An In-depth Analysis of Stakeholder Roles in the Customs and Clearing Process: Identification, Responsibilities, and Impact

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Abstract— This study, titled "An In-depth Analysis of Stakeholder Roles in the Customs and Clearing Process: Identification, Responsibilities, and Impact," explores the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders in Zimbabwe's customs and clearing sector. Through an analysis of 60 stakeholders, including ZIMRA, clearing agents, importers, exporters, and transporters, the study highlights the critical role these actors play in trade facilitation, stakeholder relationships, and the accuracy of information. The findings reveal inefficiencies, particularly due to a lack of proper procedures, qualifications, and stakeholder trust. ZIMRA was found to dominate ICT processes and compliance through ASYCUDA, establishing itself as a key regulator. The study concludes by emphasizing the importance of a coordinated, whole-of-government approach and collaboration between stakeholders to enhance trade efficiency and reduce delays in the customs process.

Index Terms- Stakeholder roles, customs and clearing, trade facilitation, ZIMRA, border management, ICT compliance, trade efficiency, stakeholder collaboration.

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, governments have made significant strides to promote trade through various legislative measures, such as Statutory Instruments and Acts of Parliament, aiming to increase trade flows and maximize the benefits of globalization. Trade facilitation, defined as the "simplification and harmonization of international trade procedures for gathering, presenting, communicating, and processing data necessary for the movement of products in international trade" (Milner, 2008), has become central to these efforts. The Doha Round of trade talks (2001), initiated by the World Trade Organization (WTO), sought to reform the international trading system by lowering trade barriers and updating trade laws. Customs administrations play a vital role in promoting foreign trade, safeguarding cross-border transfers, and ensuring government revenue collection (OECD, 2017). However, despite these efforts, delays at Zimbabwe's ports of entry persist, attributed largely to inefficiencies among stakeholders within the customs and clearing industry. According to UN Comtrade (2021), Zimbabwe experienced a decline in trade volume, with trade values dropping from $8 billion in 2011 to $5 billion in 2020. Ensuring transparency, good governance, and stakeholder collaboration could significantly reduce trade costs (Comtrade, 2021). This study investigates the roles of key stakeholders—customs officials, clearing agents, and other government bodies—in the customs clearing process, exploring how their interactions affect the efficiency of customs operations and overall trade performance in Zimbabwe.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The customs and clearing process in Zimbabwe involves several key stakeholders, each playing a crucial role in trade facilitation. The Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA) is responsible for collecting revenue and ensuring compliance with import and export regulations, including those related to health, safety, and narcotics control (Siyavhundu, 2019; GoZ, 2002). Clearing agents facilitate customs clearance by determining tariff headings, calculating taxes, and coordinating customs release through ASYCUDA while charging a fee for their services (Rupin, 2012; ZimTrade, 2016).

Freight forwarders organize the transportation of goods using various modes such as trucks, ships, or aircraft, though they do not transport goods directly (Milner, 2008; Pinar, 2015). Transporters, operating as either common or contract carriers, are responsible for

physically moving goods (Nigel, 2010; Rupin, 2012). Importers and exporters are key players in the trade process, initiating business transactions that drive trade flows (Forentina, 2013; Comtrade, 2021). Banks support international trade by providing financial backing and guarantees (Shayanowako, 2013; Nguyen, 2010).

Several government agencies also contribute to the customs process. The Ministry of Agriculture monitors the importation of plants and animals to ensure compliance (ZimTrade, 2016), while the Ministry of Health oversees the control of medicines and food products (ZimTrade, 2016). State security agencies, including the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) and Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA), safeguard the nation from smuggling and illegal imports (Nigel, 2010; GoZ, 2010). The Vehicle Inspection Department (VID) ensures vehicle compliance at border crossings (GoZ, 2010), and the Ministry of Environment manages hazardous materials and wildlife imports through the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) and Forestry Commission (ZimTrade, 2016). These stakeholders collectively ensure the efficient operation of customs and clearing in Zimbabwe.

III. DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data Collection

Data was collected using a semi-structured questionnaire as the primary method. The design of the questionnaires followed the guidelines established by Yusuf (2015), who highlights that semi-structured questions are particularly effective in case study research. This method allows for systematic exploration of the core research questions while providing the flexibility to uncover new insights. Similar approaches were used in stakeholder research by Zafer. (2017), which led to the identification of critical dynamics and growth within stakeholder relationships.

