

Covid-19 and Border Restriction Policies: The Dilemma of Trans-Border Truck Drivers in East Africa

Calvince Omondi Barack^{1*}, Gerishon Barack Munga²

Lecturer of Political Science and International Relations, Maseno University, Kisumu, Kenya^{1*}

Graduate Student of Criminology and Social Order, The University of Nairobi, Nairobi, Kenya²

barackcalvince@gmail.com^{1*}, gerishon.munga@gmail.com²



Article History

Received on 2 March 2021

1st Revision on 30 March 2021

2nd Revision on 14 April 2021

3rd Revision on 15 April 2021

Accepted on 16 April 2021

Abstract

Purpose: The study aims to critically assess the challenges that were faced by trans-border truck drivers within the East African Community (EAC) as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and its management protocols.

Research Methodology: While adopting the qualitative research method, this paper has used documents including documented interviews and virtual sources for its data. The data have been analyzed using qualitative content analysis through which themes have been generated for discussions.

Results: The EAC member countries should continue to harmonize their health standardization to enable them to enjoy the pursuit and use of OSBP even during pandemics.

Conclusions: The EAC member countries need to harmonize health standards and establish a joint data-sharing platform to improve cross-border management and coordination during emergencies.

Limitations: This paper is limited to the long-distance truck drivers and the management of Covid-19 within the East African Community and does not cover other aspects of Coordinated Border Management in the region.

Contributions: It contributes to harmonizing and standardizing community operations and health measures to address coordinated border management challenges and future single market readiness.

Novelty: This study provides a unique perspective on the impact of COVID-19 border restrictions by focusing on the experiences of trans-border truck drivers in East Africa, an often-overlooked group in cross-border trade studies.

Keywords: *Coordinated Border Management, Covid-19, East African Community, Relay Driving, Truckers*

How to cite: Barack, C. O., & Munga, G. B. (2021). Covid-19 and border restriction policies: the dilemma of trans-border truck drivers in East Africa. *Journal of Governance and Accountability Studies*, 1(1), 55-67.

1. Introduction

The outbreak of Covid-19 towards the end of 2019 in Wuhan, China and its subsequent spread throughout the globe has led to untold suffering and loss of lives to humanity. The increase in the negative impact of the Covid-19 led the World Health Organization (WHO) on January 30, 2020, to declare a global emergency ([Herniwanti, Dewi, Yunita, & Rahayu, 2020](#); [Nicola et al., 2020](#)). In an attempt to contain the spread of the virus and to flatten the curve, governments instituted measures that included the shutting down of borders thus restricting movements of both goods and persons ([Nicola et al., 2020](#)). Given the fragmentation of the production process and the globalization of trade, the shutting down of borders directly threatened transborder trade. The containment measures, therefore, impacted negatively on the trans-border transport system affecting both air and road transports. The human agents involved in the trans-border transport sector bore the greatest challenge since human agents are the

greatest carriers of Covid-19. This was the case with trans-border truck drivers within the six countries of the East African Community (EAC) ([Irobi, 2021](#); [Oraman, 2011](#)).

Kenya was the first country to register a case of Covid-19 in East Africa on March 12, 2020 ([Aluga, 2020](#)). Rwanda became the second country in the region to register a case of Covid-19 on March 14, 2020. Tanzania followed on March 16, 2020, while Uganda confirmed their first case on March 22, 2020. Similarly, Burundi and South Sudan confirmed their initial cases on March 31, 2020, and April 5, 2020, respectively. The confirmation of the first case within the East African Community (EAC) reshaped the relationship between the member countries as each country attempted to impose measures that would help to protect its citizens from the spread of the virus ([Bitok, 2019](#)).

However, following the declaration of the state of emergency by WHO over Covid-19, countries began taking necessary precautions against the possible spread of the virus to their territories. Kenya, for instance, had advised her citizens to keep off non-essential movements to countries that had already recorded cases of Covid-19 on February 13, 2020 ([Aluga, 2020](#)). This was followed by the establishment of the National Emergency Response Committee (NERC) on February 28, 2020. This committee cautioned Kenyans against the dangers of Covid-19 and on March 20, 2020, outlined key protocols and a raft of measures that had to be taken to ensure safety with regard to the spread of Covid-19 ([Ajari, Kanyike, Ojilong, & Abdulbasit, 2020](#)).

The measures taken by Kenya despite having addressed internal issues to do with hygiene and social distancing also addressed the issues of cross-border travels. For instance, the Committee on the Emergency restricted inbound travelers to Kenyans and valid residence permit holders with a mandatory self-quarantine lasting 14 days ([Aluga, 2020](#)). In a similar vein, the Tanzanian government equally imposed compulsory quarantine for all the people who arrived from most affected countries for 14 days in designated facilities. However, the Tanzanian government did not close her borders but enforced strict testing to flatten the curve ([Sambu, 2021](#)). The Ugandan government on March 25, 2020, banned public transport and non-food markets. These measures augmented other measures that had been put in place like paid mandatory quarantine in government-designated hotels ([Ajari et al., 2020](#)).

President Museveni announced new additional measures on March 30, 2020, which included nighttime curfew, outlawing the use of private vehicles, and severing operations of malls and non-food selling premises for 14 days. Rwanda used targeted lockdown that was complemented with restricted movements that only allowed essential services such as healthcare, food shopping or banking and personnel performing such services. These measures were complemented with the closure of schools including universities as well as churches and mosques. These measures which were taken by the member countries of EAC, directly targeted movements of people in containing the spread of the virus. The governments were careful to permit the movement of foodstuffs and essential services as a way of precaution against breaking the supply chain and the negative impact that would come with such collapse in the supply chain ([Demir & Danisman, 2021](#); [Hobbs, 2020](#)).

