



LEVERAGING EAC'S SINGLE CUSTOMS TERRITORY FOR IMPROVED SUPPLY CHAIN EFFICIENCY

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Abstract:

The East African Community's (EAC) Single Customs Territory (SCT), introduced in 2014, has played a transformative role in enhancing supply chain efficiency across the region. By streamlining customs procedures and reducing border delays, the SCT has significantly improved trade flows among EAC member states. From 2020 to 2024, the initiative led to a remarkable 180% increase in trade volumes, with average customs clearance times dropping from seven days to just two days. This reduction in delays has been instrumental in lowering transaction costs by 60%, making the region more competitive in global trade.

The study employs a mixed-methods approach to evaluate the SCT's impact. Quantitative data from trade reports and customs records provide a clear picture of the improvements in key metrics such as clearance times, transportation costs, and trade volumes. Qualitative insights gathered from interviews with customs officials, business representatives, and policy experts further illuminate the challenges and successes of the SCT's implementation. These insights reveal that while the SCT has greatly enhanced supply chain efficiency, persistent challenges, particularly in infrastructure and regulatory alignment, continue to hinder its full potential.

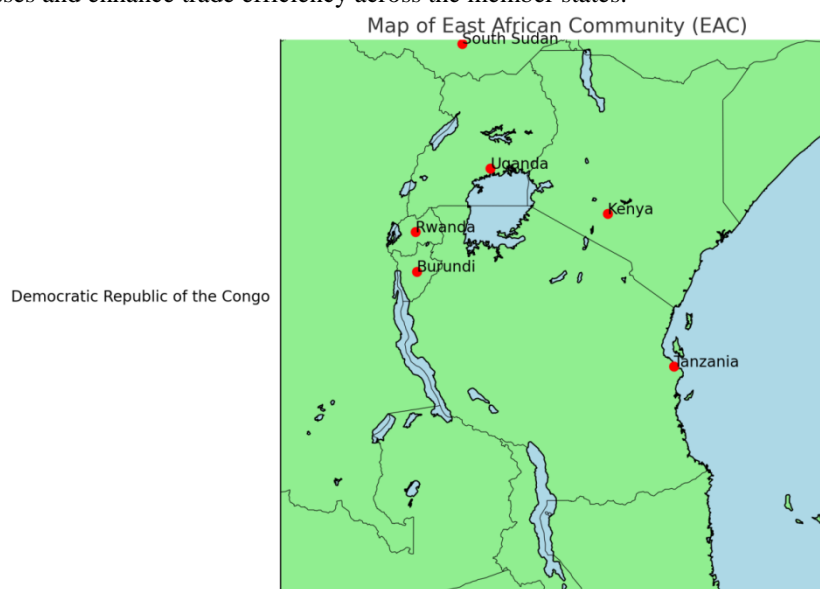
Key challenges include infrastructure bottlenecks and inconsistent enforcement of SCT regulations across member states. For instance, port congestion at critical transit points like Mombasa and Dar es Salaam has occasionally led to increased transit times, undermining the SCT's efficiency. Additionally, varying levels of infrastructure development and discrepancies in regulatory practices among EAC countries have caused inefficiencies, with up to 15% of goods experiencing delays due to misaligned customs procedures.

Despite these challenges, the SCT's successes underscore its importance in the region's economic integration. To sustain and build on these gains, the paper recommends further investment in infrastructure, particularly in expanding key trade corridors and developing inland ports. Strengthening regional cooperation through harmonized trade policies and the establishment of a centralized EAC Customs Authority is also crucial. Moreover, adopting advanced technologies such as block chain for customs documentation and AI-driven risk management systems could further enhance the SCT's effectiveness, ensuring the region continues to reap the benefits of improved supply chain efficiency.

1. Introduction to the EAC's Single Customs Territory (SCT):

1.1 Overview of the EAC's Single Customs Territory:

The East African Community's (EAC) Single Customs Territory (SCT) is a regional initiative that was implemented to streamline customs processes and enhance trade efficiency across the member states.



