HORN OF AFRICA INITIATIVE

REGIONAL TRADE FACILITATION ROADMAP 2026-2031



CONNECTING ECONOMIES | BOOSTING INTRA-REGIONAL TRADE
ENHANCING COMPETITIVENESS

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List of Acronyms

AEO	Authorized Economic Operator
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
API	Application Programming Interface
BCOCC	Border Control Operational Coordination Committee
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CBM	Coordinated Border Management
DESSU	Djibouti-South Sudan-Ethiopia-Uganda
DPs	Development Partners
EAC	East African Community
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ECTS	Electronic Cargo Tracking System
ERA	Ethiopian Roads Administration
ERC	Ethiopian Railway Corporation
HoA	Horn of Africa
HoAI	Horn of Africa Initiative
HoAI-RTFC	Horn of Africa Initiative Regional Trade Facilitation Committee
ICT	Information and Computing Technologies
IEP	Institute for Economics & Peace
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
IIAG	Ibrahim Index of African Governance
IoT	Internet of Things
IT	Information Technology
IPPC	International Plant Protection Convention
ITS	Intelligent Transport System
JOCs	Joint Operations Centers
JBCs	Joint Border Committees
KRB	Kenya Roads Board
LAPSSET	Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia-Transport
LPI	Logistics Performance Index (WBG)
MRA	Mutual Recognition Agreement
NCTTCA	Northern Corridor Transit and Transport Co-ordination Authority
NII	Non-Intrusive Inspection
NMCs	National Monitoring Committees
NTBs	Non-Tariff Barriers
NTFC	National Trade Facilitation Committee
OCR	Optical Character Recognition
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSBP	One Stop Border Post
POS	Point of Sale
PNR	Passenger Name Records
RAMS	Road Asset Management System
RBAC	Role-Based Access Control
RECTS	Regional Electronic Cargo Tracking System
RFID	Radio Frequency Identification
RMIS	Road Management Information System
RRMIS	Regional Road Management Information System
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SHIIP	Somalia-Horn Of Africa Infrastructure Integration Project (WBG)
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
SPS	Sanitary & Phyto-Sanitary
STR	Simplified Trade Regime
SW	Single Window
TIDs	Trade Information Desks
TIP	Trade Information Portals
TFA	Trade Facilitation Agreement (WTO)
TFIs	Trade Facilitation Indicators (OECD)
TOR	Terms of Reference

TFA	Trade Facilitation Agreement (WTO)
TRS	Time Release Study
UNCTAD	United Nations Trade and Development
UNECE	United Nation Economic Commission for Europe
WBG	World Bank Group
WOAH	World Organisation for Animal Health
WTO	World Trade Organization
WCO	World Customs Organization

INTRODUCTION

This Regional Trade Facilitation Roadmap has been prepared under the Somalia Chairmanship of the Horn of Africa Initiative (HoAI), assumed in April 2025 during the 24th HoAI Ministerial Forum, as the region's shared strategic framework for advancing the next generation of trade facilitation reforms. Building on the first HoAI Regional Trade Facilitation Roadmap (2022–2025), this revised edition reflects the evolution of the regional trade agenda, incorporates lessons from trade facilitation programmes and investment projects implemented by HoAI participating States and development partners, and responds to emerging priorities for regional integration and economic transformation. Moreover, it operationalizes the policy measures outlined in the discussion paper Quick Wins and High Gains for Increasing Economic Integration in the Horn of Africa, endorsed by HoAI Finance Ministers at their 24th Ministerial Meeting held on 23 April 2025 in Washington, D.C. It translates these recommendations into a coherent framework of strategic objectives, priority actions, implementation arrangements, and performance indicators to guide governments, regional institutions, private sector actors, and development partners in accelerating regional trade integration.

The overarching objective of the Roadmap is to establish a common regional vision for trade facilitation that aligns national reforms, strengthens cross-border cooperation, and maximizes the impact of investments aimed at improving the movement of goods, services, and people across the Horn of Africa (HoA). By promoting greater policy coherence and coordinated action, it seeks to transform fragmented trade systems into more integrated, predictable, and efficient regional networks.

A defining feature of the Roadmap is its strong foundation in country ownership. It builds on extensive national consultations conducted between June and July 2026 in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, and South Sudan. Led by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), with technical support from the World Bank and collaboration from the other development partners supporting the HoAI, the consultations brought together key stakeholders from Ministries responsible for Finance, Trade, Transport, and Infrastructure; customs and border agencies; chambers of commerce; logistics operators; traders' associations; and other private sector organizations. This inclusive process ensured that the Roadmap reflects practical challenges faced by border agencies and economic operators while strengthening regional consensus around priority reforms.

The Roadmap's strategic priorities have been updated to reflect the changing regional and global trade environment, including the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the development of regional value chains, the digital transformation of trade and border procedures and renewed investments in strategic transport corridors. Compared with the first edition of the Roadmap, this revised version sets out more ambitious strategic goals and provides a substantially higher level of detail on the activities required for their implementation, offering a clearer operational framework to guide regional cooperation and investment. To ensure complementarity with existing initiatives, the document includes an analysis of trade facilitation programmes and initiatives implemented under the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC), and the AfCFTA. The Roadmap is therefore designed not as a standalone initiative, but as a regional coordination framework that builds on and reinforces ongoing national, regional and continental efforts. To this end, it establishes a five-year strategic framework built around a common vision for trade facilitation in the HoA. This vision is translated into 14 strategic objectives (referred as "goals") supported by priority actions ("Activities"), implementation milestones, institutional responsibilities, and measurable indicators. Within this broader framework, 5 Goals have been identified as having particularly high strategic relevance and as priorities that HoAI participating countries consider important to operationalize in the short term. These five

priorities are the goals No 1, 2, 3, 12 and 13, and are highlighted in green throughout the Roadmap.

Beyond serving as HoAI's strategic planning framework, the Roadmap provides development partners with a common platform for aligning financial and technical assistance, improving coordination, sequencing investments, and maximizing the collective impact of support aimed at strengthening regional trade facilitation and integration.

I. VISION STATEMENT

Trade facilitation is a key pillar in advancing the broader vision of the Horn of Africa Initiative, which aims at achieving a connected, integrated and resilient regional economic space where borders become gateways rather than barriers.

By combining interconnected physical, digital and energy infrastructure with capable institutions, skilled people and coordinated trade facilitation reforms, the region will strengthen cross-border economic linkages, expand regional value creation and enable the seamless circulation of goods, services, labor and investments.

II. BASELINE CURRENT SITUATION

Any new generation of regional trade facilitation reforms must necessarily begin with a clear understanding of the territorial context in which they must be implemented, not only in terms of progress achieved but also of the structural constraints that continue to limit the circulation of goods, services and economic opportunities across borders. This Section provides the evidence base for the strategic priorities and implementation framework presented in the following ones. It examines the regional trade facilitation landscape and identifies the bottlenecks that continue to fragment regional markets and connectivity networks as well as cross-border economic linkages. Additionally, it assesses the reforms already underway, and highlights the policy, regulatory, institutional and operational gaps that must be bridged to move from isolated national improvements towards deeper regional integration.

The analysis draws on a comprehensive desk research and previous assessments and studies commissioned by the HoAI Secretariat, complemented by information and data collected through the 2026 national consultations and the practical experience of HoAI participating States and development partners (DPs). It reflects a regional environment that has evolved significantly since the adoption of the first Roadmap, marked by progress in the ratification and operationalization of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), accelerated digital transformation of trade processes, renewed investments in connectivity infrastructure, and growing recognition that regional value chains and resilient supply networks require more than physical connectivity alone. They depend on aligned regulatory frameworks, coordinated institutions, interoperable systems among border agencies, adequate infrastructure, and the human capabilities required for economies to adapt, innovate, and move towards higher levels of regional integration.

The baseline assessment therefore goes beyond measuring progress against existing commitments. It explores the extent to which recent reforms have reduced frictions along trade networks and created the conditions for more seamless movement across borders. It reviews progress in addressing non-tariff barriers, modernizing customs and border management, advancing digital trade facilitation, improving connectivity performance and strengthening regional coordination frameworks. At the same time, it identifies where fragmented approaches, uneven implementation, regulatory divergence and limited institutional interoperability continue to constrain the realization of the Horn of Africa's regional trade potential.

By establishing the current state of trade facilitation in the region, this section provides the analytical foundation for the strategic direction of the Roadmap. It informs the prioritization of reforms, the sequencing of actions required for their implementation, and the identification of areas where regional cooperation can generate the greatest impact.

More importantly, it defines the key challenges that the Roadmap aims to address: transforming physical connectivity into effective economic circulation, fragmented reforms into integrated systems, and individual national initiatives into a coherent regional trade facilitation architecture capable of supporting deeper regional integration.

1. The Trade Facilitation Challenge in the Horn of Africa

Despite its strategic location, growing population, significant productive potential (particularly in agriculture and livestock) and role as a gateway between Africa, the Middle East and global markets, the Horn of Africa (HoA) remains one of the least economically integrated regions on the continent. Regional trade continues to be constrained by fragmented markets, high transaction costs, regulatory divergence, and limited capacity to translate connectivity investments into effective economic integration.

Previous assessments[1] have estimated that only a small proportion of cross-border trade in the region is conducted through formal channels, highlighting the predominance of informal trade flows. This limited level of formalization reflects a combination of structural and operational factors, including inadequate border infrastructure, fragmented regulatory frameworks, complex and costly compliance requirements, weak institutional coordination, and limited accessibility of formal trade procedures, particularly for small-scale traders. For many border communities, informal trade represents a practical response to the difficulties of accessing markets, generating livelihoods, and maintaining economic linkages across borders.

Across the region, the persistence of informal trade reflects deeper weaknesses in formal trading systems, including burdensome procedures, high compliance costs, regulatory complexity, customs and taxation barriers, exchange rate distortions, and limited access to predictable trade mechanisms. These patterns suggest that informality in the Horn of Africa is mainly a manifestation of border systems that have not yet fully adapted to the realities and needs of borderland economies. Addressing this challenge requires a shift from an enforcement-driven approach towards one focused on making formal trade more accessible, efficient, and inclusive. This involves reducing the administrative burden and transaction costs associated with small-scale cross-border trade through simplified procedures, improved border governance, digital solutions, and practical mechanisms that encourage progressive formalization. Such measures include trade information desks providing guidance on procedures and requirements, the establishment of joint testing and inspection facilities at border points, and cross-border markets where access is linked to the formal declaration of goods to Customs. By lowering the costs and increasing the benefits of formalization, these approaches can help transform informal trade flows into more transparent, secure, and productive components of regional trade networks.

The limited integration of the Horn of Africa is also rooted in fragmented trade and transport policies, insufficient harmonization of regulatory frameworks, uneven implementation of trade facilitation commitments, persistent non-tariff barriers (NTBs), and varying institutional capacities across countries. These challenges are compounded by gaps in coordination among HoAI participating States and between national institutions responsible for trade, customs, transport, investment, and border management. As highlighted by the HoAI analysis of institutional structures and coordination mechanisms for trade and investment policies,[2] the multiplicity of national actors and overlapping mandates involved in trade and investment governance often leads to uncoordinated approaches, limiting policy coherence and the effective implementation of measures that require cross-border cooperation. Consequently,

[1] HoAI Secretariat (2021). Trade Integration and Facilitation Reforms in the Horn of Africa and Way Forward, June 2021, p. 11.

[2] Horn of Africa Initiative (2023). Analysis of the Institutional Structure/Coordination Mechanism for Trade and Investment policies: Mapping and possible collaborative approaches for HoAI countries. Background paper, December 2023.

national initiatives do not always translate into aligned regional solutions, constraining the development of efficient border processes, integrated trade corridors, and competitive regional value chains.

A further source of trade costs is the gap between physical connectivity investments and the capacity of infrastructure networks and border systems to operate as integrated regional platforms. Although road transport remains the dominant mode for freight and passenger movement in the Horn of Africa,[3] many regional routes continue to face missing links, inadequate maintenance, inefficient border processes, and limited supporting infrastructure. These constraints increase transport times, reduce reliability, accelerate vehicle deterioration, and raise logistics costs, limiting the competitiveness of regional trade.

Several strategic corridor initiatives illustrate both the opportunities and the challenges of regional connectivity. The Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor aims to connect the Lamu Port in Kenya with Ethiopia and South Sudan through a multimodal network of roads, railways, pipelines, ports, and related infrastructure, creating an alternative trade route for landlocked economies. However, several components remain at different stages of development, and infrastructure gaps continue to constrain its full operationalization.

Similarly, the Djibouti-South Sudan-Ethiopia-Uganda (DESSU) corridor seeks to strengthen connectivity between South Sudan, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Uganda, by improving South Sudan's access to regional markets, supporting the development of trade flows, and creating the conditions for greater participation in regional value chains through improved links with Ethiopia's transport networks and the port of Djibouti. A critical bottleneck remains the missing road connection between Ethiopia and South Sudan through the Boma-Raad border crossing, which has constrained the emergence of this corridor as a fully operational trade route in the region. The African Development Bank's South Sudan-Ethiopia-Djibouti Transport Corridor Project is addressing this gap through investments in critical road sections, including the Kapoeta/Boma-Raad link in South Sudan.[4] These regional investments are further complemented by Ethiopia's national efforts, supported through domestic budget allocations, to strengthen transport infrastructure and enhance connectivity.

Complementary transport modes are also needed to build more resilient and diversified trade networks in the Horn of Africa. Railway connectivity in the region remains very limited. The Ethio-Djibouti railway represents the only operational cross-border railway connection, providing direct access to the port of Djibouti and supporting a share of Ethiopia's international trade. Beyond this link, proposed railway extensions (including potential connections under the LAPSSET Corridor linking Ethiopia, Kenya, and South Sudan) remain at different stages of planning and development. The Ethiopian Railway Corporation (ERC) has also undertaken pre-feasibility assessments for potential railway connections between Ethiopia and alternative regional ports, including Berbera, Lamu, Assab, and Massawa. However, these initiatives have so far largely been developed from the Ethiopian perspective and have not yet evolved into fully coordinated cross-border planning processes involving neighbouring countries.[5] Advancing multimodal connectivity in the Horn of Africa will therefore require stronger regional coordination to align national infrastructure plans, identify priority investments, and ensure that future railway networks effectively support regional trade corridors and economic integration.

These examples demonstrate that the challenge facing the Horn of Africa is not simply the construction of infrastructure or the elimination of individual bottlenecks, but the creation of an integrated regional system in which infrastructure networks, border institutions, regulatory

[3] IGAD (2020). IGAD Regional Infrastructure Master Plan (IRIMP), Vol. 2.

[4] Africa Development Bank (2025). The Boards of Directors approve $214.4 million for Phase II of South Sudan-Ethiopia-Djibouti transport corridor, communiqué of 3 December 2025.

[5] The Reporter Ethiopia (2022). New railway to connect Ethiopia with Assab, Berbera, Lamu Ports. February 12, 2022.

frameworks, and digital systems operate together. In particular, the expansion of digital trade facilitation solutions (including electronic customs systems, cross-border data exchange platforms, National Single Windows, and electronic certificates and licensing systems for traders and transport operators), offers significant opportunities to reduce transaction costs, increase transparency, and improve predictability. However, these benefits depend on regulatory alignment, mutual recognition of electronic documents, cybersecurity frameworks, and the availability of skilled human capabilities capable of managing increasingly complex trade ecosystems. Recognizing this reality, this Roadmap focuses on the policy, regulatory, institutional, and digital measures required to complement physical investments, reduce trade frictions, and transform transport corridors into functioning engines of regional integration. The objective is to create an integrated regional economic system in which physical infrastructure, digital networks, institutions, and productive capacities work together to facilitate the movement of goods, services, investment, and knowledge across borders. This also requires addressing bottlenecks at ports and coastal landing points where goods move from maritime transport onto inland transport networks. Ensuring that these connections function efficiently is essential for linking ports with regional corridors and enabling the smooth movement of goods through regional supply chains.

2. Freight Flow Imbalances and Logistics Inefficiencies

Trade and transport flows across the Horn of Africa are characterized by significant directional imbalances, with freight movements concentrated primarily from seaports towards inland destinations, while return movements remain limited. This reflects the structural characteristics of most HoAI economies, where imports consist largely of high-volume manufactured goods, fuel, machinery, construction materials, and consumer products, while exports remain concentrated in a narrower range of primary commodities, agricultural products, and livestock, often produced seasonally and across dispersed locations. As a result, regional corridors tend to function predominantly as one-directional logistics systems, with trucks carrying substantial cargo from ports to inland markets but facing limited opportunities to secure return loads.

The limited availability of backhaul cargo contributes to widespread empty return trips, increasing transport costs and reducing the utilization of available transport capacity. Although private-sector initiatives in some countries have introduced e-logistics solutions to improve the matching of cargo demand and transport capacity, [6] these platforms remain at an early stage of development and operate largely within national markets. Their limited interoperability and geographic coverage mean that they do not yet provide comprehensive visibility of freight demand and available transport capacity across regional corridors. As a result, market fragmentation and information gaps continue to constrain the efficient allocation of trucks and cargo, with the costs of unproductive return journeys ultimately reflected in higher freight rates and consumer prices.

These inefficiencies affect the overall performance of regional corridors by increasing truck turnaround times, waiting periods, and operating costs. Improving the utilization of transport assets is therefore essential for reducing logistics costs and enhancing the competitiveness of regional trade.