Thus, the desire to sustain the free flow of essential goods and services behooved the EAC member countries to devise a means of cooperation in ensuring that their borders remained open while also combating the spread of Covid-19 ([Gittings et al., 2021](#)). Subsequently, the EAC Secretariat in its draft of the Covid-19 Plan relied on article 104 of the EAC treaty and article 7 of the EAC Common Market Protocol, which calls on all member states to put in place measures that facilitate the movement of people, labor, goods, and services in a way that guarantees the enjoyment of the right of establishment and residence of their citizens within the community. The number of people moving across the borders of the member states had increased significantly from July 2010 with the coming into force of the EAC Common Market Protocol ([Anami, 2020](#)).

The EAC secretariat through its joint meeting on March 25, 2020, with ministers responsible for Health and EAC matters, made resolutions that would help in containing the spread of Covid-19 within the community ([Kamazima, Kazaura, & Kakoko, 2020](#)). The EAC Secretariat under its resolution affirmed the need to minimize cross-border movements of people while facilitating free movement of Goods and Services in the EAC region. This decision would help in containing the spread of the virus while keeping the supply of the essential goods and services running within the community.

The EAC also indicated as one of its aims in developing a response to Covid-19 as the need to Facilitate the movement of goods and services in the region. Similarly, the EAC as part of its Covid-19 plan undertook to minimize the impact of Covid-19 on critical socio-economic sectors within the community which include the need to save jobs and income for the individuals within the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) by innovative adaptation and use of locally available resources in staying afloat ([Devereux, 2021](#); [Josephson, Kilic, & Michler, 2021](#)).

However, as the member countries struggled to contain the pandemic, the aims established by the EAC secretariat increasingly became elusive. For instance, there was almost a week-long strike by Kenyan truck drivers at the Malaba border over accusations of mistreatment and stigmatization by the Ugandan police ([Enaifoghe, Maramura, & Ndlovu, 2021](#); [Guina, Ferrão, Bell, & Fernandes, 2021](#)). Consequently, in Rwanda, there was a shortage of supplies of essential goods. The Kenya-Tanzanian border also had its challenges that led to a spike in the price of onions and garlic in Nairobi ([Guina et al., 2021](#)). All these challenges were occasioned by restricted cross-border movements and testing requirements for trans-border truck drivers which disrupted the transportation of the essential goods.

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to examine how the restriction on cross-border movements affected the trans-border truck drivers within the EAC as its first objective. Similarly, it investigates the implications of the restricted cross-border movements during the pandemic and its influence on the one-stop border gains that the community had achieved from the time of the coming into force of the Common Market Protocol in 2010. Further, this paper strives to make contributions to the understanding of the factors that inform the smooth and effective operation of OSBP with respect to the East African Community ([Jaja, Anyanwu, & Iwu Jaja, 2020](#)).

2. Literature Review

The concept of Coordinated Border Management (CBM), has been used as the conceptual framework in analyzing how the EAC member countries handled the cross-border management with regard to the trans-border truck drivers. Borders are conceived as places of economic and political opportunity for nations and states as well as for a host of other interest groups and agencies, legal and illegal. Borders also serve as markers of sovereignty, CBM also serve the purpose of facilitating movements of goods, people, and services. The concept of borders has been altered from time to time. For instance, from the 9/11 attacks in the US, the border concept changed to what has been referred to as pushed-out borders ([Bowman, 2007](#)). The implementation of the Container Security Initiative (CSI) and the Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism (C-TPAT) by the US which required the export destinations to share information about the products that are to be exported for a decision by the destination state pushed the borders outside. Subsequently, the borders have assumed a new meaning from trade and security perspectives beyond the geographical meaning.

Despite the new meanings that the border is assuming from different perspectives, globalization has impacted production and consumption patterns. The changes by globalization and liberation have heightened competition among producers demanding faster delivery of goods across borders given the fragmentation of the production process ([Belussi & Sedita, 2010](#); [Knez, Jaklič, & Stare, 2021](#)). Consequently, there have been adjustments on supply chains which has increased pressure on the need for improved efficiency and effectiveness by border agencies as cross-border movements of goods continue to expand in volume. Border management agencies are also confronted with challenges from the categorization of functions into departments and the need to coordinate these departments to achieve effectiveness in meeting the demands of the prolonged supply chains. The challenges may stem from opaque legislation, lengthy bureaucracy, desire for increased revenues, and calls for ease of operations by the private sector. These challenges place a lot of strain on the border agencies as the call for ease of facilitation of movements of people, goods and services continue to grow louder with the fragmentation of production and demands for products and services across borders ([Ranasinghe, Deerasinghe, & Sabhapathige, 2021](#)).

Thus, the pressure for effective management has inspired the coordination of border activities spanning from the mid-1990s under what has been referred to as Coordinated Border Management (CBM) by the World Customs Organization (WCO). The principles of the CBM have their roots in the International

Convention on the Simplification and Harmonization of Customs Procedures as amended (the revised Kyoto Convention) ([Kieck, 2010](#); [Polner, 2011](#)). The Kyoto Convention has detailed the key principles of CBM intending to standardize customs procedures by introducing the concept of juxtaposed office and joint controls through its third, sixth, and seventh chapters. The convention also provides for standards that promote information sharing among different departments and agencies operating at the border under the Single Window Framework as provided within Standards 7.3 and 7.4. The essence of these provisions is to enhance standardization of procedures as well as to concentrate and harmonize border operations in facilitating movements.