Additionally, the use of semi-structured questionnaires is supported by the work of Cronin (2014), who emphasize that this format allows for the collection of rich, in-depth data without sacrificing the systematic nature of the study. In line with this, the

questions were carefully designed to align with the research objectives, ensuring the validity and reliability of the findings, as cautioned by Carvalho and Junior (2015). This structured yet flexible approach facilitated a comprehensive analysis of various stakeholders' roles, responsibilities, and impact in the customs and clearing process.

3.2 Analysis
3.2.1 Stakeholder Type of Company.

Table 1 below and pie chart figure1, indicate stakeholders who responded as stakeholder and their roles in the customs and clearing process.

Table 1Stakeholders

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Importer/Exporter	5	8.3	8.3	8.3
	Clearing Agent	10	16.7	16.7	25.0
	ZIMRA	10	16.7	16.7	41.7
	State Security	5	8.3	8.3	50.0
	Others	30	50.0	50.0	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Source: *Primary data SPSS v26.*

3.2.2 Roles of Stakeholders in the Customs and Clearing Process

Table 1 shows all the stakeholders and their frequency indicating representation percentages. Clearing agents and ZIMRA are the only two stakeholders who hold 16.7% representation in the study with all the other eight stakeholders representing 8.3% each. 60 stakeholders took part in this study and all of them managed to complete and return the questionnaires. The following Figure 1 presents a perception of respondents on the roles of the stakeholders in customs and clearing service.
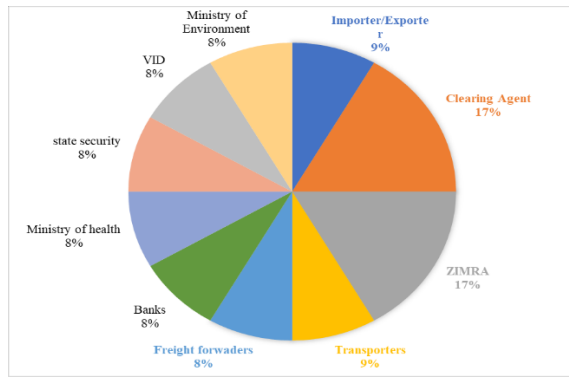
Figure 1: Types of Company
Source: *Primary data SPSS v26, 2021*

In the customs and clearance process, several key departments are involved. To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data, all relevant stakeholders participated in the study, as illustrated in Figure 1. Based on the methodology review, these stakeholders include banks, freight forwarders, transporters, state security agencies, ministries associated with customs and clearance, and vehicle inspection authorities. As noted in Freeman's Stakeholder Theory (1983), which identifies actors in the economic life cycle, this study reaffirms the same principle. Additionally, it aligns with the findings of Erika (2015) and Nguyen (2010), emphasizing the crucial role of stakeholder theory in delivering value to customers. The interconnected roles of these stakeholders mean that the absence of any one party can disrupt the clearance process, highlighting the importance of each stakeholder's participation in this study.

IV. RESULTS

The results of the study focused on identifying the roles of customs and clearing stakeholders, which include trade facilitation, stakeholder relationships, customer service, and information accuracy. Ten stakeholders were analyzed, with ZIMRA, clearing agents, transporters, importers, and exporters playing the most significant roles due to their essential services in the import and export process. However, not all stakeholders followed proper procedures or ensured the required qualifications of their personnel, which impacted their efficiency. Trust among stakeholders was weak, as their interests were not clearly defined, and stakeholder risk management was lacking. Importers, a common customer for all stakeholders,

were frequently dissatisfied with service quality, citing delays in tariffs and vehicle releases. The study also highlighted the importance of accurate information and communication, revealing that ZIMRA dominates ICT-related processes through ASYCUDA, with transporters and clearing agents held accountable for compliance. This positioned ZIMRA as a key stakeholder and regulator in the customs and clearing sector.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION.

5.1 Recommendations
The study found that multiple stakeholders, beyond just ZIMRA, contribute to delays in border clearance. A coordinated, whole-of-government approach to border management, as outlined in the Revised Kyoto Convention and Widdowson (2007), is essential for improving trade flow. The need for stronger collaboration between ZIMRA and other customs and clearing agencies is critical to ensure the smooth movement of goods and people at border points, aligning with the WCO SAFE Framework (2007). ZIMRA, acting as the primary agent at the border, should lead efforts to establish cooperative relationships with other agencies to ensure compliance with trade regulations, including health, safety, and foreign exchange requirements.

5.2 Conclusion
In conclusion, effective stakeholder relationships in the customs and clearing sector are vital to enhancing trade volumes and reducing trade costs. All stakeholders must be involved to avoid disruptions caused by delays or lack of participation. In developing countries like Zimbabwe, forming synergies among stakeholders through communication, joint decision-making, trust, and collaboration is key to managing costs and promoting efficient customs and clearing processes.

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