The challenge is compounded by the structure of the trucking industry across much of the region, where road freight services are largely provided by numerous small and medium-sized operators managing individual trucks or small fleets. While these operators play an essential role in supporting regional trade, the fragmentation of the sector limits economies of scale,

[6] An example is the use of truck aggregation platforms, which facilitate the matching of transport supply and demand by allowing operators to identify and select cargo opportunities based on relevant parameters, including cargo characteristics, volume, weight, origin, and destination. By improving market transparency and coordination among logistics actors, these solutions can contribute to reducing empty backhauls, increasing fleet utilization, and lowering transport costs along regional corridors.

access to finance, fleet modernization, and the adoption of integrated logistics solutions. Older fleets, limited maintenance capacity, and weak access to professional logistics services contribute to higher operating costs and lower vehicle productivity.

Kenya represents a notable exception within the Horn of Africa, with a more developed logistics ecosystem supported by the strategic role of the Port of Mombasa, the Northern Corridor,[7] and the presence of larger transport and logistics companies. Compared with many neighbouring countries, Kenya has a more structured logistics market, including stronger freight-forwarding capabilities, more established logistics providers, and greater integration between transport and related services. However, challenges remain, including congestion, infrastructure bottlenecks, and the need for continued modernization of trade facilitation systems and corridor management.[8]

Ethiopia's recent liberalization and reform of the logistics sector[9] could contribute to a gradual transformation of the regional logistics landscape by increasing private sector participation, attracting investment, and encouraging the emergence of larger and more integrated logistics operators. However, market opening alone will not be sufficient. The benefits of increased competition will depend on parallel modernization of trade and logistics infrastructure, including border facilities, customs systems, logistics parks, freight terminals, warehousing capacity, transport information systems, and digital platforms that enable better coordination among shippers, carriers, ports, and border agencies.

Low levels of fleet utilization also create incentives for practices that undermine transport efficiency and sustainability, including overloading. Overloading accelerates road deterioration, increases maintenance requirements and costs, and reduces the reliability of transport services (an issue of particular concern in a region where trade flows depend on a limited number of strategic road corridors). Addressing these challenges requires not only stronger enforcement of axle-load regulations, but also improvements in logistics organization, greater market transparency, and access to reliable transport information that enable operators to optimize fleet utilization, reduce empty backhauls, and operate within sustainable capacity limits.

A further constraint is the limited coordination among actors involved in the logistics chain, including shipping agents, freight forwarders, customs brokers, transport operators, ports, and border agencies. Weak information exchange and poor synchronization of logistics operations delays cargo collection and delivery, slows documentation processes, and generates additional storage and handling costs. These challenges are particularly significant along the HoAI cross-border corridors, where multiple institutions must coordinate to ensure predictable movement of goods. These logistics inefficiencies are particularly detrimental to perishable commodities, including agricultural, fish, and other marine products. Such products depend on rapid handling, reliable transport, and uninterrupted temperature control from the point of landing to the final market. Yet cold-chain infrastructure remains limited across the region, including temperature-controlled transport, cold storage, and ice-production facilities. At the same time, fragmented Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) procedures can introduce additional delays and uncertainty at border crossings. The combination of weak logistics coordination,

[7] The Northern Corridor is a multimodal transport corridor linking the Port of Mombasa in Kenya with the inland markets of Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Sudan. It serves as a critical trade route for several landlocked economies in East and Central Africa, providing access to international markets through the Indian Ocean. The corridor comprises road, rail, pipeline, and inland waterway infrastructure, supported by logistics facilities and border crossings, and is coordinated through the Northern Corridor Transit and Transport Coordination Authority (NCTTCA).

[8] World Bank (2023). Kenya Country Economic Memorandum. Seizing Kenya's Service Momentum.

[9] Ethiopia Today (2026). Liberalizing Ethiopia's Freight Forwarding Sector: A New Chapter in Logistics Reform, 30 May 2026.

inadequate cold-chain infrastructure, and fragmented SPS procedures contributes to post-harvest losses and constrains the access of producers and traders to regional markets.

3. Informality prevalent at HoAI internal borders

Informality is particularly prevalent in the Horn of Africa. In Somalia for instance, the closure or restricted operation of most of official border crossings with neighbouring countries due to security concerns has contributed to the continued reliance on informal channels, with informal trade accounting for the vast majority of cross-border exchanges.[10] Similarly, recent research has estimated that approximately 72% of cross-border trade between Ethiopia and South Sudan takes place outside formal systems.[11]

Comparable dynamics are observed along other major trade corridors, including the Ethiopia-Kenya and Djibouti-Ethiopia borders, where informal exchanges remain widespread and constitute an important component of local commerce. Evidence from border communities in Moyale, at the border between Ethiopia and Kenya, demonstrates that informal trade should not be viewed merely as a residual or illegal activity, but as an integral part of local economic activity, as it supports livelihoods and cross-border commerce.[12] At the same time, ongoing assessments conducted under the HoAI indicate that high levels of informality persist at key crossing points between Djibouti and Ethiopia such as the Guelileh-Dewele border, where restrictive administrative requirements, taxation-related challenges, and difficulties in obtaining or maintaining trade licences create incentives for traders to operate outside formal channels.[13]

The importance of informal trade also reflects the economic and social characteristics of the Horn of Africa's borderlands. Many border communities have historically maintained commercial, social, and pastoral networks that predate modern national boundaries. Livestock trade remains one of the largest informal economic activities across several borders, reflecting the region's extensive pastoral systems and cross-border mobility patterns. In addition to livestock, other important traded goods include food commodities, cereals, pulses, leather products, and agricultural goods. These transactions are often conducted through cash-based arrangements and rely on informal networks of brokers and intermediaries who facilitate connections between producers, traders, and consumers.[14]

The persistence of informal trade in the Horn of Africa should be understood not only as a governance challenge, but also as a reflection of the limitations of existing formal trade systems. Many small-scale traders operate outside formal channels because the costs and complexity of compliance are disproportionate to the size and value of their transactions. Obtaining the required documentation, complying with customs procedures, and meeting sanitary, phytosanitary, veterinary, and standards requirements often impose significant administrative and financial burdens. These costs are further increased by inspection, testing, and certification fees charged by border authorities, which can represent a substantial share

[10] Horn Economic and Social Policy Institute and Studi and Pianificazione del Territorio (2026). Consultancy Services For A Study To Inform Somalia's Regional Integration Strategy (Economic & Connectivity Corridors). World Bank, Somalia-Horn Of Africa Infrastructure Integration Project (SHIIP), final report.

[11] Policy Studies Institute (PSI), Pilot survey for collection of data on the Horn of Affrica small-scale crossborder trade (Ethiopia and South Sudan border), February 2024.

[12] Gonfa, D. B. and Galgalo, S. M. (2024). The Evaluation of informal cross -border trade on the Ethio-Kenyan Borderline. Inspira-Journal of Commerce, Economics & Computer Science (JCECS), Volume 10, No. 02, April-June, 2024, pp. 09-21.

[13] Horn of Africa Initiative (HoAI), Mapping and Assessment of Formal, Informal, and Illicit Economic Activities at the Guelileh Border (Djibouti–Ethiopia), ongoing study. Preliminary findings from fieldwork and data assessment, July 2026.

[14] World Bank (2021). Horn of Africa Regional Economic Memorandum. Overview.

of the value of low-value consignments. As highlighted in a recent HoAI study,[15] encouraging traders to formalize requires much more than reducing tariffs or introducing simplified customs procedures.

Decisions to trade formally are influenced not only by the direct costs of compliance, but also by the overall time, predictability, transparency, and convenience of border procedures relative to the perceived risks and costs associated with informal routes. Traders respond not simply to formal regulations, but to how these regulations are implemented in practice. When border procedures are perceived as unpredictable, discretionary, or inconsistent, confidence in formal channels erodes and informal trading practices become established as more reliable alternatives.[16] Formalization should therefore be understood not merely as a procedural reform, but as a broader trade facilitation agenda aimed at increasing the accessibility, predictability, and trustworthiness of formal trading systems while ensuring that their benefits clearly outweigh the costs of compliance.

Simplified Trade Regimes (STRs), adopted by Regional Economic Communities such as COMESA, EAC, and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) represent one important instrument within this broader agenda. By simplifying documentation, establishing dedicated procedures for low-value consignments, and reducing administrative requirements for small-scale cross border transactions, STRs reduce compliance costs and facilitate the formal participation of small-scale traders in cross-border trade.

Recent experience in the Horn of Africa illustrates both the benefits that these arrangements can deliver and the institutional and operational challenges that still need to be addressed. Ethiopia and Kenya concluded a bilateral arrangement in December 2025 to simplify procedures for small-scale traders at the Moyale border based on an agreed list of eligible goods. Experience at this border post demonstrates that the adoption of an STR agreement represents only the legal foundation for implementation.

Achieving full operationalization requires a comprehensive implementation framework that includes detailed standard operating procedures for Customs (as the lead agency responsible for implementing the regime); arrangements for mutual administrative assistance in the verification of origin; trader registration and licensing systems; awareness and outreach programmes for both Customs and small-scale traders; monitoring and evaluation mechanisms; and structured public-private dialogue to support the continuous improvement and effective implementation of the regime. Ultimately, the effectiveness of the arrangement will depend on a phased approach that continuously monitors trader participation and operational performance, allowing eligibility criteria and administrative restrictions to be progressively calibrated as implementation experience is gained and confidence in the regime increases. Such an approach would encourage greater uptake while preserving the integrity of the STR.[17]

For the HoAI participating countries, promoting the progressive formalization of small-scale trade requires a comprehensive package of mutually reinforcing measures that address both the costs of compliance and the benefits of participating in formal markets. Alongside the introduction of STRs, priority actions include streamlining trader registration and licensing procedures; establishing one-stop trade information and advisory services at border crossings (trade information desks); developing joint inspection, testing, and certification facilities to reduce the cost of sanitary, phytosanitary, veterinary and standards controls; strengthening coordination among Customs, standards, SPS, immigration, and local authorities; and developing cross-border markets and aggregation centres where traders can access services,

[15] Desiderio, D. (2025), Beyond Duty Relief: Revisiting the Simplified Trade Regime for enhanced formalization in Africa. Horn of Africa Initiative.

[16] Desiderio, D. (2026). Why Formalisation Policies Fail in Africa: Informal Trade as a Socially Learned Cognitive System. Horn Economic and Social Policy Institute (HESPI). May 2026.

[17] Desiderio D. and Huria, A., 2026. Smarter Rules Unlock Small-Scale Trade and Better Livelihoods across Kenya and Ethiopia. World Bank blog.

buyers, and logistics facilities while conducting transactions through simplified formal procedures.

Equally important are measures to strengthen the productive, entrepreneurial, and financial capacities of small-scale traders. These include improving access to affordable financial and digital payment services, as well as providing targeted training, coaching, and business development support to enhance understanding of regulatory requirements, record-keeping, financial management, and other formal business practices.

The overarching objective of these coordinated interventions should be to make formal trade the most attractive option for small-scale traders. By simplifying border procedures, reducing compliance costs, and improving access to support services, HoAI participating countries can encourage the progressive formalization of cross-border trade and facilitate the integration of small-scale traders into formal regional value chains. This, in turn, will strengthen border governance, improve the quality and reliability of trade statistics, enhance domestic revenue mobilization, and promote more inclusive regional markets, particularly by expanding economic opportunities for women and youth, who account for a significant share of cross-border trade.

4. Security as a Constraint to Regional Connectivity

Security remains one of the principal constraints to regional integration and trade facilitation in the Horn of Africa. Although the security environment differs across HoAI participating States, with some countries experiencing greater stability than others, the region continues to face overlapping political, security, and humanitarian crises, including the conflict in Sudan, localized insecurity in Ethiopia and South Sudan, the persistent threat posed by Al-Shabaab in Somalia and parts of Kenya, and recurrent tensions affecting the Red Sea.

International assessments consistently identify the Horn of Africa as one of the world's most fragile regional security environments. The 2026 Global Peace Index, published by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), depicts the region as a complex socio-economic system in which multiple crises interact across borders through refugee movements, illicit financial flows, arms trafficking, and competition over strategic resources and transport corridors. Likewise, the 2024 Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) highlights a continued deterioration in the Security and Rule of Lawdimension across several HoAI participating States (Figure 1).

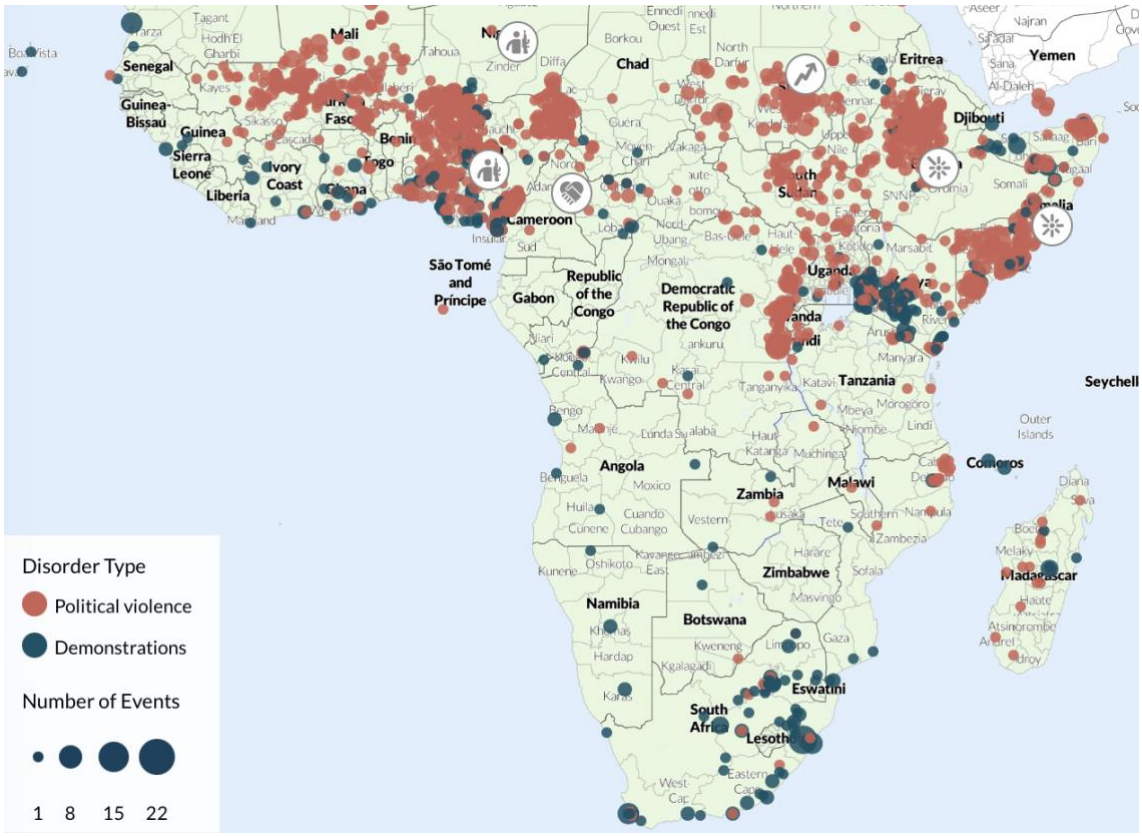
Figure 1: Security and Rule of Law indicators in HoAI participating countries

LOCATION	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Change '14-'23
Djibouti	44.7	45.0	44.7	43.2	43.2	41.9	41.6	41.4	41.2	41.8	-2.9
Ethiopia	48.4	47.3	46.6	44.5	44.7	48.7	45.8	44.2	45.1	44.1	-4.3
Kenya	55.8	57.2	58.4	58.6	55.8	55.7	54.5	54.6	55.1	54.5	-1.3
Somalia	16.4	17.5	15.5	17.5	13.7	15.4	17.1	21.5	21.0	23.4	+7.0
South Sudan	19.8	17.9	17.7	16.6	18.1	18.8	17.0	18.9	18.6	20.2	+0.4

Source: 2024 Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG)

The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) likewise describes the Horn of Africa as one of the most conflict-affected regions in Sub-Saharan Africa. Its data document the persistence of armed conflict, insurgencies, and political violence across the region, underscoring the growing impact of insecurity on economic development, regional integration, and cross-border trade (Figure 2).

Figure 2: ACLED event views in sub-Saharan Africa



The consequences of this insecurity extend well beyond the humanitarian and governance spheres and directly affect regional trade and logistics. Security concerns frequently result in border closures, restrictions to the movement of persons and vehicles, convoy and escorts requirements, checkpoints, intensified inspections, and higher insurance premiums, all of which increase transport costs and reduce the reliability of supply chains. Cross-border transport operators also face regulatory uncertainty and delays at border crossings, which reduces the competitiveness of regional logistics networks and discouraging private investment.

Lengthy clearance procedures, fragmented institutional responsibilities, limited legal trading opportunities, and weak coordination among border agencies also create incentives for informal trade, smuggling, and other illicit cross-border activities. Strengthening border management should therefore not be viewed solely as a security objective, but also as a trade facilitation priority. Effective border governance requires a combination of Coordinated Border Management (CBM), digital information exchange, interoperable customs and immigration systems, intelligence-led risk management, and enhanced cooperation among border agencies, security institutions, local authorities, and border communities. In this regard, the IGAD Cross-Border Resilience Clusters established under the Peaceful and Resilient Borderlands Programme (PRBP) provide an important platform for promoting cross-border dialogue, confidence-building, and joint responses to security and development challenges in border areas. By bringing together national authorities, local governments, security actors, and border communities, these mechanisms can contribute to addressing the underlying drivers of informal and illicit cross-border activities, strengthening cooperation between neighbouring border administrations, and creating a more conducive environment for legitimate trade and mobility.