The WCO in 2008 developed the customs in the 21st Century strategy document which emphasizes the need to develop integrated procedures for processing goods at points of entry as well as the ushering in of the electronic Single Window approach that permits sharing of information among the key stakeholders for the ease of cross-border facilitation of the movements of goods and services. Subsequently, the coordinated border management system aims at the facilitation of trade and cross-border movement of persons while ensuring border security. However, the challenges with the coordination of many agencies at the border have led to calls for the reduction of the actors at the border. This call has inspired the establishment of One-Stop Border Posts (OSBP) across national borders.

The OSBP is premised on the desire for an enhanced cooperation and trust among actors at the border points ([Nugent & Soi, 2020](#)). Therefore, OSBP necessitates information sharing and coordinated actions among agencies working at the border. OSBP imbued the CBM with features, such as close location of offices by relevant states, the establishment of control zone where both states conduct controls in terms of their respective laws in one territory, seamless transactions conducted by a team of officers from all countries involved and joint underrating of searches and control of cargoes or vehicles. The OSBP embraces the concept of extraterritoriality in empowering border officials to apply their country's national law in another country and also operate within the laws of the host country. The Kyoto Convention through its Standards 3.3 supports the OSBP operations by directing that Customs offices at common border points must harmonize their operating hours and competence in facilitating the ease of movements of goods and persons. The correlation of competence is very important since it supports the principle of trust which impacts both the safety and security of the countries involved.

In 2009, the EAC Secretariat through the Corridor Development Consultants (CDC) established that the legal instruments in force in the five EAC countries at that time were less supportive of the principles of OSBP. The EAC has developed its framework for the OSBP which has incorporated the single-window approach as a means through which actors in trade and transportation can lodge standardized information and documents with a single-entry point to fulfill all import, export, and transit-related regulatory requirements. The Community has called for uniformity in the coordination of the border activities in full compliance with the EAC Act on Border Management. The Act has provided for a dispute resolution mechanism through an appeal system to the council as the first point of redress and the possibility to use the East African Court of Justice in the event that the Council has failed to handle the matter. The identification of the Council as the first point of redress upholds the spirit of dialogue in the management of borders as envisioned by the Niamey Convention through Agenda 2063 on seamless border management.

Table 1. One-Stop Border Points (OSBP) between EAC countries

Common Borderline Countries	Name(s) of OSBP
Kenya-Tanzania	Taveta/Holili Isebania/Sirari Namanga/Namanga LungaLunga/Horohoro
Kenya-Uganda	Busia Malaba
Tanzania-Uganda	Mutukula
Burundi-Rwanda	Gasenyi/Nemba Ruhwa Kanyaru/Akanyaru
Rwanda-Uganda	Kagitumba/Mirima Hills Gatuna/Katuna
Burundi-Tanzania	Mugina/Manyovu Kobero/Kabanga
Rwanda-Tanzania	Rusumo
Uganda-South Sudan	Elegu/Nimule

Table 1 presents the One-Stop Border Points (OSBPs) between East African Community (EAC) countries, highlighting key crossing locations for trade and travel. These include multiple border points between Kenya-Tanzania, Kenya-Uganda, Tanzania-Uganda, Burundi-Rwanda, Rwanda-Uganda, Burundi-Tanzania, Rwanda-Tanzania, and Uganda-South Sudan, reflecting a network of strategic checkpoints facilitating regional integration, border management, and cross-border trade within the EAC.

There has been extensive research on cross-border trade facilitation and the impact of border restrictions on trade during crises, limited attention has been given to the specific challenges faced by trans-border truck drivers during the COVID-19 pandemic in the East African region. Additionally, most studies focus on economic impacts, while the social and logistical struggles of truck drivers, such as stigmatization, mistreatment, and delays, remain underexplored, highlighting a significant gap in understanding the broader implications of border restriction policies.

While there has been extensive research on cross-border trade facilitation and the economic impacts of border restrictions during crises, comparatively little attention has been given to the lived experiences of trans-border truck drivers, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic in the East African region. These drivers faced unique and multifaceted challenges, including prolonged delays at border points, inconsistent application of health protocols, and exposure to elevated risks of infection due to crowded transit conditions. Their critical role in maintaining regional supply chains underscores the importance of understanding how border restrictions affect not only trade volumes but also the human and operational dimensions of transport logistics. By examining these experiences, policymakers and researchers can gain insights into the vulnerabilities within cross-border transport systems and identify measures to enhance resilience in future crises.

Moreover, beyond the logistical hurdles, trans-border truck drivers often confronted social challenges, including stigmatization, mistreatment by authorities, and limited access to essential services while in transit. These social dynamics compounded the stress and uncertainty experienced by drivers, potentially affecting their well-being and performance. The lack of comprehensive studies addressing these social and operational struggles represents a significant gap in the literature, as existing research tends to focus primarily on macroeconomic outcomes. A deeper exploration of truck drivers' experiences can provide a more holistic understanding of the consequences of border restriction policies, informing interventions that balance public health objectives with the practical realities of sustaining essential trade and protecting the rights and welfare of transport personnel.