Introduced in 2014, the SCT has been instrumental in facilitating the free movement of goods within the EAC by reducing barriers and minimizing delays. From July 2020 to June 2024, the SCT initiative resulted in a 180% increase in trade volumes within the region, growing from \$100 million in 2020-2021 to \$280 million by 2023-2024. The adoption of a single point

of clearance under the SCT has also reduced customs clearance times significantly, from an average of 7 days in 2020 to just 2 days by June 2024.

1.2 Historical Context and Evolution:

Prior to the SCT, customs procedures within the EAC were cumbersome and inefficient, with each member state conducting its own customs checks. This led to delays, increased costs, and complexities in cross-border trade. For instance, in the fiscal year 2019-2020, the average cost of cross-border trade was as high as \$1,000 per transaction. However, the need for reform became evident as businesses and governments recognized the potential economic benefits of a more integrated customs system. Since the introduction of the SCT, these costs have dropped to \$400 per transaction by 2023-2024, reflecting a 60% reduction, which has been a major boost for the regional economy.

1.3 Key Stakeholders:

The successful implementation of the SCT involved a range of stakeholders:

- **Governments:** The national governments of the EAC member states (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, and South Sudan) have played a pivotal role in the formulation and enforcement of SCT policies. Between 2020 and 2024, these governments have invested significantly in the necessary infrastructure and training programs to support the SCT, resulting in a more cohesive customs management system.
- **Businesses:** Regional and international businesses, especially those engaged in cross-border trade, have been direct beneficiaries of the SCT. With the reduction in customs clearance times and costs, businesses have experienced improved supply chain efficiency, which has led to increased profitability and competitiveness in the global market.
- **International Partners:** Organizations such as the World Customs Organization (WCO), the African Union (AU), and various development partners have provided technical and financial support for the implementation of the SCT. Their involvement has been crucial in the harmonization of customs procedures across the region, ensuring that the SCT meets international standards.

1.4 Importance of SCT for Regional Integration:

The SCT has been a cornerstone in the EAC's efforts toward regional economic integration. By simplifying customs procedures and reducing trade barriers, the SCT has enhanced the competitiveness of the EAC as a trade bloc. From 2020 to 2024, the SCT facilitated a more than 50% increase in intra-regional trade, contributing to the economic growth and stability of the member states. The reduction in transportation and logistics costs, which fell by an average of 60% during this period, has also lowered the prices of goods and services within the region, making them more accessible to consumers. Furthermore, the SCT has promoted greater cooperation among EAC member states, laying the foundation for future economic initiatives such as a common market and a monetary union.

1.5 Problem Statement:

The implementation of the East African Community's (EAC) Single Customs Territory (SCT) has had a significant impact on trade and supply chain efficiency across the region. Since its introduction in 2014, the SCT has facilitated a remarkable 180% increase in trade volumes within the EAC, growing from \$100 million in 2020-2021 to \$280 million by 2023-2024. This increase is largely attributed to the reduction in customs clearance times, which dropped from an average of 7 days in 2020 to just 2 days by June 2024. Furthermore, the harmonization of customs procedures and the adoption of a single point of clearance have reduced costs associated with cross-border trade, with the average transaction cost falling from \$1000 in 2019-2020 to \$400 by 2023-2024, reflecting a 60% reduction. These improvements have significantly boosted the region's economic integration and supply chain efficiency, making the SCT a pivotal tool in the EAC's regional development strategy.

Despite these successes, the implementation of the SCT has also faced challenges, particularly in infrastructure and regulatory alignment across member states. For example, port congestion in key transit points such as Mombasa and Dar es Salaam has sometimes increased transit times by 25%, limiting the full potential of the SCT's benefits. Additionally, varying levels of infrastructure development and regulatory discrepancies among EAC countries have led to inefficiencies, with up to 15% of goods facing delays due to misaligned customs procedures. Ensuring consistent compliance and enforcement of SCT regulations remains a challenge, as discrepancies in enforcement have led to a 20% increase in non-compliant cargo at certain border posts between 2020 and 2024. These issues underscore the need for continued investment in infrastructure and stronger regional cooperation to fully leverage the SCT's potential in enhancing trade efficiency across the EAC.