Trade facilitation and security are mutually reinforcing rather than competing objectives. Greater economic integration increases cross-border interdependence, encourages investment, expands legitimate economic opportunities in border regions, and strengthens institutional cooperation, thereby reducing some of the structural drivers of instability.

Conversely, improvements in peace and security create the conditions necessary for private investment, regional value chains, and cross-border commerce to flourish. [18]

Recognizing this relationship, the Roadmap adopts an integrated approach in which trade facilitation and border security reinforce one another. The proposed reforms (including CBM, Joint Border Committees (JBCs), harmonized transport regulations, digital border management systems and cross-border information sharing), are designed to facilitate legitimate trade while strengthening the capacity of border authorities to manage security risks more effectively. In doing so, the Roadmap seeks to contribute simultaneously to regional economic integration, more resilient trade corridors, and greater stability across the Horn of Africa.

5. Addressing NTBs through Stronger Coordination and Regulatory Harmonization

Despite significant progress in tariff liberalization and customs modernization, non-tariff barriers (NTBs)[19] remain among the most important constraints to intra-regional trade in the Horn of Africa. Traders continue to face a wide range of regulatory, administrative, and operational obstacles, including burdensome licensing procedures, complex and paper-based documentation requirements, repeated inspections, lengthy border processes, inconsistent implementation of regulations, restrictive transport requirements, and limited mutual recognition of certificates and conformity assessment procedures.[20] These barriers increase the cost, time, and uncertainty of cross-border trade, disproportionately affecting small and medium-sized enterprises and small-scale cross-border traders.

A significant challenge is that many NTBs remain unidentified or unresolved because they are never formally reported through existing monitoring and resolution mechanisms. While considerable progress have been made at regional and continental level in establishing digital reporting platforms (notably the COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite NTB Reporting, Monitoring and Elimination Mechanism and the AfCFTA Online Mechanism for Reporting, Monitoring and Eliminating NTBs), the number of complaints submitted by traders from most HoAI participating States remains relatively low compared with other African countries.[21] Kenya represents a notable exception, as its traders make comparatively greater use of these reporting platforms, reflecting higher levels of awareness, stronger private-sector engagement, and more established institutional arrangements for monitoring and resolving trade barriers. In most other States, however, the relatively low number of reported cases suggests that many NTBs remain unidentified or unresolved owing to limited awareness of existing reporting mechanisms, weak private-sector participation, and insufficient institutional follow-up.

While the proliferation of digital reporting platforms at national, regional, and continental levels has expanded opportunities for traders to report barriers, it has also created a fragmented reporting landscape that can be confusing and difficult to navigate. Strengthening interoperability among these platforms and establishing clear procedures for referring unresolved NTBs from national to regional and, where appropriate, continental mechanisms

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[18] World Bank (2023). Regional Integration Removes Barriers to Development in Africa, 8 December 2023.

[19] NTBs are defined as any barrier to trade other than tariffs. This includes import bans, government monopolies, cumbersome documentation requirements and restrictions resulting from prohibitions, conditions or specific market requirements that make the importation or exportation of products difficult and/or costly.

[20] HoAI Secretariat, Trade Integration and Facilitation Reforms in the Horn of Africa and Way Forward, updated June 2021, pp. 15-19.

[21] HoAI (2023). Non-Tariff Barriers monitoring systems in Africa: possible approaches for HoAI countries. Background paper, December 2023.

would reduce duplication, improve transparency, and accelerate the resolution of trade barriers.

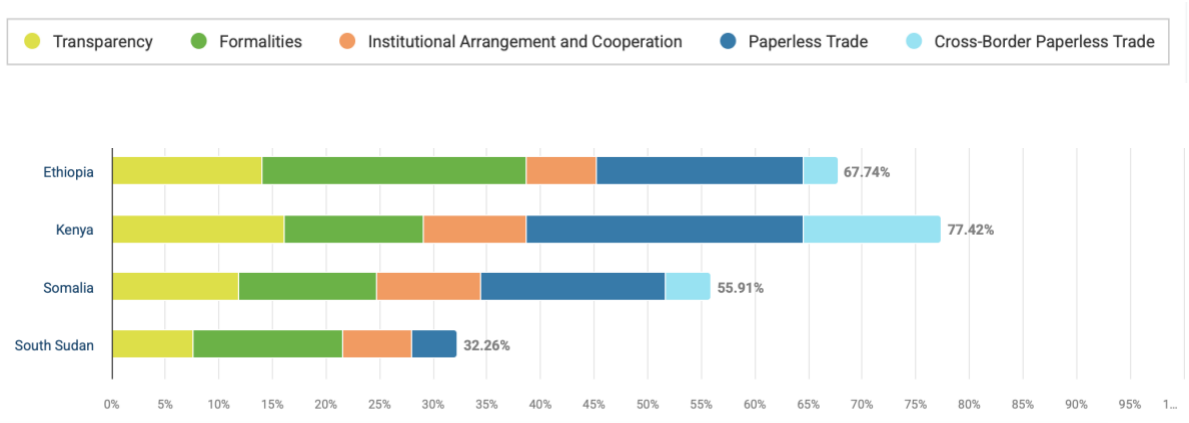
Addressing NTBs therefore requires not only digital reporting tools but also stronger institutional coordination and effective follow-up mechanisms. This includes enhanced collaboration between National Monitoring Committees on NTBs and National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFCs), ensuring that reported barriers are systematically assessed, prioritized, and addressed through coordinated action. Where such structures do not yet exist, they should be therefore be established and provided with the necessary resources and technical capacity to operate effectively. Equally important is strengthening institutional capabilities to identify, investigate, and resolve reported barriers, while ensuring timely feedback to traders and business associations throughout the resolution process.

6. Limited transparency and accessibility of trade-related regulatory information

Beyond procedural barriers, regulatory divergence and limited transparency of trade-related regulations continue to generate substantial costs for cross-border trade throughout the region. Traders and transport operators often have limited visibility of the regulatory requirements applicable in neighbouring countries because information is scattered across multiple institutions; trade information portals are lacking or not regularly updated; and official guidance is frequently available only in national languages.

The 2023 UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation further indicates that implementation of transparency measures (including the online publication of trade regulations and advance notification of regulatory changes) as well as cross-border paperless trade, remain weak in several HoAI countries (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Trade Facilitation and Paperless Trade in HoAI participating countries



Source: 2023 UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation

**data referred to Djibouti is not available*

This lack of transparency increases compliance uncertainty, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises operating across borders. In addition, differences in axle-load limits, vehicle dimensions, licensing procedures, cross-border vehicle entry and transit requirements, and technical standards, reduce the efficiency of regional road transport. As a result, transport operators may be required either to operate below optimal payload capacity in order to comply with the most restrictive regulations applicable along a corridor, or to undertake cargo transshipment at border crossings where vehicles authorized in one country cannot continue operating legally in the neighbouring nation. These additional operations increase transport costs, extend transit times, and raise the risk of cargo damage and losses due to repeated handling. Likewise, the absence of mutual recognition of weighbridge certificates frequently results in repeated vehicle weighing along regional transport corridors, causing unnecessary delays, increasing compliance costs, and creating additional opportunities for discretionary enforcement and informal payments.

Limited transparency and accessibility of trade-related regulatory information remain important obstacles to cross-border trade in the Horn of Africa. In several HoAI participating States, traders and logistics operators face difficulties in identifying and understanding the legal, regulatory, and procedural requirements applicable to imports, exports, transit, and transport operations. This situation is compounded by the fact that trade-related information is often dispersed across multiple government institutions, not regularly updated, or unavailable through centralized trade information portals. As a result, businesses spend significant time and resources obtaining reliable information, increasing compliance uncertainty and the risk of unintentional non-compliance. These constraints disproportionately affect small and medium-sized enterprises, which often lack the administrative capacity to navigate complex regulatory environments. Many are therefore obliged to rely on customs clearing agents, freight forwarders, or other intermediaries to interpret requirements, complete documentation, and ensure compliance with border procedures. While such intermediaries provide valuable support, excessive reliance on them increases transaction costs and can create additional barriers for smaller operators seeking to participate in formal cross-border trade.

Language barriers further complicate access to trade-related information, particularly in border areas where traders operate across jurisdictions with different official languages and administrative practices. Limited availability of regulatory information in languages commonly used by traders, combined with differences in terminology and documentation requirements, can create additional misunderstandings, increase dependence on intermediaries, and discourage smaller operators from engaging in formal cross-border trade.

Transparency and predictability are fundamental principles of modern trade facilitation. Easy access to accurate and up-to-date regulatory information enables traders to understand applicable requirements before goods are shipped, estimate compliance costs, prepare the necessary documentation, and anticipate border procedures. Greater transparency also reduces discretionary decision-making, enhances legal certainty, shortens clearance times, and lowers the transaction costs associated with international trade.

Addressing this issue requires HoAI participating States to strengthen the publication, accessibility, and dissemination of trade- and transport-related information, including, where appropriate, in widely used regional and international languages. Information should cover key requirements affecting cross-border operations, customs procedures, SPS and technical regulations, transport requirements and licensing procedures applicable at specific border crossings, with the relevany fees and charges. Improving access to accurate and up-to-date information would not only facilitate compliance and reduce transaction costs but also enhance regulatory transparency, strengthen investor confidence, and contribute to more predictable and efficient cross-border trade across the region.[22]

7. Cumbersome and uncoordinated border management procedures

Border posts in the Horn of Africa face significant operational constraints resulting from a combination of inadequate physical infrastructure, limited digital connectivity and fragmented institutional arrangements and insufficient coordination among border agencies. Many border crossings continue to operate through sequential and duplicated procedures, where Customs, immigration, standards, SPS, and other control agencies act independently rather than through coordinated processes. These inefficiencies increase clearance times, raise compliance costs, and reduce the predictability of cross-border trade.

The establishment of One Stop Border Posts (OSBPs) represents an important instrument for addressing these challenges by enabling neighbouring countries to share facilities, coordinate controls, and reduce duplication of border procedures. However, the implementation of such facilities along internal HoAI borders remains limited. The Moyale OSBP between Kenya and

[22] World Customs Organization, “Transparency and Predictability Guidelines”, July 2016.

Ethiopia is currently the only formally designated OSBP operating along an internal HoAI border. Supported by the African Development Bank, construction was completed on the Kenyan side in 2016 and on the Ethiopian side in 2017, but its performance demonstrates that physical infrastructure alone does not automatically generate efficient, coordinated, and seamless border operations. Recent assessments, including a January 2026 evaluation commissioned by TradeMark Africa, [23] indicate that the effectiveness of the Moyale OSBP remains constrained by incomplete operational integration. Border agencies continue to rely largely on separate national systems, with limited interoperability and no electronic exchange of information, resulting in repeated document verification and duplication of controls. Differences in procedures, working arrangements, administrative requirements, and regulatory frameworks continue to affect the fluidity of operations in Moyale. In addition, challenges related to documentation requirements, administrative fees, and differences in axle-load regulations contribute to continued reliance on manual cargo transshipment, increasing handling costs and transit times for businesses. Although a joint operational manual was adopted in September 2021, the practical implementation of integrated procedures and coordinated agency operations remains an ongoing process.

The experience of Moyale illustrates a broader lesson for border modernization across the Horn of Africa: border infrastructure investments must be accompanied by equally strong investments in soft infrastructure. Effective OSBPs require not only joint facilities, but also harmonized procedures, interoperable information systems, mutual recognition arrangements, coordinated working and risk management practices, and clear institutional responsibilities among participating agencies. Without these complementary measures, modern border facilities risk functioning as upgraded versions of traditional border posts, with limited impact on trade efficiency.

Moving towards more integrated border management in the Horn of Africa therefore requires a transition from infrastructure-centred approaches towards governance models that treat borders as shared economic interfaces rather than control points. Priority actions include strengthening border coordination mechanisms, establishing joint border management committees, expanding risk-based inspections, improving digital connectivity between border agencies, and progressively integrating border posts into wider trade facilitation ecosystems, including national single windows, electronic certification systems, and regional data exchange platforms. These measures are essential to ensure that investments in border infrastructure translate into faster, more predictable, and more inclusive regional trade.

8. Fragmented digital trade systems and limited interoperability

Digital transformation offers significant opportunities to reduce trade costs, improve transparency, and enhance the predictability of cross-border transactions in the Horn of Africa. Over recent years, HoAI participating States have made important progress in automating trade-related processes, including customs declarations, trade, transport and transit licenses, phytosanitary certificates, certificates of origin, and other regulatory procedures. However, the regional impact of these reforms remains constrained by fragmented digital ecosystems, limited interoperability between national platforms, and the absence of comprehensive mechanisms for cross-border exchange of trade-related data.

The HoAI Digital Trade Gap Assessment[24] highlights that the region's challenge is no longer simply the availability of digital solutions, but rather the ability of different systems and institutions to communicate with each other. While several countries have introduced electronic customs systems, National Single Windows, Port Community Systems and sector-specific information systems, these solutions have generally developed within national

[23] Tripleline And Horn Economic And Social Policy Institute (2026). Consultancy For Implementation of Trade Facilitation Initiatives At Tog Wajaale And Moyale. Inception Report. Final Draft. January 2026.

[24] HOAI (2024). Digitial Trade Gap Assessment, April 2024.

institutional frameworks and follow different technological, regulatory, and operational approaches. As a result, digitalization has often reduced paper-based processes within countries without yet achieving seamless information flows across borders.

This fragmentation affects the efficiency of regional trade corridors, where a single shipment may involve multiple administrations, including Customs, immigration, standards authorities, SPS agencies, transport regulators, ports, and logistics operators. Without interoperable systems, traders and government agencies continue to exchange information through separate platforms or manual procedures, requiring repeated submission and verification of documents. The result is that electronic systems may replicate some of the inefficiencies of paper-based processes rather than eliminate them.

Several priority gaps affect digital trade integration in the Horn of Africa. These include limited agreements and technical arrangements for cross-border data exchange, differences in digital maturity among countries, incomplete legal frameworks for electronic transactions, limited mutual recognition of electronic documents, cybersecurity constraints, and insufficient institutional capacity to manage increasingly complex digital trade environments. These challenges are particularly relevant for border agencies, where effective integration requires not only compatible technologies but also common standards, trusted data-sharing arrangements, and clearly defined governance mechanisms.

Progress is nevertheless visible in several areas. Kenya has developed a relatively advanced National Electronic Single Window, which integrates multiple government agencies involved in trade clearance and regulatory approvals. Djibouti and Kenya, have invested in digital platforms supporting port and logistics operations through Port Community Systems, improving information exchange among stakeholders involved in maritime and inland logistics. Ethiopia has continued to expand electronic customs and trade facilitation solutions, while regional initiatives within the EAC (of which Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia are Partner States) have promoted cooperation on electronic documents, digital certificates, and information exchange. These experiences demonstrate that digital technologies can significantly enhance trade efficiency when combined with appropriate legal frameworks, institutional coordination, interoperability arrangements, and the capacity of agencies and users to effectively operate such systems.

However, the next phase of digital trade facilitation requires moving beyond isolated national platforms towards interoperable regional systems. This requires establishing common data standards, developing secure mechanisms for cross-border information exchange, strengthening legal recognition of electronic documents and signatures, promoting mutual recognition of electronic certificates, and aligning cybersecurity and data protection frameworks. The HoAI Digital Policy Matrix (2025), adopted to support regional digital integration among HoAI countries, identifies cross-border data flows, cybersecurity, electronic communications, and digital governance as key areas requiring continued cooperation among these nations.

Digital inclusion is also essential. Small-scale traders, transport operators, and SMEs often face barriers in accessing digital trade platforms due to limited digital literacy, inadequate connectivity in remote border areas, language constraints, and the cost of digital services. Digital transformation needs therefore to be accompanied by user-oriented solutions, including simplified interfaces, multilingual information services, trader training, and support mechanisms that enable smaller economic actors to participate in formal regional trade.

For the Horn of Africa, digital infrastructure should be considered a core component of regional connectivity. Physical infrastructure such as roads, ports, and border facilities creates the pathways through which trade flows, but interoperable digital systems provide the intelligence layer that connects these networks, enabling the efficient exchange of information, reducing friction, and allowing regional trade corridors to function as integrated systems rather than disconnected national segments. Strengthening digital interoperability is therefore essential for transforming economic corridors into integrated trade systems capable of supporting regional value chains and more inclusive participation in cross-border commerce.

9. Weak transit facilitation frameworks and corridor governance

The geography of the Horn of Africa makes efficient transit systems a fundamental requirement for regional trade integration. Two HoAI active participating countries (Ethiopia and South Sudan) are landlocked and depend on access to neighbouring ports and transit corridors, while Djibouti, Kenya and Somalia serve as critical gateways connecting the region to global markets. However, the economic potential of these corridors is constrained not only by physical infrastructure gaps but also by fragmented transit arrangements, limited interoperability of customs and transport information systems, and weak coordination among the institutions responsible for customs, transport, and border management.

Although HoAI countries have adopted various bilateral, regional, and continental instruments to facilitate transit, implementation remains uneven and often fragmented. In practice, transport operators moving goods across borders continue to face multiple administrative requirements, different documentation procedures, repeated controls, and varying regulatory obligations. These constraints reduce predictability, increase transit times and logistics costs, and limit the ability of regional corridors to function as integrated supply chains.