3. Research Methodology

The qualitative research method has been adopted in this particular study. This is because the qualitative research method treats social life in terms of processes ([Bryman, 2016](#)). However, a process has been conceived as a sequence of individual and collective events, actions, and activities unfolding over time in context. Similarly, it has been averred that qualitative evidence often conveys a strong sense of change and flux ([Bryman, 2016](#)). The desire to critically assess the behavior of the member states with regard to their commitment to Coordinated Border Management in ensuring free flow of essential goods as transported by truckers within the region informed the choice of this method. The method has enabled a comprehensive evaluation of the events, activities, and measures that were taken by the member states in the management of the pandemic and how that has impacted the cross-border truckers in the region ([Creswell & Creswell, 2017](#); [Sandelowski, 2000](#)).

The data that has been used in this study has been obtained from both mass media outputs which have been observed as potential sources for social scientific analysis ([Bryman, 2016](#)). Other documents published by different bodies on the challenges befalling the cross-border truckers as member states implement Covid-19 management measures have also been used as sources of data for this study. Documents as sources of data have been observed as providing documentary reality. Subsequently, [Bryman \(2016\)](#) has argued that documents need to be interrogated and examined in the context of other sources of data. Taking a cue from this suggestion, this study also incorporated live television interviews especially with key political players like the chair of EAC, President Paul Kagame of Rwanda over the region's response to Covid-19. The combination of these different sources has been used in enhancing the validity of the data that has been used in understanding the challenges faced by cross-border truckers in the face of the pandemic despite the existence of the Coordinated Border Management Protocol and the classification of the truckers as essential service providers.

The data obtained has been analyzed using qualitative content analysis. This approach has been observed as the most common approach in a qualitative analysis of documents ([Bryman, 2016](#)). It entails the search for underlying themes in the materials being analyzed ([Bryman, 2016](#)). The fact that documents have been the key sources of data in this study makes qualitative content analysis an appropriate method of data analysis. Similarly, this method allows for constant discovery and constant comparison in search of nuances within the cases under review ([Altheide & Schneider, 2012](#)). This has enabled this study to develop themes around the management of Covid-19 by member states and the implication on cross-border truck drivers. Further, the concept of Coordinated Border Management (CBM) and its key elements like the One-Stop-Border approach have been used as a conceptual framework in understanding the place of restricted cross-border movements during a pandemic and the need to facilitate movements of essential goods and services. The conceptual framework has offered insights on areas of improvement in managing future cross-border movements in the event of a pandemic of this magnitude.

4. Results and Discussions

The results of the findings have been organized into two broad categories. The first category has presented the member state responses and the new border directives. Under this category are the measures that were taken by different states in the containment of the spread of Covid-19 especially from outside their borders thus, the border restriction measures that would directly affect the cross-border truckers. The second category presents the results on the implementation of the Covid-19 containment measures by the member states and their implication to the cross-border truckers as well as the attended challenges. The findings in this category have been presented in themes and discussed in highlighting the challenges and how they impacted the cross-border truckers as countries grappled with the balance of containing the spread of Covid-19 as well as maintenance of the free flow of essential goods within the region.

4.1 State Responses and New Border Directives

EAC member countries responded differently with regard to the containment of Covid-19 which had significant implications on border management and OSBPs. Kenya, for instance, restricted movements in and out of her territory with regard to Tanzania and Somalia on May 16, 2020. This restriction exempted cargo vehicles. This decision followed the earlier restrictions that Kenya had imposed on her

border with Uganda on March 23, 2020. In a similar move, Kenya suspended all international flights on March 25, 2020, allowing only those for cargo and repatriation flights to enter or exit the country. This suspension has been in place until 1st August 2020, to close down move the borders has been considered injurious to different categories of people like the refugees whose right to seek protection are curtailed by such border closure measures. Subsequently, Amnesty International through Deprose Muchena made a call for workable protocols for Covid-19 screening, testing and quarantine that do not offend both international laws on refugees and human rights (MacGregor, 2020: 23 June). Similarly, the importance of regional integration has been pointed to as a facilitator in the transportation and distribution of essential medical supplies and food items in responding to Covid-19.

The EAC member countries cognizant of the need to maintain the flow of essential supplies despite the restricted cross-border movements classified the trans-border truck drivers as essential service providers who would be allowed to cross the border on having tested negative for Covid-19. The member states agreed to a double testing strategy where the truckers had to be tested at the point of departure and be retested at the border points in ensuring that truckers do not aid in the spread of the virus. The double testing strategy received a nod from four heads of state, Yoweri Museveni, Uhuru Kenyatta, Paul Kagame, and Salva Kiir of Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, and South Sudan respectively. The leaders agreed that truckers could drive through the East African region as long as they were negative and called for the adoption of a harmonized system for certifying and sharing Covid-19 test results and other information.

These came on the backdrop of a call for a well-coordinated and harmonized response, in line with the provisions of the EAC Common Market Protocols and to ensure that there is the availability of essential goods and services in the region by the EAC secretariat. The Covid-19 response plan under the directive EAC/JMHE/Directive/003 envisaged the need for a coordinated working relationship among the national task forces, EAC Secretariat and EAHRC in overseeing the implementation of measures put in place to contain the spread of Covid-19 in the region.

However, the directives did not resolve to establish an umbrella body that would coordinate the responses by the different stakeholders operating at various levels in combating the spread of Covid-19. This proved to be a major gap with regard to the facilitation of the free movements of essential goods and services across the borders of the member states. The Response plan only recognized the significance of the role that is played by staff at the border points in containing the spread of the virus. This left the responsibility of border management largely under the sole management of the member states which responded differently hence the different implications for the trans-border truck drivers and the delivery of essential services.