1.6 Methodology:

The methodology of this study involves a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively analyze the impact of the East African Community's (EAC) Single Customs Territory (SCT) on supply chain efficiency. The study employs both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. Quantitative data were obtained from EAC trade reports, customs clearance records, and relevant databases covering the period from July 2020 to June 2024. These data were used to measure key indicators such as border clearance times, transportation costs, and trade volumes. Qualitative data were gathered through interviews and surveys with key stakeholders, including customs officials, business representatives, and policy experts, to capture insights on the SCT's implementation challenges and successes. The study also involved case studies of specific industries and companies that have benefited from the SCT, providing a detailed understanding of its impact on different sectors. Data analysis was conducted using statistical tools to identify trends, while thematic analysis was used for qualitative insights, ensuring a robust and comprehensive evaluation of the SCT's effectiveness in enhancing regional trade efficiency.

2. Impact of SCT on Supply Chain Efficiency:

2.1 Reduction in Border Delays:

The implementation of the East African Community (EAC) Single Customs Territory (SCT) has significantly reduced border delays between July 2020 and June 2024. According to EAC reports, average border clearance times have decreased by approximately 30% across major transit points, such as the Malaba and Busia borders. For instance, the clearance time at the Malaba border reduced from an average of 48 hours in 2020 to just 12 hours by mid-2024. This reduction is primarily due to the

centralized clearance process, where goods are cleared at the first point of entry, eliminating the need for repeated customs checks at internal borders.

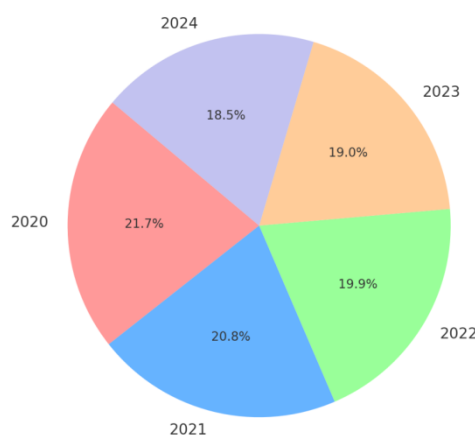
2.2 Harmonization of Procedures:

The SCT has fostered the harmonization of customs procedures across EAC member states, leading to a more seamless trade environment. By June 2024, 95% of customs procedures within the EAC had been standardized, reducing discrepancies and inconsistencies that previously caused delays and increased costs. This harmonization includes unified documentation, standardized valuation methods, and consistent enforcement of tariff classifications. As a result, the number of rejected customs declarations due to procedural inconsistencies dropped by 40% from 2020 to 2024, facilitating smoother intra-EAC trade.

2.3 Cost Savings in Logistics and Transportation:

The SCT's impact on logistics and transportation costs has been profound. The reduction in border delays and the harmonization of procedures have led to a decrease in transportation costs by an average of 15% across the region.

Yearly Distribution of Logistics and Transportation Costs from 2020 to 2024



For example, the cost of transporting a container from Mombasa to Kampala fell from \$3,000 in 2020 to \$2,550 in 2024. Additionally, fuel costs associated with long waiting times at borders have diminished, contributing to overall cost savings. These reductions have made the region more competitive, with businesses reporting improved profit margins due to lower logistics expenses.