A key challenge is the limited harmonization and mutual recognition of transit procedures across countries. Differences in customs transit regimes, vehicle licensing requirements, insurance arrangements, axle-load limits, inspection procedures, and enforcement practices create additional burdens for operators engaged in cross-border transport. In addition, the limited interoperability of electronic systems prevents customs administrations from efficiently exchanging information and monitoring shipments across borders, with compliant traders that are unable to fully benefit from risk-based controls and simplified procedures.

Several HoAI countries have introduced important innovations to strengthen transit management through electronic cargo tracking and digital customs solutions. Ethiopia and Kenya, for example, have implemented Electronic Cargo Tracking Systems (ECTS) to improve real-time shipment monitoring, strengthen transit security, and reduce reliance on manual controls. Kenya's ECTS, which operates along the Northern Corridor and is integrated into the Regional Electronic Cargo Tracking System (RECTS) used by Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, has already contributed to improving cargo visibility and transit time between the Port of Mombasa and inland destinations.

Djibouti is also deploying an ECTS through an EU-funded project implemented by TradeMark Africa. Currently in the testing phase, the system extends digital transit monitoring across the corridors linking the Port of Djibouti to Ethiopia through the use of electronic cargo seals and geofenced monitoring zones, enhancing cargo visibility and supporting more secure and efficient transit operations. Recognising the highly unbalanced nature of corridor traffic (where cargo movements from the Port of Djibouti to Ethiopia substantially exceed those in the opposite direction), the project also incorporates rapid intervention units responsible for retrieving electronic seals that accumulate at inland border locations and returning them at Djibouti ports for reuse.

Beyond the RECTS example, electronic cargo tracking solutions in the Horn of Africa remain largely national and have not yet evolved into a fully interoperable regional transit management framework. The challenge is therefore not only the deployment of digital technologies, but also ensuring cross-border interoperability, mutual recognition of electronic controls, and coordinated customs procedures that allow transit systems to function seamlessly across multiple jurisdictions.

The challenge extends beyond the adoption of individual digital tools or bilateral agreements. Effective transit facilitation requires stronger corridor governance structures capable of coordinating policies, systems, and operational practices across countries. Priority actions include progressive harmonization of transit procedures, expansion and interoperability of electronic transit systems, mutual recognition of customs controls and guarantees, harmonization of cross-border vehicle permits, and enhanced cooperation among customs administrations and other border agencies. Corridor governance mechanisms should also systematically engage private-sector actors (including transport associations, freight

forwarders, logistics providers, and traders) to ensure that reforms address practical constraints faced by these operators.

Improved transit facilitation is also essential for the development of regional value chains. Modern production networks depend on the predictable movement of raw materials, intermediate inputs and finished goods across multiple jurisdictions. By reducing delays and uncertainty along trade corridors, HoAI countries can strengthen regional supply chains, support industrial and agricultural transformation, and increase the ability of firms to participate in opportunities created by the AfCFTA and other regional trade arrangements to which HoAI nations participate, such as COMESA and the EAC.

III. GOALS

Based on the baseline assessment presented in Section II, this part defines the strategic outcomes (referred as “Goals”) required to advance the Vision Statement and guide the transformation of the Horn of Africa’s trade facilitation environment.

Each Goal responds directly to the structural constraints, institutional gaps, and operational challenges identified in the preceding analysis, translating the diagnostic findings into a coherent framework of priorities and areas for collective action.

Together, the 14 Goals outlined in this roadmap provide the strategic direction for transforming fragmented trade systems into a more integrated, predictable, and efficient regional trade facilitation architecture. Within these 14 Goals, 5 have been identified by participating countries as having particularly high strategic relevance and as priorities for short-term operationalization. These priority Goals are highlighted in green and marked with an ⚠ symbol throughout the Roadmap, making them readily identifiable as the areas where early collective action is expected to generate the greatest strategic value.

1. Overview of Strategic Goals

Goal 1 ⚠	**Strengthen collaboration mechanisms for identification, reporting and resolution of NTBs in the HoA through the establishment of a permanent regional coordination platform that facilitates structured dialogue among governments, regional institutions and the private sector.**

Non-Tariff Barriers are among the main constraints to the efficient movement of goods in the Horn of Africa, as they increase transaction costs, reduce predictability, and limit the competitiveness of regional trade. Unlike tariffs, NTBs are often difficult to identify and resolve because they are embedded in administrative procedures, regulatory requirements, institutional practices, or operational constraints that are rarely captured through formal reporting systems. Their dispersed and often hidden nature makes effective monitoring and coordinated action particularly challenging.

Most HoAI participating States have established National Monitoring Committees (NMCs) on NTBs, [25] bringing together relevant public institutions and private-sector representatives to identify, monitor, and support the resolution of reported barriers. In addition, National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFCs) [26] are active in all HoAI active participating countries to coordinate the implementation of trade facilitation reforms under the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. However, the effectiveness of these mechanisms remains constrained by uneven institutional capacity, limited dedicated resources, insufficient awareness of existing reporting channels, limited private-sector engagement, and weak coordination among institutions responsible for trade, customs, transport, standards, SPS, and border management. In the case of NTFCs, recent studies show that their establishment does not automatically translate

[25] NMCs bring together relevant government institutions and private-sector representatives to identify, investigate, coordinate, and monitor the resolution of NTBs. Under Annex 5 of the AfCFTA Protocol on Trade in Goods, all State Parties are required to establish NMCs and National Focal Points. While NMCs provide the institutional platform for reviewing reported barriers and coordinating their resolution, National Focal Points act as the main interface between national authorities and the AfCFTA NTB reporting, monitoring, and elimination mechanism. NMCs have been established in all active HoAI participating countries except Djibouti, where this committee has not yet been formally designated. In Ethiopia, the functions of the NMC are performed by the NTFC, thereby integrating NTB monitoring within the broader trade facilitation coordination framework.

[26] All HoAI participating States have established NTFCs. In South Sudan, the Committee is operational and its members have already been designated, although its legal establishment remains pending until the issuance of the ministerial order formally constituting this body.

into effective coordination capacity. Their performance depends on the existence of clear mandates, adequate resources, regular high-level engagement, and effective mechanisms for monitoring progress and ensuring accountability among participating institutions. Where these conditions are absent, such committees risk becoming primarily consultative platforms with limited capacity to drive and oversee the implementation of complex, cross-cutting trade facilitation reforms, particularly when these reforms require coordination beyond national borders.

Addressing these limitations requires moving beyond fragmented national approaches towards stronger regional coordination. In this context, the establishment of an **HoAI Regional Trade Facilitation Committee (HoAI-RTFC)** provides an opportunity to create a permanent regional governance mechanism that links national trade facilitation structures with each other and supports collective action on shared trade facilitation priorities. The HoAI-RTFC would provide a platform for National Trade Facilitation Committees and other relevant institutions to jointly identify regional bottlenecks, formulate coordinated initiatives, exchange experiences and technical expertise, and monitor the implementation of regional reforms aimed at improving cross-border procedures and corridor performance.

Strengthening institutional coordination must be complemented by improving the mechanisms through which traders, transport operators, and other users of regional corridors can identify and report obstacles affecting cross-border transactions. The limited number of formally reported NTBs in the region indicates gaps in awareness, accessibility, and effectiveness of existing reporting mechanisms.

Within this mandate, the HoAI-RTFC will provide a regional forum for addressing NTBs with cross-border or wider Horn of Africa implications. It will facilitate structured dialogue among competent authorities and private-sector stakeholders, support the development of common approaches for NTB identification, monitoring, and resolution, and provide recommendations to HoAI Ministers responsible for Finance and Trade on persistent barriers requiring coordinated policy responses. By bringing together national institutions and regional stakeholders, the HoAI-RTFC will help address trade frictions that cannot be effectively resolved through isolated national actions, promoting regulatory alignment, improved institutional coordination, and more predictable cross-border trade.

Beyond NTB resolution, **the HoAI-RTFC will serve as the main regional governance mechanism for overseeing the implementation of this Roadmap**. It will monitor progress against agreed objectives, facilitate coordination among HoAI participating States and DPs, and assess whether implemented reforms are generating measurable improvements in trade facilitation performance. Through regular monitoring, stakeholder dialogue, and evidence-based analysis, the Committee will identify emerging challenges and provide **recommendations** to HoAI Ministers responsible for Trade and Finance on policy adjustments, complementary regional reforms, and additional measures required to achieve the Roadmap's goals. This adaptive governance function will ensure that the Roadmap remains a dynamic framework capable of responding to evolving regional priorities and implementation realities.

The HoAI-RTFC will also strengthen transparency and accountability in the implementation of trade facilitation initiatives supported under the HoAI. It will monitor the delivery of technical assistance programmes, facilitate coordination among DPs, and support awareness and sensitization activities targeting private-sector stakeholders that benefit from regional trade facilitation reforms. A **regional trade facilitation scorecard**, maintained through the HoAI website, will provide a practical tool for tracking commitments, monitoring implementation progress, and showcasing achievements by HoAI countries against the objectives of the Roadmap. An additional strategic function of the HoAI-RTFC will be to ensure that regional trade facilitation initiatives are grounded in national priorities and operational realities. By providing a structured platform for dialogue among participating States and private-sector stakeholders, the Committee will promote a demand-driven approach to project identification and design. This will help ensure that investments and technical assistance respond to evidence-based needs identified by countries, while improving the alignment, sustainability,

and impact of development partner support. Over time, the HoAI-RTFC could evolve into a broader regional platform for private-sector engagement, consistent with the objectives of the HoAI Private Sector Engagement Roadmap (Goal n. 1). Such an evolution would require a review of the Committee's composition, governance arrangements, and working groups to ensure more systematic representation of private-sector actors and to establish dedicated mechanisms for structured dialogue between public institutions, businesses, and other stakeholders involved in regional trade and investment.

The effective operationalization of the HoAI-RTFC will require sustained political commitment, institutional support, and technical assistance from DPs. Dedicated Terms of Reference (TOR) should define its mandate, governance structure, responsibilities, and working modalities, while specialized technical expertise will support this body in the analysis of trade facilitation constraints, monitoring of reform implementation, stakeholder engagement, and preparation of evidence-based recommendations or project concept notes for HoAI Ministers responsible for Finance and Trade. Given the current composition of the HoAI, with five active participating countries, the Committee should maintain a lean and operational structure to ensure effective decision-making, manageable coordination arrangements, and sustainable financial and technical support. Its membership should therefore be limited ideally to **two designated members** from each participating country: one representative from the public sector (preferably the national coordinator of the NTFC or equivalent national trade facilitation coordination mechanism), and one representative from the private sector. These representatives would not replace existing national structures, but rather serve as institutional focal points responsible for ensuring that national priorities, implementation challenges, and private-sector concerns are effectively consolidated and transmitted to the regional level. They would also facilitate communication between the regional platform and domestic stakeholders, ensuring that regional discussions are informed by national realities and that agreed regional actions are effectively followed up at country level.

Goal 2 ⚠	**Implement Simplified Trade Regimes at HoAI borders at HoAI borders to facilitate legitimate small-scale cross-border trade, with particular attention to supporting women traders, who represent a significant share of informal commerce in the region.**

Several African Regional Economic Communities (RECs), including COMESA, the East African Community (EAC), and SADC, have developed Simplified Trade Regimes (STRs) to reduce compliance costs faced by small-scale cross-border traders. These regimes typically combine simplified customs declarations, reduced documentation requirements, preferential treatment for low-value consignments, and simplified origin declaration or certification procedures. The COMESA STR, for example, is based on four main instruments: a simplified customs declaration, a simplified certificate of origin, a common list of eligible products, and a maximum consignment threshold currently set at USD 2,000.

STRs respond to a fundamental challenge affecting small-scale traders across Africa: formal trade procedures are often designed for larger commercial operators and impose costs that are disproportionate to the value of small consignments. Documentation requirements, customs procedures, standards and SPS compliance obligations, and border delays can make formal channels less attractive than informal alternatives. STRs therefore aim not only to facilitate trade, but also to create incentives for traders to progressively transition into the formal economy by making compliance simpler, faster, and less costly.

However, duty exemptions, reduced tariffs, or procedural simplifications alone may not be sufficient to trigger the formalization of crossborder small-scale trade. Traders decide whether to use formal channels based on the overall cost, convenience, and reliability of the trading process. In HoAI participating states, many small-scale traders continue to face non-tariff obstacles, including limited access to information, complex or burdensome registration and licensing procedures, unpredictable compliance procedures (including testing, inspection, and certification requirements), inadequate access to finance and payment systems, and limited

understanding of applicable regulatory requirements. A successful STR should therefore be conceived as a comprehensive support mechanism rather than a trade facilitation measure alone, combining simplified procedures with accessible information and advisory services, capacity building, transparent and predictable border operations, and adequate border facilities for joint testing and inspection. In line with established STR and customs practices, this also requires clear linkages between simplified customs procedures and access to designated cross-border markets, where traders can sell goods only after completing the applicable customs formalities and presenting evidence of declaration, such as a simplified declaration form, receipt, or electronic reference.

By reducing compliance costs while increasing benefits associated with engaging in formal trade, STRs can create stronger incentives for traders to progressively transition into formal regional trade networks. In this context, the HoAI Roadmap proposes the development of STRs at key border posts where informality levels are particularly high, as a mechanism to support the formalization of small-scale cross-border trade. The regime will allow eligible traders dealing with consignments below a threshold agreed by participating countries to benefit from a range of support measures, including Trade Information Desks (TIDs) and business support or incubation services aimed at strengthening traders' capacity to operate in formal markets. The COMESA and EAC STR frameworks provide useful reference models for HoAI countries in designing and operationalizing such arrangements. Since all active HoAI participating States are members of one or both of these Regional Economic Communities, these existing frameworks provide an institutional foundation that can facilitate the development of compatible approaches. However, STRs will need to be adapted to the specific characteristics of the border locations where they are implemented, taking into account the profile of traders, the nature of goods traded, existing market dynamics, and the security context of each border area. In more sensitive locations, implementation may require enhanced monitoring, risk-based controls, and closer coordination among relevant authorities to ensure that trade facilitation objectives are achieved while maintaining appropriate security safeguards. The detailed implementation modalities should therefore be established through dedicated bilateral arrangements between the concerned countries.

Beyond simplifying customs procedures, these STR frameworks should incorporate mechanisms aimed at improving the overall trading environment. COMESA's Regulations on Minimum Standards for the Treatment of Small-Scale Cross-Border Traders provide an example of such an approach, as it promotes transparency, protecting traders' rights, improving dialogue with border officials, and encouraging awareness programmes targeting traders and enforcement agencies. Similarly, Trade Information Desks should provide practical assistance to traders by helping them understand and comply with border procedures, documentation requirements, and other applicable regulatory obligations.

By reducing the costs of compliance while increasing the benefits of formal participation, the STR can help expand the formal trade base, improve trade statistics, strengthen border governance, and enable small-scale traders (particularly women and youth who represent a significant share of cross-border commerce) to participate more effectively in regional markets and AfCFTA opportunities.

Goal 3 ⚠	**Develop a regional Portal that connects national Trade Information Portals and other relevant national databases, providing traders in the HoA with a single, interoperable access point to accurate and up-to-date information on cross-border trade procedures.**

Limited access to reliable, timely, and easily understandable regulatory information is another significant obstacle to cross-border trade in the Horn of Africa. Traders and transport operators frequently face difficulties in identifying the procedures, documentation requirements, fees, standards, SPS obligations, and transport regulations applicable when moving goods across borders in the region. Addressing this challenge requires not only the development of interconnected Trade Information Portals, but also the deployment of user-friendly digital

solutions, including mobile applications, that can provide traders (particularly small-scale crossborder traders and small and medium sized enterprises) with easily accessible, real-time information on border procedures, requirements, and applicable trade regimes. By bringing regulatory information closer to users, such tools can reduce uncertainty, improve compliance, and facilitate more efficient and inclusive participation in regional trade.

Although several HoAI participating countries have developed national Trade Information Portals (TIPs)[27] or equivalent platforms providing information on import, export, and transit procedures, these systems remain largely disconnected and provide information only on national requirements. As a result, traders operating across borders are required to consult multiple sources, often managed by different institutions, with varying formats, levels of detail, and frequency of updates. In some cases, regulatory information is available only in national languages, further limiting accessibility for foreign traders and transport operators. This fragmentation reduces transparency, increases compliance costs, and discurages trades from engaging in regional trade.

To address this challenge, HoAI countries should establish a multilingual **Regional Trade Information Portal** that serves as a single access point connecting existing national Trade Information Portals, customs websites, and other relevant databases containing information on trade, transport, and border procedures. The regional portal should build on existing national experiences, such as Kenya's InfoTrade portal, which provides a step-by-step guidance to the requirements to import/export commodities in Kenya, tailored to specific border locations. The objective of the regional platform should not be to replace national systems, but rather to create a regional interoperability layer that allows traders, logistics operators, and other stakeholders to access up-to-date information on cross-border procedures through one single regional platform. Specifically, the portal should provide practical information on customs procedures, import, export and transit requirements, required documentation, applicable fees and charges, border operating procedures, border agencies working hours, transport regulations, SPS and technical standards requirements, and contact details of relevant authorities. A dedicated component of the portal should focus on STRs, providing small-scale traders with clear and accessible information on the regulations, procedures and benefits associated with these trade facilitation tools at border posts where they are implemented. The STR module should include information on eligible products, applicable thresholds, trader registration requirements, simplified customs procedures, required documentation, participating border crossings, and the rights and obligations of small-scale traders. By making STR information easily available, the portal would help reduce uncertainty among traders and create stronger incentives for them to use formal trade channels.