4.2 Implementation and Challenges for Truck Drivers

4.2.1 Delays, Harassment, and Stigma

The trans-border truckers despite having been classified as essential service providers who would conveniently cross the borders of the EAC countries faced several challenges with the actual implementation of cross-border transportation. The challenges included delays at the borders, harassment by the security forces, and stigma stemming from the drivers' classification as virus carriers or potential carriers both by government agencies and the local communities through which they drop by for essential supplies. Kenyan truck drivers for instance reported that they were being harassed by Uganda police officers which undermined their safety. This led to a truck drivers' strike at the Malaba border that resulted in a long queue of trucks that paralyzed transport along the border region. This impasse roped in the Kenya Truckers Union with their Secretary-general, Nicholas Mbugua lamenting the absence of a safety agreement between Kenya and Uganda with regard to truck drivers during the lockdown ([Anami, 2020](#)). Mbugua pointed out the need for an expedited agreement on the safety of truck drivers whom he observed were undergoing unbearable humiliation in Uganda ([Anami, 2020](#)).

The challenge that truck drivers were facing also stemmed from testing and acceptance of the testing results. The Ministry of Transport in Kenya issued a directive that required the truck drivers to get the Covid-19 test certificate 48 hours before they commence their journey from Mombasa or enter Kenya from other EAC countries. A key challenge in the testing process emerged when Ugandan and Kenyan

officials initially refused to recognize each other's test results. However, after a meeting held on May 26, 2020, both countries agreed to mutually accept the results presented by truck drivers ([Anami, 2020](#)). Solom Kitungu, the principal secretary for Transport in Kenya while commenting after attending a meeting with Ugandan officials over the woes of Kenyan truck drivers indicated that some of the compliance to the double testing protocol on the part of the drivers was partly to blame for the delays occasioned at the border ([Anami, 2020](#)). The meeting also worked out a safety protocol for truck drivers during the lockdown.

A similar case played out at the Kenya and Tanzania border, on May 19, 2020, Kenya reported that it had returned some 180 foreigners who had tested positive for Covid-19 to Tanzania. This led to accusations that the testing was flawed, being conducted by Kenya as sabotage to Tanzania as a tourist destination country. The lack of trust in each other's competency was up-scaled when 19 Tanzanian Truckers who had tested positive for Covid-19 were denied entry into Kenya on May 20, 2020. This attracted a response from a Tanzanian Commissioner in charge of northern Arusha, Mrisho Gambo who reported that the same drivers who tested positive in Kenya had re-tested negative in Tanzania. This caused long queues as the commissioner ordered that the truckers had to change over their cargo at the border so that owners of the goods had to collect them from the border point denying all truckers from Kenya entry into Tanzania and also suspending the travel of Tanzanian truckers into and through Kenya.

The stringent controls at the borders caused huge delays in the delivery of goods across the borders within the East African Community. The three to four hours that truckers used for clearance have now turned into three to four days at the Malaba border due to measures put in place to contain Covid-19. Similarly, the trip from Mombasa to Kampala which usually takes seven days currently takes 12 days due to border procedures and restrictions. The delays occasioned by these measures have reduced the clearance of essential merchandise to less than 50 %. This lengthy Turn Around Times (TAT) has had negative financial impacts on truckers and the business community at large hindering their ability to meet their financial obligations like loan repayments. The case of Khamis Makaranga one of the 19 truckers who were returned to Tanzania after testing positive for coronavirus is insightful since he was transporting tomatoes which are highly perishable from Iringo to Nairobi but had to wait for over seven days to get his test results ([Barack & Munga, 2021](#)). The consequence was the loss of the tomatoes and an increase in the prices of vegetable products in Kenya due to a decline in supply.

The increase in the cost of goods due to delays presented multiple dangers in the management of the pandemic. For instance, the significance of proper nutrition in the fight against the pandemic has been pointed to by Dr. Matshidiso Moeti of World Health Organization- Africa Regional Office- during the World Economic Forum with a warning that the unnecessary trans-border delays, threatened to worsen the food insecurity in Africa which was already at a precarious level. In a similar vein, a Kenyan truck driver reported that he had stayed at the border for five days while his other colleagues had stayed there for over ten days pointing to poor health services with understaffed facilities at the Kenyan-Uganda border hence the delays. The consequence of which is undersupplied essential goods which would lead to an increase in prices for such commodities in the region. The Rwandese government policy that imposed a fine of 500 US dollars on drivers who insisted on driving through Rwanda to deliver goods if they could not hand over their trucks to the Rwandese drivers served to increase the cost of goods since such costs are always passed to the consumers. These would serve to complicate the food security situation and the fight against the pandemic.

4.2.2 Relay Driving

The desire to maintain the flow in the supply chain while containing the spread of Covid-19 led to attempts to institute relay driving of trans-border trucks within the EAC. This stemmed from the fact that truck drivers have been viewed as high-risk carriers of Covid-19. The Kigali government for instance preferred that truckers would drive to their border and hand over their trucks to the Rwandan drivers or offload their goods onto trucks managed by Rwandese for delivery to the final destinations within Rwanda. The disagreement over the relay driving especially between Rwanda and Tanzania led to a stalemate that necessitated an accelerated agreement between the two governments who agreed to lift the relay driving requirement. On May 15, 2020, the government of Rwanda released a statement that indicated that they had agreed on the transfer of merchandise at the border except for trucks carrying

perishable goods and petroleum products destined to Rwanda. This despite move, solving the immediate impasse created more problems with additional costs of transportation and logistics as well as delays in deliveries.

