached to trucks and containers once they have been customs cleared. However, the more critical reason for the backlog of trucks going north into the DRC was due to the delays in the issuing of the necessary Feri Certificates or destination certificate to get into the DRC. Most trucks have been parked now for more than a week and the company responsible for issuing the certificate simply doesn’t have the capacity to deal with the volume of online applications for the issuing of the Feri Certificate taking up to a week to reach the transporter.

Major problems were also experienced in getting through Zimbabwe. They currently don’t have enough electronic seals for road freight passing through the country’s borders like Beitbridge, Chirundu further to the north and Forbes on the way to Mozambique’s Port of Beira.

Around 900 trucks pass through these borders on a daily basis and apart from the shortage of seals, seals arrive at the border with flat batteries and with Zimbabwe’s electricity issues at the moment, down to less than eight hours of power on a good day, it can take up to 12 hours to recharge the seals before the necessary cargo clearing can be done.

At Forbes Border post there were in excess of 800 trucks mostly fuel tankers parked off waiting for seals. The two main staging of parking areas in Mutari near the border are full to capacity and over-flowing into the road leading from the border. ZIMRA have acknowledged the shortage of seals and say that 200 seals were sent to the border with more seals having been precured from Singapore but are only expected to arrive in Zimbabwe sometime in the month of September.

In a nutshell a hopeless situation prevails for the Transporters and inter state or regional trade in the Southern African Region. In conclusion we leave you with the question of will AfCFTA Succeed or Fail? What are your thoughts on this given the current situation?