The regional trade portal should be designed with the realities of the region in mind, particularly the widespread reliance on mobile connectivity among small-scale traders and transport operators. A mobile-friendly interface, complemented where appropriate by applications, SMS notifications, or other low-bandwidth digital solutions, would expand access beyond large businesses and professional logistics operators. Experiences such as the Sauti Africa platform, which uses digital tools to provide small-scale traders with access to trade information, market opportunities, and support services through mobile-based solutions, demonstrate the potential of user-oriented approaches adapted to the needs and constraints of informal and small-scale cross-border traders. Building on such experiences, the regional portal could provide practical guidance, frequently asked questions, and links to Trade Information Desks or advisory services established at border crossings, helping traders better understand requirements and navigate formal trade procedures.

[27] This is the case, for instance, in Kenya, Somalia and South Sudan, which have established Trade Information Portals. By contrast, Ethiopia and Djibouti do not currently have dedicated TIPs in place, highlighting the need for complementary mechanisms to ensure regional coverage and access to consistent trade procedure information across the Horn of Africa.

The HoAI-RTFC should provide strategic oversight for the development and implementation of the portal, ensuring coordination among participating countries and alignment with regional trade facilitation priorities. Customs and relevant trade authorities should remain responsible for validating and updating national regulatory information, while DPs supporting the HoAI could provide technical assistance for system design, interoperability, capacity building, and long-term sustainability.

By transforming fragmented national information sources into an integrated regional knowledge platform, the HoAI Regional Trade Information Portal would significantly improve transparency and predictability along regional corridors. It would reduce information-related trade costs, support compliance by traders and transport operators, strengthen the formalization of small-scale trade, and contribute to the creation of more efficient and connected regional markets under the AfCFTA framework.

Goal 4	**Conduct joint Time Release Studies (TRS++) at priority border posts, along key trade corridors, or at the regional level among HoAI countries, and develop joint bilateral or regional action plans to implement the recommendations emerging from these assessments.**

Time Release Studies (TRSs) are internationally recognized trade facilitation instruments recommended by the World Customs Organization (WCO) to measure the actual time required for the release of goods, identify procedural bottlenecks, and support the design of targeted corrective measures to improve border performance. The WCO TRS methodology provides a structured framework for assessing the time elapsed between the arrival of goods and their release, while identifying the contribution of different procedures, agencies, and control processes to overall clearance times.

While TRSs have traditionally been conducted at the national level, their application has increasingly expanded to bilateral, regional, and corridor levels in recognition that trade delays often result from interactions between multiple jurisdictions, agencies, and control points. Regional and corridor-based TRSs provide a more comprehensive understanding of supply chain constraints and help identify bottlenecks that cannot be effectively addressed through isolated national interventions. This approach is consistent with the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, which encourages Members to periodically measure and publish average release times, and with Annex 4 on Trade Facilitation of the AfCFTA Protocol on Trade in Goods, which recognizes TRSs as an important tool for assessing and improving border and corridor performance.

For the Horn of Africa, corridor-based TRSs are particularly relevant given the region's dependence on a few trade routes involving seaports, inland clearance facilities, border crossings, and multiple regulatory authorities. Addressing delays along these corridors therefore requires coordinated assessments and joint solutions involving the countries and agencies concerned.

The HoAI region would therefore benefit from the establishment of joint TRSs at strategic border posts and along key regional corridors. Such studies would provide a common evidence base to identify bottlenecks, delays, costs, and NTBs affecting trade flows, guiding national policymakers in developing coordinated action plans among HoAI participating countries. International and regional experience demonstrates the value of corridor-level approaches. In the Asia-Pacific region, for instance, Australia and New Zealand have conducted a bilateral Trans-Tasman Time Release Study to assess the efficiency of import and export clearance procedures between the two countries, identify procedural bottlenecks affecting the movement of goods across their respective customs territories, and develop targeted measures to improve the predictability and efficiency of bilateral trade flows. In East Africa, the Northern Corridor TRS undertaken oin 2016 by the Northern Corridor Transit and Transport Coordination Authority (NCTTCA) assessed cargo movements along one of the region's most important trade routes, covering segments in Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan,

Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. More recently, in 2025, SADC conducted a TRS along the North-South Corridor, analysing delays and bottlenecks affecting trade flows from the Port of Durban through major border crossings, including Kasumbalesa, Beitbridge, and Chirundu.

For the Horn of Africa, **a regular programme of joint TRSs** could serve as a critical regional performance-monitoring mechanism. However, such studies should go beyond measuring customs release times and assess the broader efficiency of strategic corridors by examining delays at border crossings, interactions between Customs and other regulatory agencies, documentary and procedural duplications, constraints affecting small-scale and informal traders and gaps in digital and energy connectivity. Regular publication of TRS results, combined with structured follow-up mechanisms, would enable HoAI countries to monitor progress, prioritize investments and reforms, and strengthen accountability for improving the predictability and competitiveness of regional trade corridors.

Indeed, given the complexity of trade barriers affecting the Horn of Africa, traditional TRSs alone may not provide a sufficiently comprehensive picture. This is why the adoption of TRS+ and TRS++ methodologies would be particularly relevant. The TRS+ methodology expands the analysis beyond border clearance processes by assessing the impact of regulatory procedures conducted "away from the border", including the time required to obtain licences, permits, certificates, and other authorizations issued by government agencies other than Customs. TRS+ therefore help to identify process improvements and institutional reforms needed to enhance the performance of all agencies involved in cross-border trade. Early examples of TRS+ applications in Africa include studies conducted in countries such as Eswatini, Lesotho and Zambia. Building on this approach, the TRS++ methodology introduces an even broader corridor perspective, extending the analysis to systemic factors affecting the movement of goods along regional corridors. These include institutional coordination mechanisms, digital connectivity gaps, and energy constraints that may limit the effective deployment of digital trade facilitation solutions at border posts. By capturing the full range of factors influencing the circulation of goods, TRS++ provides a more comprehensive evidence base for designing coordinated regional reforms and improving corridor performance.

Goal 5	**Establish mutual recognition of cross-border road transport permits among HoAI participating States to facilitate the free circulation of trucks and reduce administrative barriers along regional corridors.**

The absence of harmonized rules and mutual recognition arrangements for cross-border road transport permits remains a significant obstacle to the efficient movement of goods across the Horn of Africa. Currently, transport operators registered in one HoAI participating State are often required to obtain additional permits from the authorities of neighbouring countries before entering their territory to deliver or collect cargo, even when a valid permit has already been issued by the competent authority in the country of registration. This duplication of procedures increases administrative burdens, extends transit times, raises transport costs, and creates uncertainty for logistics operators.

To address this challenge, HoAI participating States should establish bilateral agreements and protocols providing for the mutual recognition of road transport permits issued by the country of origin of the shipment or the country where the vehicle is registered. Under such arrangements, a truck legally authorized to undertake international transport operations in its home country would be permitted to circulate in the neighbouring country without the need for additional national permits, subject to agreed safety, technical, insurance, and compliance requirements.

Such a framework would represent an important step towards creating a more integrated regional road transport market and improving the efficiency of strategic corridors. It would reduce unnecessary regulatory fragmentation, facilitate greater competition among transport operators, improve vehicle utilization and backhaul opportunities, and contribute to lowering

logistics costs for traders. Achieving this objective would require a phased approach. As a first step, HoAI participating States should undertake a comparative assessment of existing national road transport regulations, permit regimes, and technical requirements to identify areas of convergence and divergence. This assessment should provide the basis for developing a common regional framework defining the categories of transport operations covered, eligibility criteria, vehicle and operator requirements, insurance obligations, safety standards, and enforcement responsibilities. Based on this framework, neighbouring countries sharing priority trade corridors should negotiate bilateral or corridor-based mutual recognition agreements for road transport permits. These agreements should establish clear procedures for recognizing permits issued by the competent authority in the country of registration, while maintaining agreed safeguards related to road safety, vehicle standards, insurance coverage, and compliance with applicable transport regulations.

Effective implementation would further require the establishment of supporting institutional and digital mechanisms, including designated focal points among transport authorities, procedures for information exchange and verification of permits, and, where feasible, interoperable digital systems allowing authorities to confirm the validity of transport authorizations in real time. Joint monitoring mechanisms involving transport authorities, customs agencies, and private-sector representatives should also be established to identify implementation challenges and progressively refine the arrangements.

Goal 6	**Establish interoperable Electronic Cargo Tracking System (ECTS) frameworks for end-to-end monitoring of goods movements along strategic trade corridors in the Horn of Africa.**

The limited visibility of cargo movements across borders remains a significant constraint to efficient transit operations and corridor performance in the Horn of Africa. Electronic Cargo Tracking Systems (ECTSs), based on technologies such as GPS, GSM, RFID, Wi-Fi, or combinations thereof, provide Customs and other relevant authorities with real-time information on the location and status of goods in transit, helping to ensure cargo integrity, reduce risks of diversion, and improve the predictability of cross-border logistics operations.

Several HoAI participating States have already introduced ECTS solutions, although their coverage, interoperability, and operational effectiveness remain uneven. Kenya, for example, has implemented or is in the process of expanding geofencing capabilities along key corridors, including the Mombasa–Nairobi, Nairobi–Moyale, and Nairobi–Nadapal routes. These systems enable Customs authorities to monitor the movement of transit cargo between the Port of Mombasa and various destinations in landlocked countries of the Great Lakes region, improving cargo visibility, compliance monitoring, and risk management. Ethiopia has introduced an ECTS along the Galafi–Kaliti section of the Djibouti–Addis Ababa corridor to monitor transit cargo. However, the utilization of the system has remained limited owing to operational costs and capacity constraints. Given the rapid growth of traffic along the Ethiopia-Djibouti corridor (which now carries an estimated 2,000 or more trucks per day across its main road links), there is a need to expand and modernize the cargo tracking system to ensure seamless, end-to-end monitoring of transit cargo. In parallel, the Ethiopian Ministry of Transport has deployed an Integrated Fleet Management System (iFMS) along the Ethiopia-Djibouti corridor. Unlike ECTSs, an FMS is not a customs transit management tool. Rather, it is a transport management platform designed to monitor the movement, location, and operational performance of commercial vehicles more broadly, regardless of whether they are carrying goods in customs transit. Consequently, it does not provide the customs-specific functionalities of an ECTS, such as electronic sealing of consignments, monitoring the integrity of transit cargo, or supporting customs control from the point of entry to the point of destination.

On the other hand, Djibouti, Somalia, and South Sudan have not yet introduced comparable ECTSs or FMSs for customs transit operations.

The development of a regional ECTS framework should focus on interconnecting existing national systems or, where appropriate, establishing a common Regional Electronic Cargo Tracking System capable of monitoring cargo movements from origin to destination across HoAI corridors. A regional approach would avoid the need to replace electronic seals at every border crossing, reduce delays associated with multiple national tracking requirements, and enable seamless traceability of shipments moving through different jurisdictions. Such interoperability would be particularly valuable for major regional corridors, such as Nairobi-Moyale-Addis Ababa, Berbera-Tog Wajaale-Addis Ababa, Djibouti-Galafi-Addis Ababa and the LAPSSET/Northern Kenya–South Sudan corridor.

Beyond customs control, an integrated ECTS framework could generate broader benefits for corridor efficiency and supply chain management. By providing real-time visibility of cargo movements, ECTSs can reduce the need for physical customs escorts, shorten transit times, support insurance risk assessment, and enhance enforcement capacity through rapid response mechanisms when irregularities are detected. Experience from the Northern Corridor demonstrates the potential impact of combining electronic tracking with coordinated enforcement arrangements: the deployment of ECTS and rapid response units contributed significantly to reducing transit times and limiting cases of cargo diversion.

However, the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of ECTS deployment require addressing several practical challenges. First, the costs associated with electronic sealspurchase and maintenance, and system operation should not be borne (at least exclusively) by transport operators. To maximize value and cost-sharing, ECTS platforms should be designed as multi-user systems accessible not only to Customs but also to transport companies, insurance providers, police authorities, and transport ministries, allowing each stakeholder to benefit from and contribute to the system. Second, the suitability of tracking technologies should reflect the structure of regional trade flows. While electronic seals are particularly effective for containerized cargo, many Horn of Africa corridors are dominated by bulk and non-containerized shipments, requiring adapted solutions. In this regard, the experience of Zimbabwe provides a useful example of how security measures can be adapted to bulk cargo movements. Zimbabwe has introduced magnetic sealing cables as a solution to increase the security of break-bulk cargo in transit. Under regulations adopted in 2018, trucks transporting break-bulk cargo through the country are required to use a single tarpaulin cover with reinforced holes at the edges to allow the installation of magnetic sealing cables and electronic seals. Where cargo characteristics prevent the use of a standard tarpaulin cover, transporters must obtain specific authorization from Customs authorities. Similar approaches, combining physical security measures with electronic monitoring tools, could be considered for HoAI corridors where bulk and non-containerized trade flows represent a significant share of regional transport. Third, regional interoperability is essential to avoid operational disruptions caused by the replacement of seals at borders and to ensure continuous cargo visibility throughout the entire journey.

A regional ECTS should also consider the practical management of tracking devices, including mechanisms for the reuse and redistribution of electronic seals between countries. Given the imbalance of trade flows along some corridors, systems should incorporate operational arrangements that prevent the accumulation of unused devices in destination countries and ensure their efficient circulation across the region. To address this challenge, HoAI participating States could establish a **regional seal management mechanism** based on a common asset pool, allowing seals to be reused across countries regardless of where they were originally issued. Such a mechanism could be supported by a **centralized digital inventory system** that tracks the location, utilization, maintenance status, and ownership of each device in real time. In addition, participating countries could agree on periodic redistribution arrangements and cost-sharing mechanisms to ensure that electronic seals remain available where demand is highest. The adoption of interoperable devices and common technical standards would further facilitate their seamless transfer between national systems and contribute to the operational and financial sustainability of a regional ECTS. In the longer term, the region could establish one or more **regional seal management centres** responsible for procuring, maintaining, refurbishing, and redistributing electronic seals across

corridors based on actual traffic patterns. This would reduce capital costs for individual countries, improve device utilization rates, and ensure that shortages in high-traffic corridors do not undermine the effectiveness of the regional tracking system.[28]

By integrating national systems, harmonizing technical standards, and promoting data exchange among relevant authorities, a regional ECTS framework would contribute to transforming HoAI corridors into more secure, predictable, and efficient trade routes. It would also complement other trade facilitation reforms, including digital customs systems, Single Windows, transit modernization, and corridor performance monitoring mechanisms, supporting the broader objective of improving the efficiency of regional trade networks.

Goal 7	**Develop a Regional Road Corridor Management Information System (RRCMIS) to monitor the condition, usability, resilience, and operational performance of priority trade corridors in the Horn of Africa.**

The efficiency of regional trade corridors depends not only on the quality of border procedures but also on the continuous availability and operational performance of the transport infrastructure connecting ports, border posts, production centres, and markets. In the Horn of Africa (where international trade is concentrated along a limited number of strategic road corridors), disruptions caused by poor road conditions, accidents, floods, insecurity, or maintenance works can rapidly affect regional supply chains, increase transport costs, and reduce the reliability of logistics services. Strengthening corridor resilience therefore requires moving beyond periodic road maintenance towards continuous monitoring of corridor conditions and traffic flows.

Many countries have addressed this challenge through the deployment of Road Asset Management Systems (RAMS) or Road Management Information Systems (RMISs), which combine Geographic Information Systems (GIS), road inventories, pavement condition surveys, bridge management databases, traffic monitoring, and maintenance planning tools into integrated digital platforms. Modern systems increasingly incorporate Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS), satellite positioning, remote sensing, connected sensors, and mobile data collection technologies to provide road authorities with near real-time information on infrastructure conditions, traffic volumes, incidents, and maintenance needs, enabling more proactive and evidence-based management of transport networks.

Within the Horn of Africa, the Ethiopian Roads Administration (ERA) has significantly modernized its road asset management capabilities through the deployment of the Integrated Road Asset Management System (I-RAMS). The platform integrates road inventories, GIS mapping, traffic data, bridge management, condition assessments, maintenance planning, and performance monitoring to support strategic investment and maintenance decisions across the federal road network. It also incorporates traffic monitoring modules and digital reporting tools, providing a comprehensive overview of the operational status of Ethiopia's transport infrastructure. Kenya has also strengthened its road asset management capabilities through the Kenya Roads Board (KRB), which use a road inventory database, condition surveys, monitoring systems, and performance-based planning tools to support maintenance programming and investment prioritization. Relevant information is publicly accessible from the KRB Map Portal, which provides GIS-based data on road conditions, surface characteristics, investment programmes, and other datasets supporting road sector planning and decision-making.

[28] This solution is based on the same principle used in the aviation industry to manage cargo containers and pallets through shared pooling systems, whereby equipment is circulated and redistributed across the network rather than being returned to its original owner after each trip. The same approach could be applied to electronic seals, allowing them to be managed as a shared regional asset and reallocated where needed to support efficient transit operations across the Horn of Africa.

Building on these national experiences, the Horn of Africa Initiative should promote the establishment of a Regional Road Corridor Management Information System (RRCMIS) that interconnects national platforms and provides a shared operational picture of the region's strategic transport corridors. Rather than replacing existing national systems, the regional platform would enable participating road authorities to exchange selected datasets through a central regional server, allowing continuous monitoring of corridor usability across borders while preserving national ownership of road information systems. The platform should provide real-time information on road conditions, traffic flows, incidents, weather-related disruptions, axle-load restrictions, construction works, bridge closures, security alerts, and other events that may affect freight movements. Through interoperable data-sharing arrangements, it would support coordinated responses among neighbouring countries and facilitate evidence-based planning of maintenance interventions along international corridors.