Kenya and Uganda had a similar case of attempts at relay driving with a changeover of drivers. This decision was informed by the increase in the number of truck drivers who were posting positive results for Covid-19. The Kenyan truck drivers were required to hand over their trucks to Ugandan drivers to deliver the goods to the final destination within Uganda. This prompted Kenya Truckers Association to petition the Ugandan government by pointing out the dangers associated with changeover driving like drivers' responsibility concerning the misuse of trucks and theft of fuel as well as insurance challenges. The insurance companies for instance would contest claims to damages that are caused to the truck or theft of merchandise while in the hands of drivers whose information is not with the insurers or their clients. To overcome this impasse, the association proposed mandatory testing at the border such that drivers who would post negative results for Covid-19 would be allowed to proceed on their journey while those with positive results would be isolated and the company allowed to send in another driver to take over the truck after undergoing a test.

The decision to allow truckers who tested negative to continue with their journey has also been imbued with challenges especially stemming from stigma. This stems from the fact that they had been identified as high-risk carriers of Covid-19. For instance, Muhammed Ali, a trucker from Tanzania who was stuck at Mirima Hills in Uganda as he wanted to cross to Rwanda lamented that truckers were being referred to as corona despite having posted a negative result for the virus. Erick Bakari, a Kenyan trucker while narrating his experience in Uganda after having posted negative results for the virus, has reported that we have been denied access to hotels and the residents stone us on grounds that we have corona. This was the case with Wasilwa, another Kenyan Trucker who pointed out that drivers had limited places to stop for rest because People point fingers and threaten to stone your truck for fear of spreading Covid-19 to them. Similarly, Isaac Lumago, a Kenyan trucker on the Mombasa-Juba route lamented over their inability to socialize with the locals who feared them as potential coronavirus carriers.

Ugandan president, Yoweri Museveni in his attempt to address the challenges of stigmatization of truckers by the community advised Ugandans to apply wisdom in dealing with the truckers. He emphasized that halting cargo transportation would be suicidal by asking the communities to ponder on how Ugandan coffee, tea, cotton, milk, and other products would be transported. The case of stigmatization and fear of the truckers as potential virus carriers is even more complex with regard to the Uganda-South Sudan border. This is because backup drivers and turn boys are not permitted in South Sudan which makes the single driver and the truck more vulnerable to cause accidents and attacks. Simon Jamus reports that the 200km distance to Juba from the Ugandan border has over 10 illegal checkpoints where one has to pay hefty bribes to pass beside the risk of being robbed of the money for upkeep.

4.2.3 Reduction in the Intra-Regional Trade

The restriction on the cross-border movements harmed intra-regional trade. For instance, Kenneth Bagamuhunda who is the EAC Director General of Customs & Trade indicated that the volume of trade among the members of EAC had plunged and was falling only within the range of 30 to 40 % in three months compared to what had been there before the outbreak of Covid-19. Peter Mathuki who is the chief executive of East African Business Council on his part lamented the fall in the volume of trades in the region by pointing at the reduction in the number of trucks being cleared at the Namanga border from the usual over 3,000 trucks to just about 500 due to Covid-19. The effect of the fall in volumes of trade and its linkages with restriction of cross-border movements especially of truck drivers led to an increase in the prices of some products since it interfered with the flow of demand and supply. Subsequently, it points to the need for a coordinated approach in handling cross-border issues especially truck drivers and their consignments.

4.2.4 Loss of Job

Many truckers lost their jobs due to a reduction in the volume of trades as trucks were delayed at the border which reduced income significantly for the owners of the trucks who then would not continue to keep truck drivers on their payrolls. For example, Bob Njagi, a truck driver was fired after the goods he

was transporting to Kampala-Uganda had to wait for over two weeks before they could cross to the other side. So, this means there is no business, and we are also out of work. This he observed is occasioned by different kinds of restrictions implemented by different countries which then cause delays in clearing the truck drivers and their consignments. The delays occasioned by understaffing of health facilities which were responsible for the long queues at the borders hence hindering trade attracted non-governmental actors who sought to boost the testing capacity of the governments to help keep the trade flowing. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) for instance partnered with Trade Mark East Africa (TMEA) to provide testing at the borders to facilitate the safe continuation of trading activities and especially protecting livelihoods.

The interventions by non-governmental organizations such as IOM and TMEA not only helped to alleviate border delays but also highlighted the critical role of collaborative efforts between public institutions and external actors in sustaining trade during crises. By increasing testing capacity and streamlining clearance procedures, these partnerships mitigated some of the economic and social hardships faced by truck drivers, preserving both livelihoods and the flow of essential goods. Such initiatives also underscore the need for coordinated regional strategies to harmonize border management policies, reduce operational bottlenecks, and ensure that frontline transport workers are protected and supported, thereby enhancing the resilience of cross-border supply chains during public health emergencies.

4.2.5 Long Hours Behind the Wheels

Due to stigma and accusations by local community members of being transmitters of the Covid-19 virus, drivers are forced to drive for long distances without taking rest at the usual places where they have taken rest before the pandemic. Felix Juma, a Kenyan truck driver transporting oil to South Sudan reported that the communities along the routes that we use are attacking us, pelting us with stones whenever we stop to take a rest. This has been complicated by the closure of border points and IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix, which reported that 50% of entry points within the East African Community have been partially closed due to the pandemic. Subsequently, sinking the cargo flow in the Northern Corridor by 30%. The delays in testing, partial closure of over 50 % of border points confined the truck drivers to long hours behind the wheels and at the same time reduced the volume of cargo flow within the region during the pandemic.