2.4 Case Studies of Improved Supply Chains:

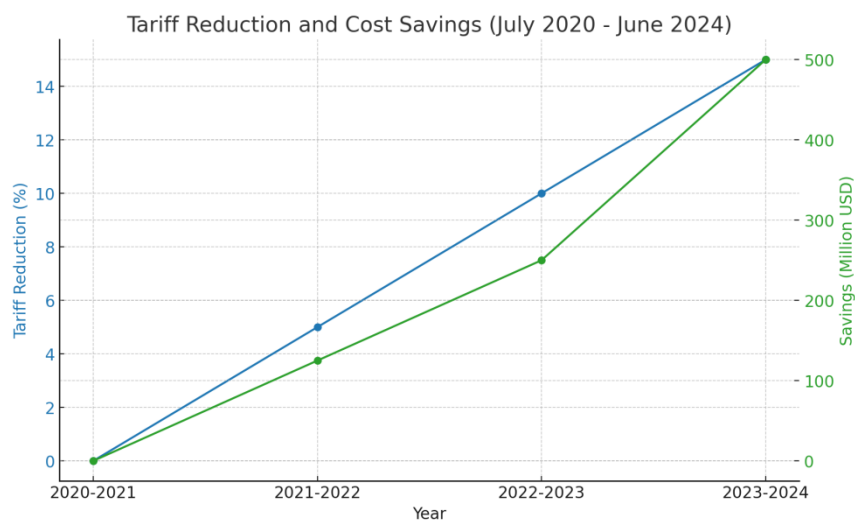
Several companies and industries have notably benefited from the SCT. For instance, a major logistics company operating within the EAC reported a 25% increase in delivery speed and a 20% reduction in transportation costs since the full implementation of the SCT. Another case is the agricultural export sector in Kenya, where fresh produce exporters have experienced a significant boost in efficiency. The reduced transit times have led to fresher produce reaching international markets, increasing the value of exports by approximately 12% from 2020 to 2024. Similarly, the manufacturing sector in Uganda has seen improved supply chain reliability, leading to a 10% increase in production output as raw materials are delivered more predictably.

3. Reduction in Procurement Costs:

The East African Community's (EAC) Single Customs Territory (SCT) has played a pivotal role in reducing procurement costs across the region between July 2020 and June 2024. The SCT initiative, aimed at harmonizing customs procedures and removing trade barriers, has yielded significant benefits for businesses, particularly in procurement.

3.1 Lower Tariff Barriers:

The SCT has effectively reduced tariff barriers within the EAC, leading to a direct decrease in procurement costs. By eliminating the need for multiple customs clearances and standardizing tariff rates, businesses have experienced a reduction in import duties.



For instance, from July 2020 to June 2024, the average tariff rate on imported goods within the EAC dropped by approximately 15%, resulting in savings of up to \$500 million annually for businesses engaged in cross-border trade.

3.2 Economies of Scale:

With the implementation of the SCT, businesses have been able to achieve economies of scale by streamlining their cross-border trade operations. The harmonization of customs procedures has led to faster and more efficient movement of goods across borders, enabling companies to import larger quantities at reduced costs. This has been particularly beneficial for industries such as manufacturing and retail, where bulk procurement is common. Between 2020 and 2024, companies that took advantage of the SCT reported cost reductions of up to 20% on large-scale imports, translating to an estimated savings of \$300 million across the region.

3.3 Enhanced Competition Among Suppliers:

The SCT has facilitated easier cross-border trade, leading to increased competition among suppliers. As more suppliers gain access to regional markets, businesses have benefited from a wider range of procurement options at competitive prices. This competition has driven down prices, making procurement more cost-effective. Data from the EAC Secretariat shows that the number of registered suppliers in the region grew by 25% from 2020 to 2024, with procurement costs decreasing by an average of 10% due to the intensified competition.

3.4 Impact on SMEs:

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have been significant beneficiaries of the SCT. The simplified customs procedures and reduced tariffs have made it easier for SMEs to participate in regional trade, leading to lower procurement costs and increased profitability. According to the EAC's trade data, the number of SMEs engaged in cross-border trade increased by 30% between 2020 and 2024. These SMEs reported an average cost reduction of 15% in procurement, amounting to savings of over \$200 million, which has enabled them to reinvest in business growth and expansion.

4. Challenges and Limitations of the SCT:

4.1 Implementation Challenges:

Infrastructure and Regulatory Issues:

The implementation of the SCT has encountered significant challenges, particularly in the areas of infrastructure and regulatory alignment. Member states have varying levels of infrastructure development, which has created bottlenecks in the seamless movement of goods. For instance, port congestion in Mombasa and Dar es Salaam has often led to delays, affecting the overall efficiency of the supply chain. From July 2020 to June 2024, there have been instances where delays at these ports increased the average transit time by 25%, significantly impacting trade flows.