As an initial step, the HoAI should undertake a feasibility study involving Ethiopia and Kenya (the two participating States that already operate advanced road asset management systems) to assess the technical, institutional, legal, and financial requirements for interconnecting national RMISs through a regional data exchange platform. The study should examine interoperability standards, data governance arrangements, communication protocols, cybersecurity requirements, institutional responsibilities, and the feasibility of linking national systems to a central regional server capable of aggregating and disseminating information on the operational condition of strategic trade corridors. The findings could serve as the basis for developing a scalable regional architecture that would progressively incorporate the remaining HoAI participating States as they establish or modernize their national road management systems.

Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) and emerging digital technologies, including IoT sensors, satellite imagery, connected weather stations, automated traffic counters, CCTV, and AI-assisted analytics, could be further integrated into the regional platform to predict infrastructure deterioration, detect incidents, and identify congestion hotspots before they generate major disruptions. Information generated by the system should not only support road authorities but also be made available to transport operators and logistics service providers through web portals, Application Programming Interface (APIs),[29] and mobile applications, allowing drivers to receive real-time alerts, identify alternative routes, and better plan their journeys.

Beyond improving infrastructure management, a regional corridor management platform would constitute a strategic governance instrument for the HoAI. By combining road infrastructure data with information generated by customs systems, Electronic Cargo Tracking Systems (ECTSs), border management platforms, corridor observatories, and other digital trade facilitation tools, it would provide a comprehensive picture of corridor performance and resilience. This integrated approach would enable HoAI participating States to move from reactive maintenance towards predictive corridor management, improving the reliability, safety, and competitiveness of regional logistics networks while strengthening the resilience of the Horn of Africa's trade corridors against climatic, operational, and security-related disruptions. It would also establish the foundation for a regional digital twin of the HoAI transport corridors, supporting evidence-based investment planning and coordinated infrastructure management across the region.

Goal 8 Establish a Regional Border Management Coordination Forum and Institutionalize Joint Border Committees at HoAI Border Posts

Efficient cross-border trade requires not only improved infrastructure and digital systems, but also effective institutional coordination among the numerous government agencies

[29] APIs are a set of rules and protocols that allows different software programs to talk to each other.

responsible for managing the cross-border movement of goods, vehicles, and people. In the Horn of Africa, border management remains highly fragmented, with Customs administrations, immigration authorities, security agencies, standards bodies, SPS authorities, transport regulators, and other institutions often operating under separate systems, procedures, and reporting structures. This fragmentation contributes to duplicated controls, inconsistent decision-making, delays in resolving operational problems, and limited capacity to implement coordinated border management approaches.

A key challenge in many HoAI participating States is that border agencies are characterized by centralized and hierarchical decision-making structures, where officials deployed at border posts have limited authority to address operational issues without seeking approval from headquarters. In the absence of clear operational protocols and empowered coordination mechanisms, relatively minor issues raised by traders, transport operators, or travellers can generate significant delays, as border officials may lack the mandate to take corrective decisions locally. This situation is particularly problematic at borders with higher levels of traffic, where effective trade facilitation requires rapid problem-solving, continuous communication among agencies, and close cooperation with neighbouring countries.

To address these challenges, the HoAI should promote the establishment of **national high-level border management coordination mechanisms** bringing together senior representatives of all institutions involved in cross-border trade and mobility. These structures should provide strategic oversight, ensure policy coherence, facilitate inter-agency cooperation, and create a mechanism through which operational challenges identified at border posts can be escalated and resolved rapidly. An example of such an approach is Kenya's **Border Control Operational Coordination Committee (BCOCC)**. The BCOCC brings together senior officials from relevant ministries and agencies responsible for border management and provides strategic direction on border policies, coordination of information exchange, harmonization of operational approaches, and oversight of border management performance. The Committee is supported by operational structures at border level, including Border Management Committees (BMCs) and Joint Operations Centres (JOCs), which bring together representatives of relevant agencies to coordinate daily border operations, address emerging challenges, and strengthen collaboration among institutions.

Similar national coordination mechanisms should be progressively established in other HoAI participating States, adapted to their institutional contexts. Once operational, these national platforms should be connected through the creation of a **Regional Border Management Coordination Forum**, bringing together senior representatives of equivalent national structures. The Forum would provide a permanent platform for strategic and technical dialogue among HoAI countries, facilitate the exchange of experiences and good practices, promote convergence of border management approaches, and support the implementation of Coordinated Border Management principles across the region. The Forum would complement the HoAI-RTFC by providing specialized technical inputs on border management challenges, operational bottlenecks, and implementation constraints affecting cross-border trade in the Horn of Africa. These inputs would inform the identification and design of regional trade facilitation reform initiatives and project proposals to be considered under the HoAI framework.

At the operational level, the HoAI should support the institutionalization of **Joint Border Committees (JBCs)** at priority border crossings. While JBCs are commonly established within OSBPs, their application should also be expanded to conventional border posts where coordinated management arrangements are needed. JBCs should bring together agencies operating on both sides of the border to address practical operational challenges, coordinate working procedures, exchange information, resolve disputes affecting traders and travellers, and monitor the implementation of bilateral and regional trade facilitation commitments.

The functions of JBCs should include, among others:

- coordination of border operating procedures and working schedules;
- identification and resolution of operational bottlenecks affecting trade and passenger flows;

- facilitation of information exchange among border agencies;
- monitoring of implementation of bilateral agreements and border arrangements;
- coordination of joint inspections, risk management initiatives, and emergency responses;
- engagement with private sector stakeholders, including traders, transport operators, and logistics providers.

Importantly, JBCs should not be viewed solely as trade facilitation mechanisms, but as integrated border governance platforms that bring together economic, security, and administrative actors. By combining operational coordination on trade and mobility with enhanced security cooperation, JBCs can help create safer and more predictable border environments, reducing disruptions to legitimate trade while strengthening the capacity of authorities to manage security risks.

To strengthen the effectiveness of these mechanisms, the HoAI should also promote **joint training programmes, exchange of border officials, and peer-learning initiatives** among participating States. Such programmes would help build a common understanding of coordinated border management principles, strengthen institutional trust between neighbouring countries, and promote the adoption of common operational practices.

The creation of a regional border management coordination architecture would complement other trade facilitation measures proposed under this Roadmap, including digital interoperability, Single Window integration, Electronic Cargo Tracking Systems, Time Release Studies, and corridor performance monitoring. By combining high-level political coordination with operational mechanisms at border posts, the HoAI can move towards a more integrated border management model that reduces duplication, accelerates the movement of goods and people, and strengthens the predictability and competitiveness of regional trade corridors.

Goal 9	**Establish a regional framework for cross-border data sharing and interoperability among Customs and other border agencies through the interconnection of national digital trade and border management systems.**

The digital transformation of border management can significantly improved the efficiency of customs and regulatory procedures across the Horn of Africa. However, the full benefits of automation cannot be achieved if national information systems continue to operate in isolation. Customs administrations, immigration authorities, SPS agencies, standards bodies, transport regulators, and other border agencies have progressively introduced automated systems to manage their respective functions, yet the exchange of data, electronic documents, and inspection information between neighbouring countries remains limited. As a result, traders, transport operators, and travellers are often required to submit the same information repeatedly to multiple authorities on both sides of the border, while consignments are frequently subjected to duplicate documentary and physical inspections. This increases administrative burdens, delays clearance, raises trade costs, and reduces the effectiveness of coordinated border management.

The HoAI should therefore promote the establishment of a regional framework for cross-border data sharing and digital interoperability, enabling Customs, Immigration, and other border agencies to exchange trade, transport, and regulatory information electronically and securely. Rather than replacing existing national platforms, the objective should be to interconnect them through common interoperability standards, harmonized data models, and secure communication protocols, while ensuring that each country retains ownership and control over its own information systems and databases. Such a framework would support coordinated risk management, advance processing of cargo and travellers, and the progressive implementation of paperless cross-border procedures. It should also facilitate the electronic exchange of customs inspection results and non-intrusive inspection (NII) scanner

images between neighbouring Customs administrations, a practices that some HoAI countries (notably Kenya), have already started with other nations. The mutual recognition of scanner images and the associated risk assessments would significantly reduce the need to re-scan cargo at successive border crossings, accelerate transit operations, optimize the use of costly scanning equipment, and allow customs authorities to focus physical inspections on high-risk consignments.

Where National Single Window (NSW) systems are operational at national level, interoperability should be pursued through the interconnection of these platforms or, where appropriate, through the establishment of a regional interoperability layer linking national Single Windows. This would enable customs declarations, certificates of origin, SPS certificates, import and export permits, transit documents, and other trade-related information submitted electronically in the exporting country to be reused by the authorities of transit and destination countries, thereby eliminating duplicate submissions and significantly reducing documentary requirements. As additional HoAI participating States establish National Single Windows, they should progressively be integrated into this regional interoperability framework.

A particular priority should be strengthening the interoperability of immigration management systems. Across the Horn of Africa, immigration authorities currently rely on different independently developed platforms for passport control, visa management, border inspections, and biometric identification, with the Migration Information and Data Analysis System (MIDAS) and the Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluation System (PISCES) being among the most commonly used solutions. These systems frequently rely on different technical standards, software architectures, and biometric technologies, making the secure exchange of traveller information particularly challenging. The absence of interoperability limits the ability of neighbouring countries to share advance passenger information, verify travel documents electronically, exchange biometric data where legally permitted, and undertake coordinated risk assessments. Given the high sensitivity of several HoAI borders to insecurity (as described in the baseline assessment), strengthening secure information exchange among immigration and security authorities is essential to improve border situational awareness, detect potential risks more effectively, and enhance the capacity of countries to respond collectively to cross-border security threats while facilitating legitimate movement of people..

The regional interoperability framework should therefore extend beyond customs and trade information to include secure, standards-based exchanges of immigration data, in full compliance with national legislation on privacy, cybersecurity, and personal data protection. Priority should be given to the electronic exchange of advance passenger information, Passenger Name Records (PNR), visa and residence permit information, vehicle crew data, and, where legally and technically feasible, biometric identifiers and watch-list information. Beyond strengthening border security, such exchanges would facilitate the legitimate movement of business travellers, transport operators, and cross-border communities, while improving preparedness for public health emergencies requiring coordinated border surveillance.

The implementation of this objective should be guided by internationally recognized interoperability standards, including the WCO Data Model, the UN/CEFACT Reference Data Model, and other relevant international frameworks, while ensuring compatibility with the AfCFTA Protocol on Digital Trade and future continental digital trade initiatives. To support implementation, the HoAI should undertake a regional interoperability feasibility study assessing the readiness of participating States to exchange electronic information across borders. The study should map existing customs, immigration, port, standards, SPS, and transport information systems; identify legal, institutional, and technical barriers to interoperability; define common data standards and governance arrangements; establish cybersecurity and data protection requirements; and recommend a phased roadmap for implementation. It should also identify priority datasets and documents for exchange, including customs declarations, transit information, certificates of origin, SPS certificates, permits, advance cargo information, immigration records, transport-related data, and non-intrusive

inspection (NII) scanner images and inspection reports. The feasibility study should further assess the technical and legal requirements for the secure transmission, storage, authentication, and mutual recognition of scanner images among Customs administrations.

Digital interoperability should be complemented by the deployment of smart border technologies capable of translating electronic information into faster physical border procedures. Depending on traffic volumes and operational needs, priority border posts could progressively introduce Smart Gates equipped with Optical Character Recognition (OCR) for automatic vehicle identification, RFID readers, biometric verification systems, automated weighbridges, non-intrusive inspection equipment, and Internet of Things (IoT) devices linked directly to customs, immigration, and cargo tracking systems. These technologies would enable border controls to become increasingly risk-based, minimizing repetitive documentary checks and unnecessary physical inspections while improving both trade facilitation and border security.

Beyond accelerating border clearance, regional data sharing would strengthen coordinated border management by supporting joint risk analysis, the exchange of scanner images and inspection results, reducing duplication of inspections, improving fraud detection, enhancing migration management, and enabling more effective responses to security and public health threats. Combined with the interconnection of National Single Windows, Electronic Cargo Tracking Systems, Road Corridor Management Information Systems, and other digital trade facilitation platforms, this framework would provide the digital backbone of an integrated regional border management ecosystem. In doing so, it would move the Horn of Africa beyond the automation of individual national procedures towards a truly interoperable regional trade and border information infrastructure, supporting seamless cross-border trade, stronger corridor governance, and the implementation of both the HoAI Trade Facilitation Roadmap and the AfCFTA.

Goal 10	Develop dedicated fast-track lanes at Horn of Africa border posts for Authorized Economic Operators (AEOs) and progressively establish a regional AEO+ programme based on mutual recognition and coordinated border management.

Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) programmes are internationally recognized trade facilitation instruments that grant compliant and reliable businesses simplified customs procedures and reduced controls in return for meeting predefined standards relating to compliance, security, record-keeping, and supply chain integrity. At many border crossings around the world, particularly where OSBPs have been established, AEOs benefit from dedicated fast-track lanes, priority treatment during inspections, expedited release of goods, reduced documentary and physical controls, and, where operationally feasible, extended or 24/7 clearance services. These measures contribute to reducing border delays, lowering logistics costs, and allowing border agencies to focus their control resources on higher-risk operators.

The HoAI should promote the establishment of dedicated AEO fast-track lanes at major regional border posts and along strategic trade corridors. However, these facilitation measures can only achieve their full potential if operators authorized in one HoAI participating State receive equivalent treatment when trading with neighbouring countries. This requires the conclusion of **Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) between national AEO programmes**, allowing participating Customs administrations to recognize each other's authorization decisions and apply equivalent facilitation measures to trusted traders operating across borders. Mutual recognition would reduce duplication of compliance assessments, strengthen regional supply chain security, and facilitate the seamless movement of goods along regional corridors.

As all HoAI participating States belong to COMESA and EAC, the regional implementation of the COMESA and EAC Authorized Economic Operator Programmes should constitute the principal frameworks for achieving mutual recognition. COMESA and EAC have already developed regional guidelines and/or implementation procedures to support the

harmonization of national AEO programmes and their progressive integration into a regional trusted trader system. Building upon this framework would facilitate future interoperability with the AfCFTA and other Regional Economic Communities.

Currently, national AEO programmes are operational in Kenya and Ethiopia, while Somalia is developing the relevant framework with support under the De-risking, Inclusion, and Value Enhancement of Pastoral Economies in the Horn of Africa (DRIVE) Project financed by the World Bank. As additional HoAI participating States establish national AEO programmes, priority should be given to harmonizing eligibility criteria, validation procedures, post-authorisation monitoring, and the range of benefits granted to certified operators, thereby facilitating the progressive conclusion of bilateral and regional MRAs.

The HoAI should go beyond the traditional Customs-centred concept of the Authorized Economic Operator by progressively introducing an AEO+ model. Under this model, initially developed in Colombia, trusted trader status would not only be recognized by Customs but also by other border regulatory agencies (including Immigration, SPS authorities, standards bodies, port authorities, transport regulators, police, and security agencies) through an integrated inter-agency governance framework. Instead of undergoing separate compliance assessments by multiple institutions, eligible operators would be validated through a coordinated process, allowing participating agencies to recognize a common trusted operator status while retaining responsibility for their respective regulatory mandates.

An AEO+ programme would therefore extend the benefits of trusted trader status beyond customs clearance. Certified operators could receive priority treatment for import and export permits, expedited SPS and standards inspections, simplified immigration procedures for transport crews, priority access at ports and terminals, reduced documentary requirements, coordinated inspections by multiple agencies, preferential access to digital services, and dedicated service channels at border posts. By reducing duplication of controls across government agencies, the AEO+ model would significantly improve the predictability of cross-border logistics while strengthening regulatory compliance and supply chain security.

The implementation of an AEO+ programme should be preceded by a regional feasibility study assessing the institutional, legal, and operational requirements for extending trusted trader recognition beyond Customs. The study should examine the readiness of participating border agencies, identify opportunities for harmonizing risk management practices, define common governance arrangements, and develop a roadmap for progressively integrating non-customs agencies into national and regional AEO frameworks. Particular attention should be given to the interoperability of digital systems supporting AEO management, allowing participating agencies to exchange trusted trader information electronically and securely.

The development of a regional AEO+ programme would complement other digital and institutional reforms proposed under the HoAI Trade Facilitation Roadmap, including the interoperability of National Single Windows, the exchange of customs and immigration data, Electronic Cargo Tracking Systems, and coordinated border management initiatives. Together, these reforms would create an integrated ecosystem in which trusted operators benefit from seamless treatment across the entire border clearance process, enabling border authorities to concentrate their resources on high-risk movements while facilitating legitimate trade and enhancing the competitiveness of the Horn of Africa's regional trade corridors.

Goal 11	**Establish a regional framework for interoperable digital payments for customs duties, border agency fees, and other cross-border charges, including the mutual recognition of electronic proofs of payment.**

The continued reliance on cash payments at many border crossings in the Horn of Africa remains a significant obstacle to efficient cross-border trade. Traders and transport operators frequently encounter difficulties in converting national currencies into those of neighbouring countries in order to pay customs duties, immigration fees, SPS inspection charges, road user fees, and other border-related levies. Limited banking infrastructure at border posts, the

absence of Point-of-Sale (POS) terminals and digital payment facilities, and restrictions on the cross-border use of national mobile money platforms often oblige traders and truck drivers to carry large amounts of cash. This not only increases transaction costs and delays but also exposes economic operators to security risks, exchange rate losses, and opportunities for informal payments and corruption.