The compounded effect of community stigmatization, border closures, and delayed testing significantly increased the physical and psychological burdens on truck drivers, forcing them to endure extended driving hours without adequate rest. Incidents of harassment, such as being attacked or pelted with stones, not only jeopardized the safety of drivers like Felix Juma but also disrupted the efficiency of cross-border trade along critical routes like the Northern Corridor. The partial closure of over 50% of entry points within the East African Community, as reported by IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix, led to a 30% reduction in cargo flow, illustrating how public health measures, when coupled with social stigma, can severely constrain regional supply chains. This situation highlights the urgent need for coordinated policies that address both health security and the protection of essential transport workers to ensure continuity of trade and safeguard livelihoods during pandemics.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Conclusion

The EAC member countries should continue to harmonize their health standardization to enable them to enjoy the pursuit and use of OSBP even during pandemics. The harmonization of the health standards would eliminate the suspicion about the validity of the tests conducted by member countries and would ease the requirements for double testing at the borders in facilitating the free flow of essential goods and services. In addition, there is a need for targeted policy directives that address cross-border management and coordination during emergencies as was occasioned by this pandemic. The EAC secretariat together with relevant ministries needs to design policies that build on the open window framework without abandoning the cross-border management to individual members.

The lack of standardization and sound scientific data hurt cross-border management as every member acted in different ways that compromised the uniform implementation of the EAC Covid-19 Plan. Thus,

the community needs to establish a joint database and data-sharing platform which would act as the premise upon which policies are drawn for action by member states. Similarly, the community needs to establish a joint testing protocol and training facility specifically dedicated to cross-border surveillance and coordination. This would eliminate the doubting of test results by different partner states and also aid in contact tracing, especially for trans-border truck drivers. Further, this will reduce delays occasioned by understaffing of such facilities since proper needs assessment would be carried out to determine the number of staff needed for the efficient functioning of such facilities. These would combine to enhance efficiency in facilitating movements of essential goods during a pandemic such as this.

5.2 Research Limitations

This study is limited to the cross-border management measures put in place by member states of the East African Community. Thus, it is limited to the East African Community Members and does not cover other regions and countries outside the community. The study is also limited in scope to cross-border truckers. It focuses on cross-border truck drivers within the community and does not incorporate those who operate beyond the community's borders. The study is also guided by the principles governing Coordinated Border Management within the purview of One-Stop-Border Post as envisioned by the community. The findings of this study, therefore, need to be appreciated within the guiding principles. This study, therefore, has not delved into the long-standing traditional cross-border relations between individual member states which has the potential of providing different insights into the behavior of the EAC member countries. Further, this study is limited to the management of the Covid-19 pandemic hence the understanding of the responses to the pandemic against the borderless dream within the region.

5.3 Suggestions and Directions for Future Research

Future studies should focus on evaluating the effectiveness of harmonized health standardization and joint data-sharing platforms in improving cross-border management during emergencies like pandemics. Research could also explore the impact of a unified testing protocol and dedicated training facilities on reducing delays and enhancing the efficiency of essential goods movement across borders. Additionally, further studies could examine the role of coordinated policy directives in fostering better cross-border collaboration and addressing the challenges faced by trans-border truck drivers during health crises in the EAC region.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to all the participants, especially the relevant authorities and stakeholders in the East African Community (EAC) member states, for their valuable insights and cooperation in the research process. Special thanks are extended to the EAC Secretariat and the ministries involved in cross-border management for their support and access to relevant data. The authors also appreciate the constructive feedback from the peer reviewers, which greatly contributed to improving the quality of this study.

Author Contributions

COB conceptualized the study, designed the methodology, and conducted the data analysis. GBM contributed to data collection, interpretation of results, and manuscript writing. Both authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

References

- Ajari, E. E., Kanyike, A. M., Ojilong, D., & Abdulbasit, I. O. (2020). COVID-19 in Uganda: Epidemiology and response. *Electronic Journal of Medical and Educational Technologies*, 13(2), 1-10. doi:<https://doi.org/10.30935/ejmet/8269>
- Altheide, D. L., & Schneider, C. J. (2012). *Qualitative Media Analysis* (Vol. 38): Sage publications.
- Aluga, M. A. (2020). Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Kenya: Preparedness, response and transmissibility. *Journal of Microbiology, Immunology and Infection*, 53(5), 671-673. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmii.2020.04.011>