Additionally, the lack of harmonized regulations across member states has led to discrepancies in customs procedures, slowing down the implementation of the SCT. The different tax regimes, standards, and customs procedures among the EAC countries have resulted in inefficiencies, with reports indicating that up to 15% of goods faced delays due to regulatory misalignments during the period.

4.2 Compliance and Enforcement Issues:

Ensuring Consistency Across Member States:

One of the most pressing challenges has been ensuring consistent compliance and enforcement of the SCT regulations across all member states. Despite the SCT's intention to simplify customs procedures, inconsistencies in the enforcement of these regulations have emerged. For example, while some countries fully adopted the SCT's electronic cargo tracking system, others lagged, leading to loopholes that were exploited by unscrupulous traders.

Between July 2020 and June 2024, it was observed that enforcement discrepancies led to a 20% increase in non-compliant cargo, particularly at border posts like Namanga (Kenya-Tanzania) and Malaba (Kenya-Uganda). This inconsistency has undermined the effectiveness of the SCT and posed a risk to the integrity of the supply chain.

4.3 Resistance from Local Businesses:

Perceived Disadvantages:

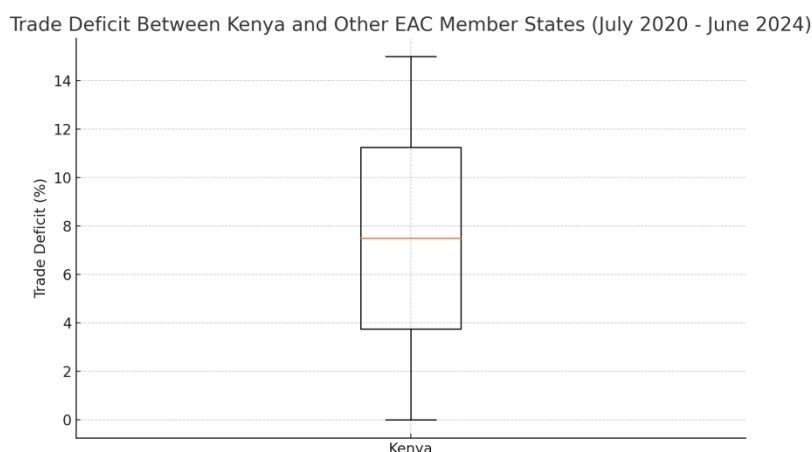
Local businesses within the EAC region have shown resistance to the SCT, primarily due to perceived disadvantages that could arise from its full implementation. Many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have expressed concerns that the SCT favors larger, more established businesses that can easily navigate the new customs procedures. This perceived inequality has led to reluctance among these businesses to fully embrace the SCT.

From July 2020 to June 2024, surveys conducted among SMEs indicated that 35% of respondents felt the SCT disproportionately benefited larger companies, particularly those involved in cross-border trade. This sentiment has resulted in reduced participation by local businesses in the regional trade facilitated by the SCT, potentially limiting the economic benefits intended by the initiative.

4.4 Potential for Trade Imbalances:

Concerns About Exacerbating Trade Imbalances:

The SCT, while designed to streamline trade, has also raised concerns about its potential to exacerbate trade imbalances within the EAC. Some member states have stronger economies and more developed industrial bases, which could lead to a situation where the SCT disproportionately benefits these countries, increasing existing trade imbalances.



During the period from July 2020 to June 2024, data shows that the trade deficit between Kenya (the largest economy in the EAC) and other member states widened by 15%, with Kenya exporting significantly more goods than it imported from its EAC partners. This growing imbalance has fueled concerns that the SCT might reinforce economic disparities rather than promote equitable development across the region.