The Horn of Africa Initiative should therefore promote the establishment of a regional framework for interoperable digital payments, enabling traders and transport operators to pay customs duties, taxes, and border agency fees electronically, irrespective of the country in which the payment is made. The framework should also provide for the mutual recognition of electronic proofs of payment, allowing payment confirmations issued in one HoAI participating State to be accepted electronically by border authorities in another, thereby eliminating the need for paper receipts and reducing delays associated with payment verification.

The proposed framework should build upon the rapid expansion of mobile money, electronic banking, QR-code payments, instant payment systems, and other digital financial services that have transformed domestic payments across much of Eastern Africa. While several HoAI participating States have achieved high levels of financial inclusion through mobile money, these systems generally remain confined within national borders and cannot easily be used to settle cross-border public payments. Developing interoperability between national payment platforms would therefore constitute a major step towards facilitating regional trade.

Implementation should involve close cooperation between central banks, customs administrations, ministries of finance, revenue authorities, telecommunications regulators, commercial banks, mobile network operators, and payment service providers. Particular emphasis should be placed on establishing interoperable payment gateways capable of connecting national mobile money platforms, banking systems, and government revenue collection systems. This would enable traders to settle border-related payments using familiar digital payment instruments in their domestic currency, while ensuring that revenues are automatically transferred to the appropriate government authority in the currency required by the receiving country.

The regional framework should also seek to leverage existing African cross-border payment infrastructure, particularly the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS), which enables instant cross-border payments in local currencies without requiring transactions to be routed through correspondent banks using third-country currencies. Integrating customs and border agency payment systems with PAPSS, where feasible, would reduce foreign exchange costs, accelerate settlement, and simplify cross-border transactions, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises and small-scale cross-border traders. The framework should also remain compatible with evolving regional payment initiatives being developed by COMESA, the East African Community, and other African regional organizations.

To support implementation, the HoAI should undertake a regional feasibility study assessing the legal, technical, financial, and institutional requirements for interoperable digital border payments. The study should map existing government revenue collection systems, customs payment platforms, mobile money ecosystems, banking infrastructure, and payment regulations in each HoAI participating State; identify barriers to cross-border interoperability; evaluate options for integrating national payment systems through regional payment gateways; and recommend common technical standards, governance arrangements, cybersecurity safeguards, and consumer protection mechanisms. It should also assess the requirements for the electronic verification and mutual recognition of digital payment receipts, ensuring that payment confirmations can be exchanged automatically between border agencies through secure digital channels.

Digital payment interoperability should be accompanied by investments in the supporting infrastructure required at border posts, including reliable internet connectivity, Point-of-Sale (POS) terminals, QR-code payment facilities, digital kiosks, and integration with Customs, National Single Window, and border management systems. Payment confirmation should be transmitted automatically to the relevant authorities, eliminating manual verification

procedures and allowing border clearance to begin immediately after payment has been validated.

The proposed framework would generate benefits extending well beyond payment modernization. By reducing the use of cash, it would strengthen revenue collection, improve transparency and auditability, reduce opportunities for fraud and corruption, enhance trader security, and lower the administrative costs associated with payment processing. Digital transaction data would also provide valuable information for risk management, trade statistics, and policy analysis. Combined with interoperable National Single Windows, Electronic Cargo Tracking Systems, coordinated border management, and regional data-sharing mechanisms, interoperable digital payments would become a fundamental component of the Horn of Africa's emerging digital trade ecosystem, supporting faster, safer, and more transparent cross-border trade while advancing the implementation of the AfCFTA and regional economic integration.

Goal 12 ⚠

Support the full operationalization of the DESSU Corridor Authority and Transport Observatory

The Djibouti–Ethiopia–South Sudan–Uganda (DESSU) Corridor represents one of the most ambitious recent initiatives to strengthen regional connectivity and economic integration in the Horn of Africa. The initiative was formally launched in February 2025 through the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) by Djibouti, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Uganda, followed on 27 February 2026 by the signature of the Agreement establishing the DESSU Corridor Authority, which provides the legal basis for a permanent multilateral institution responsible for coordinating the development and management of the corridor. The Authority will serve as a permanent institutional platform for coordinating transport, logistics, customs cooperation, trade facilitation, infrastructure development, private sector engagement, and investment mobilization along the corridor

Although the Agreement establishing DESSU has been signed, it has not yet entered into force, as it still requires ratification by the participating countries. Consequently, the DESSU Corridor Authority has not yet become operational. Under the institutional arrangements agreed by the Parties, the Authority will be headquartered in Djibouti, reflecting its role as the maritime gateway of the corridor, while a liaison office in Addis Ababa will facilitate coordination with Ethiopian authorities and other corridor stakeholders. Although conceived as a multinational corridor connecting four countries, the implementation of the DESSU initiative will follow a phased approach. During the initial stage, corridor operations will focus on the Djibouti–Ethiopia axis, which already constitutes one of the busiest international trade corridors in East Africa. The subsequent extension towards South Sudan and Uganda will depend on the completion of the missing road infrastructure linking western Ethiopia with South Sudan. Once this strategic infrastructure gap is completed, South Sudan and subsequently Uganda can be progressively integrated into a continuous multimodal corridor connecting the Port of Djibouti with the Great Lakes region.

At present, the DESSU Corridor Authority is receiving support from TradeMark Africa in the ratification and implementation od the agreement as well as the development of the Authority's governance framework, institutional arrangements, staffing structure, operational procedures, financing mechanisms, and coordination arrangements with relevant corridor stakeholders.

A key component of the institutional architecture will be the establishment of a dedicated Corridor Transport Observatory, operating as the analytical and performance-monitoring arm of the Corridor Authority. Drawing on the experience of the Northern Corridor and Central Corridor observatories, it should collect, analyse, and disseminate harmonized data on transit times, border crossing times, logistics costs, freight volumes, infrastructure conditions, road safety, customs performance, non-tariff barriers, transport prices, and the reliability of logistics services. Regular publication of corridor performance indicators, scorecards, and benchmarking reports would provide an objective basis for monitoring reforms, identifying bottlenecks, and measuring progress regarding the fluidity of the corridor over time.

As digital trade facilitation systems are progressively deployed across the region, the Observatory should evolve into a regional digital corridor observatory by integrating information generated by Customs administrations, Electronic Cargo Tracking Systems (ECTSs), Road Corridor Management Information Systems (RRCMISs), National Single Windows, Port Community Systems, border management platforms, and other digital trade facilitation tools. This integrated platform would enable the Corridor Authority to monitor corridor performance in near real time, detect emerging bottlenecks, assess the impact of policy and infrastructure interventions, and support evidence-based operational and investment decisions.

To support this process, the HoAI should undertake a feasibility study and institutional design exercise focusing specifically on the establishment of the DESSU Corridor Transport Observatory. Building on the institutional arrangements already being developed for the Corridor Authority, the study should define the Observatory's governance arrangements, financing model, staffing requirements, data governance architecture, digital infrastructure, and performance monitoring framework. It should also examine how the Observatory can interoperate with existing regional organizations and corridor initiatives (including COMESA, IGAD, and the AfCFTA), to ensure complementarity, avoid institutional duplication, and maximize synergies with regional trade facilitation programmes.

Once operational, the DESSU Corridor Authority could pioneer a new generation of multinational corridor governance in Africa by providing a permanent platform for coordinating infrastructure development, trade facilitation reforms, digital interoperability, and corridor performance monitoring. Beyond improving the efficiency and competitiveness of the Djibouti–Ethiopia corridor, it could serve as a model for other corridor systems across the continent, promoting a more integrated and holistic approach to corridor governance.

Goal 13 ⚠

Support the implementation of the AfCFTA Protocols through coordinated regulatory alignment and institutional capacity building.

The AfCFTA has entered a new phase of implementation that extends well beyond tariff liberalization. In addition to the Protocol on Trade in Goods, AfCFTA State Parties have adopted a wide array of Protocols covering areas such as Digital Trade, Investment, Competition Policy, Intellectual Property Rights, and Women and Youth in Trade. These instruments establish a common regulatory framework aimed at facilitating trade, promoting investment, supporting digital transformation, and fostering inclusive economic integration across the continent. Their effective implementation will require substantial reforms of national legislation, institutions, administrative procedures, and regulatory practices.

For the HoAI, supporting the implementation of the AfCFTA Protocols represents a strategic opportunity to align national reforms with continental integration objectives while promoting greater regulatory convergence among participating States. Although implementation remains the responsibility of individual countries, the HoAI can play an important regional coordinating role by facilitating the exchange of experiences, promoting regulatory harmonization where appropriate, and supporting the development of common implementation approaches in areas of shared interest.

A priority area for regional cooperation should be the implementation of Annex 6 (Technical Barriers to Trade) and Annex 7 (Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures) to the AfCFTA Protocol on Trade in Goods. These Annexes require State Parties to progressively align their national technical regulations, standards, conformity assessment procedures, accreditation systems, metrology frameworks, and sanitary and phytosanitary legislation with internationally recognized principles and standards. They also call for enhanced transparency, scientific risk assessment, equivalence and mutual recognition arrangements, harmonization of standards, and strengthened cooperation among national competent authorities. For many HoAI participating States, compliance with these provisions will require significant institutional strengthening and legislative reforms.

Support under the HoAI should therefore prioritize the modernization of national quality infrastructure systems, including standards bodies, accreditation agencies, metrology institutes, testing laboratories, certification bodies, veterinary services, and plant health authorities. At the regional level, efforts should focus on harmonizing technical regulations for priority products, promoting the mutual recognition of conformity assessment results, facilitating the electronic exchange of SPS certificates and certificates of conformity, strengthening regional laboratory networks, and improving cooperation among SPS and standards authorities. The adoption of international standards developed by organizations such as ISO, IEC, Codex Alimentarius, the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH), and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) should be encouraged wherever appropriate. These reforms would reduce compliance costs, eliminate duplicate inspections and testing, facilitate the movement of agricultural and industrial products across borders, and support the development of regional value chains under the AfCFTA.

Particular attention should also be given to the implementation of the AfCFTA Protocol on Digital Trade, which is expected to have far-reaching implications for trade facilitation and border management across the region. The Protocol requires participating countries to establish legal and regulatory frameworks covering electronic transactions, electronic signatures, electronic authentication, digital identities, consumer protection, personal data protection, cybersecurity, cross-border data flows, digital payments, and paperless trade. Many of these areas are directly linked to the digital trade facilitation measures proposed under the HoAI Trade Facilitation Roadmap, including the interoperability of National Single Windows, electronic exchange of trade documents, digital customs procedures, interoperable payment systems, coordinated border management, and data-sharing frameworks. Supporting implementation of the Digital Trade Protocol would therefore reinforce many of the regional digital integration initiatives already envisaged under the HoAI.

The Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade is equally relevant for the Horn of Africa, where a significant share of informal cross-border trade is undertaken by women and young entrepreneurs. Its implementation will require HoAI participating States to identify and remove legal, administrative, and procedural barriers that disproportionately affect these groups, while improving access to trade information, finance, digital technologies, business development services, and simplified border procedures. Many of the measures proposed under this Roadmap (including Simplified Trade Regimes, regional trade information portals, interoperable digital payment systems, and coordinated border management) would directly contribute to the implementation of this Protocol by making cross-border trade more accessible, predictable, and secure.

The implementation of the AfCFTA Protocols should not be viewed as a series of isolated national reforms but as an opportunity to promote regional regulatory convergence. Since HoAI participating States face many common institutional and legal challenges, a coordinated regional approach can reduce implementation costs, promote consistency in regulatory frameworks, and facilitate future interoperability between national systems. The HoAI can serve as a platform for developing regional guidelines, model legislation, implementation toolkits, and mechanisms for peer learning, enabling participating States to benefit from each other's experiences and avoid fragmented implementation.

As a first step, the HoAI should support a regional AfCFTA implementation readiness assessment to evaluate the level of alignment of national legal and institutional frameworks with the AfCFTA Protocols. The assessment should identify legislative gaps, institutional capacity needs, implementation priorities, and opportunities for regional cooperation, while proposing a sequenced roadmap for regulatory reforms. Particular attention should be given to areas requiring coordinated action, including technical regulations, SPS measures, quality infrastructure, digital trade governance, electronic transactions, cross-border data sharing, digital identities, paperless trade, digital payments, consumer protection, competition policy, and measures supporting women- and youth-led enterprises.

The implementation of the AfCFTA Protocols should also be accompanied by targeted institutional capacity building for ministries responsible for trade, customs administrations,

standards bodies, SPS authorities, accreditation agencies, border management institutions, competition authorities, and other agencies responsible for implementing the new legal frameworks. This should include technical assistance for legislative drafting, regulatory impact assessments, institutional strengthening, digital transformation strategies, and monitoring of implementation progress.

By supporting the implementation of the AfCFTA Protocols through a coordinated regional approach, the HoAI can accelerate the convergence of national regulatory frameworks, strengthen institutional cooperation, and ensure that regional trade facilitation reforms are fully aligned with the continent's broader economic integration agenda. Rather than treating AfCFTA implementation as a parallel process, the HoAI should position itself as a regional implementation platform capable of translating continental commitments into practical reforms that improve the efficiency, inclusiveness, and competitiveness of trade across the Horn of Africa.

Goal 14	**Optimize and strengthen Pre-Arrival Processing (PAP) systems to accelerate cargo clearance and improve predictability of trade flows across HoAI corridors.**

Pre-Arrival Processing (PAP) enables customs administrations and other relevant border agencies to receive and process import documentation, manifests, and other required information electronically before the arrival of goods, allowing risk assessment, documentary verification, and clearance decisions to be undertaken in advance. By shifting border processing from an arrival-based model to a data-driven, anticipatory approach, PAP reduces clearance times, minimizes congestion at ports and border crossings, improves supply chain predictability, and enables authorities to focus inspection resources on higher-risk consignments.

While several HoAI participating States have introduced elements of PAP through customs modernization programmes, Single Window platforms, and electronic customs systems, implementation remains uneven, with significant differences in the level of automation, participation of relevant border agencies, data exchange capabilities, and private sector adoption. The effectiveness of PAP depends not only on the digitalization of customs procedures but also on the ability of all agencies involved in border controls (including standards, SPS, immigration, and transport authorities) to participate in a coordinated and integrated process. Strengthening PAP therefore requires greater interoperability between customs systems and the IT platforms of other regulatory agencies, enabling the timely exchange, verification, and processing of accurate trade information before the arrival of consignments.

The HoAI PAP initiative should focus on expanding and harmonizing existing systems across priority corridors, establishing common operational procedures, strengthening risk management capabilities, and promoting coordinated border agency participation. Particular attention should be given to ensuring that PAP solutions are compatible across borders, allowing traders and logistics operators to benefit from more predictable clearance processes throughout regional supply chains. This will contribute to reducing dwell times at ports and border crossings, improving corridor performance, and supporting broader objectives related to customs digitalization, Single Window development, and paperless trade.

The implementation of PAP should also address institutional and operational challenges, including limited technical capacity, incomplete legal frameworks, insufficient awareness among traders and logistics operators, and inconsistent adoption by border agencies. Strengthening governance arrangements, including multi-agency coordination mechanisms, stakeholder engagement platforms, and monitoring systems, will be essential to ensure sustainable implementation and continuous improvement of PAP processes.

By accelerating the transition toward proactive, risk-based, and digitally enabled border management, optimized PAP systems will enhance the efficiency of HoAI trade corridors,

reduce transaction costs for businesses, and complement other regional trade facilitation reforms, including interoperable Single Windows, Electronic Cargo Tracking Systems, and digital customs modernization initiatives.

2. M&E framework and Goals performance Indicators

To ensure strong accountability, demonstrate the impact of investments supporting regional integration, and promote evidence-based decision-making, the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework of this Roadmap will be centred on the HoAI Trade Facilitation Scorecard, currently under development. Maintained through the official HoAI website under the strategic oversight of the HoAI Regional Trade Facilitation Committee (HoAI-RTFC), in collaboration with the HoAI National Focal Points, National Advisors, and designated focal points of DPs supporting the Initiative, the Scorecard will serve as the principal regional instrument for monitoring the implementation of the Roadmap, tracking the progress of HoAI-supported trade projects, and assessing the trade facilitation outcomes achieved by participating countries.

Rather than functioning as a static reporting matrix, the Scorecard will operate as a strategic governance and decision-support platform. It will create a direct link between development partner support, national reform implementation, and measurable improvements in trade facilitation performance by monitoring three complementary dimensions. First, it will track the implementation status of projects and technical assistance programmes financed under the HoAI, providing a consolidated overview of activities, milestones, and delivery of planned outputs. Second, it will monitor the regulatory, institutional, and operational reforms implemented by participating States in response to the recommendations and commitments arising from those interventions. Detailed information on national progress will be provided through the HoAI coordination mechanisms, particularly by the HoAI National Focal Points through their National Advisors, who will periodically update the Scorecard with information on legislative reforms, institutional measures, implementation milestones, and constraints encountered at country level. Third, the Scorecard will assess whether these reforms are generating tangible improvements in trade facilitation performance and regional connectivity, thereby shifting the focus of monitoring from activities undertaken to results achieved.