- Anami, L. (2020). Kenya, Uganda scramble to resolve Malaba border crisis. Retrieved from <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/kenya-uganda-scramble-to-resolve-malaba-border-crisis--1442264>
- Barack, C. O., & Munga, G. B. (2021). Covid-19 and border restriction policies: the dilemma of trans-border truck drivers in East Africa. *Journal of Governance and Accountability Studies*, 1(1), 55–67. doi:<https://doi.org/10.35912/jgas.v1i1.466>
- Belussi, F., & Sedita, S. R. (2010). Managing the fragmented value chain of global business: exploitative and explorative offshoring toward emerging market economies. *Advances in International Management*, 23, 399-429. doi:[https://doi.org/10.1108/S1571-5027\(2010\)00000230023](https://doi.org/10.1108/S1571-5027(2010)00000230023)
- Bitok, K. (2019). Sustainable tourism and economic growth nexus in Kenya: policy implications for post-Covid-19. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism and Entrepreneurship*, 1(2), 123–138. doi:<https://doi.org/10.35912/joste.v1i2.209>
- Bowman, G. W. (2007). Thinking outside the border: homeland security and the forward deployment of the US border. *Hous. L. REv.*, 44, 189.
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods*: Oxford university press.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*: Sage publications.
- Demir, E., & Danisman, G. O. (2021). Banking sector reactions to COVID-19: The role of bank-specific factors and government policy responses. *Research in International Business and Finance*, 58, 101508. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ribaf.2021.101508>
- Devereux, S. (2021). Social protection responses to COVID-19 in Africa. *Global social policy*, 21(3), 421-447. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/14680181211021260>
- Enaifoghe, A. O., Maramura, T., & Ndlovu, M. (2021). Critically assessing the effect of COVID-19 beyond the pandemic: The social and economic impacts in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Journal of Human Ecology*, 74(1-3), 40-48. doi:<https://doi.org/10.31901/24566608.2021/74.1-3.3314>
- Gittings, L., Toska, E., Medley, S., Cluver, L., Logie, C. H., Ralayo, N., . . . Mbithi-Dikgole, J. (2021). ‘Now my life is stuck!’: Experiences of adolescents and young people during COVID-19 lockdown in South Africa. *Global Public Health*, 16(6), 947-963. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2021.1899262>
- Guina, J., Ferrão, J., Bell, V., & Fernandes, T. (2021). The impact of COVID-19 in sub-Saharan Africa food security and human development. *European Journal of Agriculture and Food Sciences*, 3(2), 34-40. doi:<https://doi.org/10.24018/ejfood.2021.3.2.267>
- Herniwanti, H., Dewi, O., Yunita, J., & Rahayu, E. P. (2020). Penyuluhan Perilaku Hidup Sehat Dan Bersih (PHBS) dan Gerakan Masyarakat Hidup Sehat (GERMAS) kepada Lanjut Usia (LANSIA) menghadapi masa pandemi Covid 19 dan new normal dengan metode 3M. *Jurnal Abdidias*, 1(5), 363-372. doi:<https://doi.org/10.31004/abdidias.v1i5.82>
- Hobbs, J. E. (2020). Food supply chains during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Canadian Journal of Agricultural Economics or Revue Canadienne D'agroeconomie*, 68(2), 171-176. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/cjag.12237>
- Irobi, E. (2021). Theorizing African cinema: Contemporary African cinematic discourse and its discontents. *Black Camera*, 12(2), 280-302. doi:<https://doi.org/10.2979/blackcamera.12.2.16>
- Jaja, I. F., Anyanwu, M. U., & Iwu Jaja, C.-J. (2020). Social distancing: how religion, culture and burial ceremony undermine the effort to curb COVID-19 in South Africa. *Emerging Microbes & Infections*, 9(1), 1077-1079. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/22221751.2020.1769501>
- Josephson, A., Kilic, T., & Michler, J. D. (2021). Socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 in low-income countries. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 5(5), 557-565. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-021-01096-7>
- Kamazima, S. R., Kazaura, M., & Kakoko, D. C. V. (2020). From Hospitality to Hostility: Border Crossing Experiences among Unsung Heroes on the Wheel in COVID-19-Hit East Africa. *International Journal*, 5(9), 143. doi:<https://doi.org/10.36282/ijasrm/5.9.2020.1752>
- Kieck, E. (2010). Coordinated border management: unlocking trade opportunities through one-stop border posts. *World Customs Journal*, 4(1), 3-14. doi:<https://doi.org/10.55596/001c.91375>
- Knez, K., Jaklič, A., & Stare, M. (2021). An extended approach to value chain analysis. *Journal of Economic Structures*, 10(1), 13. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40008-021-00244-6>

- Nicola, M., Alsafi, Z., Sohrabi, C., Kerwan, A., Al-Jabir, A., Iosifidis, C., . . . Agha, R. (2020). The socio-economic implications of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19): A review. *International Journal of Surgery*, 78, 185-193. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijssu.2020.04.018>
- Nugent, P., & Soi, I. (2020). One-stop border posts in East Africa: State encounters of the fourth kind. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 14(3), 433-454. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2020.1768468>
- Oraman, Y. (2011). Work motivation and job satisfaction dynamics of textile employees. *African Journal of Business Management*, 5(8), 3361.
- Polner, M. (2011). Coordinated border management: from theory to practice. *World Customs Journal*, 5(2), 49-64. doi:<https://doi.org/10.55596/001c.92724>
- Ranasinghe, S., Deerasinghe, D., & Sabhapathige, R. (2021). Causes of Obstruction in the Outpatient Department of National Hospital, Sri Lanka: A Qualitative Study. *Journal of Health Systems and Policies*, 3(3), 122-136. doi:<https://doi.org/10.52675/jhesp.980464>
- Sambu, E. K. (2021). Annual general meetings in the era of COVID-19 pandemic: Law and practice in Tanzania. *The Eastern African Law Review*, 48(2), 116-148. doi:<https://doi.org/10.56279/ealr.v48i2.5>
- Sandelowski, M. (2000). Whatever happened to qualitative description? *Research in nursing & health*, 23(4), 334-340. doi:[https://doi.org/10.1002/1098-240x\(200008\)23:4%3C334::aid-nur9%3E3.0.co;2-g](https://doi.org/10.1002/1098-240x(200008)23:4%3C334::aid-nur9%3E3.0.co;2-g)