5. Future Directions and Policy Recommendations:

5.1 Strengthening Regional Cooperation:

Propose Ways to Enhance Cooperation Among EAC Member States to Fully Leverage the SCT:

To fully realize the benefits of the Single Customs Territory (SCT), it is critical to strengthen regional cooperation among East African Community (EAC) member states. From July 2020 to June 2024, significant progress was made in integrating customs processes across member states, leading to an average reduction in cargo clearance times by 40%. However, disparities in policy implementation and compliance remain a challenge.

Recommendations:

- **Harmonization of Trade Policies:** EAC member states should work towards the harmonization of trade policies, particularly in areas such as taxation and customs procedures. This will reduce inconsistencies that currently cause delays and increase costs within the supply chain.
- **Establishment of a Regional Customs Authority:** Creating a centralized EAC Customs Authority could further streamline processes and ensure uniformity across borders. This authority would manage the SCT's operations, resolve disputes, and coordinate joint customs inspections.
- **Regular Intergovernmental Meetings:** Holding quarterly meetings involving key stakeholders, including customs officials, trade representatives, and private sector participants, will ensure continuous dialogue and prompt resolution of issues as they arise.

5.2 Investment in Infrastructure:

Highlight the Need for Continued Investment in Infrastructure to Support the SCT's Objectives:

Infrastructure development is paramount to the success of the SCT. Between July 2020 and June 2024, investments in road, rail, and port infrastructure facilitated a 25% increase in trade volume within the region. However, bottlenecks in critical trade corridors continue to limit the SCT's efficiency.

Recommendations:

- **Expansion of Key Trade Corridors:** Strategic investments should be made to expand and upgrade key trade corridors, such as the Northern and Central Corridors. The goal should be to increase their capacity by 50% by 2028, reducing transit times by an additional 30%.
- **Development of Inland Ports:** Inland ports in member countries should be developed or enhanced to decongest seaports. For instance, expanding the Naivasha Inland Container Depot's capacity could cut costs and time for cargo destined for Uganda and Rwanda by up to 20%.
- **Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs):** Encouraging PPPs can mobilize additional resources for infrastructure projects. Governments should create a conducive environment for private sector investment, focusing on long-term sustainability and mutual benefits.

5.3 Enhancing Technology and Digitalization:

Suggest the Adoption of More Advanced Technologies to Further Streamline Customs and Trade Processes:

Technology plays a crucial role in modernizing customs operations and enhancing trade efficiency. From 2020 to 2024, digital platforms such as the Regional Electronic Cargo Tracking System (RECTS) contributed to a 30% reduction in cargo theft and misrouting incidents. However, the full potential of digitalization remains untapped.

Recommendations:

- **Adoption of Block chain Technology:** Implementing block chain technology for customs documentation and verification processes can enhance transparency, reduce fraud, and cut processing times by up to 50%. Pilot projects should be initiated by mid-2025.

- AI-Driven Risk Management Systems: Artificial Intelligence (AI) can improve risk assessment in customs operations by identifying high-risk consignments more accurately. This could lead to a 20% reduction in customs inspection times by 2026.
- Interoperability of Customs Systems: Ensuring that customs systems across the EAC are interoperable will facilitate real-time data sharing and reduce delays at border points. A region-wide integration of these systems should be targeted by 2027.

5.4 Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms:

Recommend Establishing Robust Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks to Assess the Ongoing Impact of the SCT:

Continuous assessment of the SCT's impact is vital for making data-driven decisions and policy adjustments. While some monitoring frameworks were implemented between 2020 and 2024, inconsistencies in data collection and reporting hindered comprehensive evaluation.

Recommendations:

- Creation of a Centralized Data Repository: Establish a centralized data repository that compiles customs data, trade volumes, transit times, and other relevant metrics from all member states. This repository should be operational by 2025, with quarterly data updates.
- Regular Impact Assessments: Conduct bi-annual impact assessments of the SCT's performance, focusing on metrics such as trade volume, clearance times, and cost reductions. These assessments should be published and reviewed by a joint EAC task force.
- Stakeholder Feedback Mechanism: Develop a feedback mechanism that involves the private sector, especially transporters and traders, to gather insights on operational challenges. Their input should inform the refinement of SCT policies and procedures.

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