To complement information reported by participating countries, the HoAI-RTFC should systematically incorporate internationally recognized performance indicators and benchmarking tools developed by DPs and specialized international organizations. These external indicators will provide an independent and objective basis for assessing reform effectiveness, benchmarking progress across countries, and identifying areas requiring additional technical assistance or policy attention. Relevant sources will be:

a) the **World Bank Logistics Performance Index** (LPI)
b) the **OECD Trade Facilitation Indicators** (TFIs)

These global benchmarks should be complemented by operational performance data generated within the region, including the results of Time Release Studies (TRSs), corridor performance indicators produced by the proposed DESSU Corridor Transport Observatory, and other internationally recognized datasets relating to customs modernization, border management, transport connectivity, logistics performance, and digital trade. The HoAI-RTFC should be responsible for consolidating and analysing these data, identifying regional trends and implementation gaps, assessing the effectiveness of reforms supported under the Roadmap, and preparing evidence-based recommendations for consideration by HoAI Ministers responsible for Trade and Finance. Where necessary, the Committee should also recommend corrective measures, additional technical assistance, or new regional initiatives to address emerging challenges and accelerate implementation, including the update of the present Roadmap.

Ultimately, the HoAI Trade Facilitation Scorecard should evolve beyond a conventional monitoring and evaluation framework into the Initiative's principal instrument for regional performance management, accountability, and policy learning. By integrating information on project implementation, national reform progress, and independent performance indicators

within a single platform, it will provide a comprehensive evidence base for assessing implementation, identifying bottlenecks, prioritizing corrective actions, and informing policy dialogue among HoAI participating States and development partners. In doing so, it will strengthen transparency, reinforce mutual accountability for both participating countries and DPs, and support the adaptive implementation of the Roadmap. The Scorecard will thus enable the HoAI to assess not only whether planned activities have been completed, but also whether they are generating measurable improvements in border efficiency, trade performance, regional connectivity, and the broader objectives of economic integration across the Horn of Africa.

IV. ACTIVITIES

This section sets out the implementation framework for achieving the Goals presented in Section III by identifying the intermediate steps (referred to as "Activities") required to translate each Goal into concrete interventions. Within the context of this Roadmap, an Activity refers to a specific intervention, project, or set of actions designed to implement a specific trade strategic outcome.

1. Definition of Activities Needed to Implement the Roadmap's Goals

Given that the Roadmap will be implemented over a **five-year period**, the Activities are described at a strategic level, defining their objectives, scope, and expected contribution to the achievement of the Goals, rather than prescribing detailed implementation methodologies. The operational design of each Activity (including its implementation approach, sequencing, institutional arrangements, budget requirements, financing strategy, and monitoring framework) will be developed through dedicated project concept notes and implementation plans prepared by the HoAI-RTFC. These documents will be submitted to the DPs supporting the HoAI after validation by the Ministers responsible for Finance and Trade in the region, in accordance with their respective institutional mandates and areas of competence.

This phased approach will ensure that implementation remains flexible and responsive to evolving regional priorities, country-specific circumstances, and available financing opportunities, while maintaining a coherent strategic direction and ensuring that all Activities contribute effectively to the achievement of the Roadmap's overall objectives.

Table 1: Goals and Activities Matrix

Goals	Activities
1. Strengthen collaboration mechanisms for identification, reporting and resolution of NTBs in the HoA through the establishment of a permanent regional coordination platform that facilitates structured dialogue among governments, regional institutions and the private sector. ⚠	***a.*** *Establish the HoAI Regional Trade Facilitation Committee (HoAI-RTFC) as a regional coordination platform composed of one designated representative from the National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC)/National Monitoring Committee (NMC), and one private-sector representative from each HoAI participating country.*
	b. *Develop Terms of Reference defining the mandate, governance structure, functions, operational modalities, and working arrangements of the HoAI-RTFC.*
	c. *Recruit dedicated technical experts to provide analytical, coordination, monitoring, and technical support to the HoAI-RTFC.*
	d. *Develop and maintain a regional NTB monitoring and resolution matrix to register reported barriers, monitor their status, assign responsibilities, track corrective actions, and report progress on their resolution.*
	e. *Organize awareness, sensitization, and training programmes for public and private-sector stakeholders to promote the use of national and regional NTB reporting mechanisms and strengthen capacities for identifying, reporting, and resolving non-tariff barriers.*

2. Implement Simplified Trade Regimes at HoAI borders at HoAI borders to facilitate legitimate small-scale cross-border trade, with particular attention to supporting women traders, who represent a significant share of informal commerce in the region. ⚠	***a.*** *Conduct studies at key border posts in the region with high levels of informality to assess the scale and characteristics of informal trade, including the volume and value of informal transactions, the main categories of goods traded informally, the means of transport and trading modalities used, the profile of traders involved, and the underlying factors driving reliance on informal channels. This should include mapping formalities and tariffs/taxes to be paid at the border in relation to the trade of such goods, in view of simplification and harmonization of regulations and standards for small-scale traders.*
	b. *Adopt Bilateral Agreements/Protocols establishing lists of common goods covered by the simplification measures.*
	c. *Support the establishment/strenghtening of traders' associations (where not existing) with inclusion of women and youth traders for inclusiveness, and launch sensitization programs to increase awareness of trade procedures and traders' rights.*
	d. *Establish Trade Information Desks at HoA borders and Integrate design of trade information desks for SMEs and cross-border markets.*
3. Develop a regional Portal that connects national Trade Information Portals and other relevant national databases, providing traders in the HoA with a single, interoperable access point to accurate and up-to-date information on cross-border trade procedures. ⚠	***a.*** *Conduct a regional assessment of existing Trade Information Portals, customs and border-related databases, and information-sharing practices in HoAI participating countries, identifying interoperability requirements, priority datasets, institutional responsibilities, and technical standards for establishing a regional access point.*
	b. *Develop and implement a pilot regional Trade Information Portal connecting existing national TIPs and selected trade-related databases from countries with operational systems, using common data standards, interoperability protocols, and mechanisms to ensure regular updating of information.*
	c. *Establish governance, data sharing and maintenance arrangements for the regional portal, including responsibilities for data provision, validation, updating, and coordination among national trade authorities and border agencies.*
4. Conduct joint Time Release Studies (TRS++) at priority border posts, along key trade corridors, or at the regional level among HoAI countries, and develop joint bilateral or regional action plans to implement the recommendations emerging from these assessments.	***a.*** *Initiate consultations among Customs administrations and relevant border agencies in HoAI countries to identify priority border posts and corridors, agree institutional responsibilities, and establish the coordination arrangements required for conducting joint TRS++ exercises. This should include the establishment of structured engagement mechanisms with private-sector stakeholders, including traders, transport operators, logistics providers, and business associations, to collect operational evidence on bottlenecks and validate TRS++ findings and recommendations.*
	b *Develop and adopt Terms of Reference and a common methodology for joint TRS++ assessments, covering Customs, immigration, SPS authorities, standards agencies, transport regulators, and other relevant border control institutions. The methodology should also incorporate an assessment of digital connectivity, energy availability, and border infrastructure conditions, as well as the specific constraints affecting small-scale cross-border trade, including access to information, simplified procedures, compliance requirements, and the functioning of dedicated support mechanisms (Trade Information Desks).*

	c. *Conduct pilot joint TRS++ assessments at selected priority border posts and/or strategic corridors, followed by the preparation of bilateral or regional action plans defining corrective measures, responsible institutions, implementation timelines, and monitoring arrangements. Establish a mechanism for integrating key findings and performance indicators from TRS assessments into the HoAI Trade Facilitation Scorecard, including changes in release times, border-crossing performance, and progress in implementing agreed recommendations. Full TRS reports and related documentation may be made available through the HoAI knowledge management platform, subject to approval by the relevant national authorities.*
5. Establish mutual recognition of cross-border road transport permits among HoAI participating States to facilitate the free circulation of trucks and reduce administrative barriers along regional corridors	***a.*** *Undertake a comparative assessment of existing national road transport regulations, permit regimes, and technical requirements to identify areas of convergence and divergence. This should include vehicle and operator requirements, insurance obligations, safety standards, and enforcement procedures across HoAI participating States to identify regulatory gaps and opportunities for harmonization.*
	b. *Develop and adopt bilateral or corridor-based frameworks for the mutual recognition of cross-border road transport permits, defining the scope of eligible transport operations, operator and vehicle requirements, technical and safety standards, compliance obligations, verification procedures, and institutional responsibilities. Based on these frameworks, support neighbouring countries along priority trade corridors in negotiating and concluding mutual recognition agreements for cross-border road transport permits. Establish joint monitoring mechanisms involving transport authorities, customs agencies, and private-sector representatives to identify implementation challenges and progressively refine the arrangements.*
6. Establish interoperable Electronic Cargo Tracking System (ECTS) frameworks for end-to-end monitoring of goods movements along strategic trade corridors in the Horn of Africa.	***a.*** *Conduct a comprehensive assessment of existing Electronic Cargo Tracking Systems, Integrated Fleet Management Systems, customs transit platforms, and related digital infrastructure across HoAI participating States to identify gaps in coverage, technology, institutional arrangements, and operational performance. Based on the assessment, develop a regional ECTS interoperability framework defining common technical standards, data exchange protocols, governance arrangements, and minimum functional requirements for ensuring seamless cargo visibility across borders. The framework should determine whether existing national systems can be interconnected or whether a complementary regional platform would be required for specific corridors..*
	b. *Support the integration and expansion of ECTS capabilities along priority regional corridors, including Nairobi–Moyale–Addis Ababa, Berbera–Tog Wajaale–Addis Ababa, Djibouti–Galafi–Addis Ababa, and LAPSSET/Northern Kenya–South Sudan corridors. This activity will focus on connecting national tracking systems, enabling cross-border data exchange, and ensuring continuous monitoring of cargo movements from origin to destination without requiring replacement or reactivation of tracking devices at border crossings. Where national systems are not yet available, support the deployment of appropriate ECTS solutions adapted to corridor requirements.*
	c. *Establish common technical specifications, certification requirements, and operational procedures for electronic seals and tracking devices used across HoAI corridors. This will include developing mechanisms for the registration, reuse, maintenance, and redistribution of tracking devices through a regional seal management system supported by a centralized digital inventory. The activity will also explore cost-sharing arrangements and options for regional procurement or seal management centres to improve device*

	availability, reduce operational costs, and ensure sustainability.
	***d.** Transform ECTS platforms from customs control tools into multi-user corridor management systems accessible to customs authorities, transport ministries, logistics operators, insurance providers, and enforcement agencies. This activity will support the development of governance models, user access arrangements, and financing mechanisms that ensure operational sustainability while reducing the burden of ECTS costs on transport operators alone. The system should enable stakeholders to benefit from improved cargo visibility, enhanced risk management, reduced physical escorts, and more predictable logistics operations.*
	***e.** Develop operational guidelines and strengthen institutional capacities for the effective deployment and use of interoperable ECTS systems across HoAI corridors. This activity will ensure that tracking solutions are adapted to different cargo characteristics and corridor realities, including containerized, bulk, and non-containerized shipments, through the appropriate combination of electronic seals, GPS/GSM tracking, physical security measures, and alternative monitoring solutions. It will support customs administrations, transport authorities, and other relevant agencies in establishing standard operating procedures, cross-border coordination mechanisms, rapid response arrangements, and effective use of ECTS data for risk management, enforcement, and corridor performance monitoring. Capacity building will also focus on integrating ECTS platforms with broader trade facilitation instruments, including customs transit systems, Single Windows, and corridor observatories.*
7. Develop a Regional Road Corridor Management Information System (RRCMIS) to monitor the condition, usability, resilience, and operational performance of priority trade corridors in the Horn of Africa.	***a.** Conduct a feasibility study to identify existing road management information systems, available datasets, institutional capacities, and interoperability requirements and define the technical architecture, data governance arrangements, cybersecurity requirements, communication protocols, and institutional responsibilities for establishing a regional platform that connects such systems, while preserving national ownership of road information. Identify common standards, protocols, and procedures for the exchange of selected road corridor data among participating countries. These arrangements should define priority datasets to be shared, including road conditions, traffic flows, incidents, weather-related disruptions, axle-load restrictions, construction works, bridge closures, and other factors affecting corridor performance.*
	***b.** Develop and pilot the RRCMIS along selected strategic trade corridors, initially focusing on corridors linking countries with more advanced road asset management capabilities, such as Ethiopia and Kenya, Kenya and South Sudan and Djibouti and Ethiopia. The pilot should integrate available data from road management systems, traffic monitoring tools, and other relevant digital platforms to provide a shared operational view of corridor conditions and identify bottlenecks affecting freight movements. Lessons from the pilot should inform the progressive expansion of the system to other HoAI participating States.*
	***d.** Expand the RRCMIS into a regional corridor performance and resilience platform. Progressively integrate additional data sources, including Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS), satellite imagery, IoT sensors, Electronic Cargo Tracking Systems (ECTSs), customs and border management platforms, and corridor observatories. Develop user interfaces, APIs, and mobile applications to provide relevant information to transport operators, logistics providers, and public authorities. The expanded platform should support predictive maintenance, incident management, route planning, and evidence-*

	based investment decisions, contributing to more resilient and efficient regional trade corridors.
8. Establish a Regional Border Management Coordination Forum and Institutionalize Joint Border Committees at HoAI Border Posts	***a.** Conduct an assessment of existing border coordination mechanisms at key HoAI borders and develop a regional framework for coordinated border management*
	***b.** Support HoAI participating States to establish or strengthen high-level national border management coordination platforms, adapted to their institutional contexts, bringing together Customs, immigration, security agencies, standards and SPS authorities, transport regulators, and other relevant institutions. These mechanisms should provide strategic oversight, facilitate inter-agency coordination, and create clear escalation channels for resolving operational challenges identified at border level.*
	***c.** Create a permanent Regional Border Management Coordination Forum bringing together senior representatives of national border management coordination mechanisms. The Forum would facilitate strategic and technical dialogue among HoAI participating States, promote the exchange of good practices, support convergence of border management approaches, and provide technical inputs to the HoAI Regional Trade Facilitation Committee (HoAI-RTFC) on border-related challenges requiring regional policy responses or investment interventions.*
	***d.** Establish Joint Border Committees (JBCs) at strategic HoAI border posts where such structures do not yet exist. JBCs should bring together border management, customs, immigration, security, and other relevant agencies operating on both sides of the border to coordinate procedures, address operational bottlenecks, facilitate information exchange, monitor the implementation of bilateral arrangements, coordinate joint inspections and risk management activities, and engage with private-sector users of border facilities. Beyond their trade facilitation functions, JBCs should also contribute to strengthening border security and resilience by supporting joint security assessments, coordinated responses to emerging risks, information sharing among security agencies, and, where appropriate, joint patrols and other collaborative activities aimed at improving safety and stability in border areas.*
	***e.** Develop a pilot program for JBCs establishment at borders where insecurity is prevalent and implement joint training programmes, exchange visits, and peer-learning initiatives among border officials and agencies to strengthen understanding and application of Coordinated Border Management principles. These activities should promote common operational practices, enhance institutional trust among neighbouring administrations, and support the effective functioning of national coordination mechanisms, the Regional Forum, and Joint Border Committees.*
9. Establish a regional framework for cross-border data sharing and interoperability among Customs and other border agencies through the interconnection of national digital trade and border management systems.	***a.** Conduct a comprehensive regional digital interoperability assessment to map existing Customs, immigration, SPS, standards, transport, Single Window, port, and cargo tracking systems across HoAI participating States, identify technical, institutional, legal, and operational gaps affecting cross-border data exchange, and develop a phased implementation roadmap. The HoAI Digital Trade Gap Analysis should serve as a foundation for this assessment, providing an initial overview of existing digital capabilities and priority areas for intervention.*
	***b.** Establish common technical and institutional arrangements enabling secure exchange of trade, transport, and border management information while preserving national ownership of information systems. The framework should define interoperability standards, data*

	models, authentication mechanisms, cybersecurity requirements, data protection safeguards, and institutional responsibilities. It should be aligned with international standards, including the WCO Data Model and UN/CEFACT reference frameworks, as well as continental digital trade initiatives.
	***c.** Develop a regional trade automation and data sharing roadmap between neighbouring countries and agencies by prioritizing high-volume trade corridors and strategic border crossings. Initial pilots could focus on the electronic exchange of priority datasets, including customs declarations, transit information, certificates of origin, SPS certificates, inspection results, and non-intrusive inspection (NII) scanner images. Lessons from these pilots should inform the progressive expansion of the framework to additional countries, agencies, and datasets.*
	***d.** Progressively connect Customs management systems, immigration platforms, National Single Windows, Electronic Cargo Tracking Systems, and other relevant digital platforms through a regional interoperability layer. Support the deployment of complementary smart border technologies, including automated vehicle identification, biometric verification, OCR systems, IoT-enabled monitoring tools, and digital inspection solutions, to translate improved information exchange into faster, more secure, and risk-based border procedures.*
10. Develop dedicated fast-track lanes at Horn of Africa border posts for Authorized Economic Operators (AEOs) and progressively establish a regional AEO+ programme based on mutual recognition and coordinated border management.	***a.** Conduct a regional assessment of existing and planned AEO programmes in HoAI participating States, reviewing legal frameworks, eligibility criteria, validation procedures, benefits, digital systems, and institutional capacities. Building on the COMESA and EAC frameworks, prepare a phased roadmap for harmonizing national programmes, establishing Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs), and progressively developing a regional AEO+ model involving multiple border agencies.*
	***b.** Support HoAI participating States in establishing or strengthening national AEO programmes through the harmonization of eligibility criteria, authorization and validation procedures, post-authorisation monitoring, and benefit packages. Particular attention should be given to strengthening digital AEO management systems and ensuring compatibility with regional interoperability initiatives.*
	***c.** Support the development of dedicated fast-track lanes and priority service arrangements for Authorized Economic Operators plus at OSBPs, priority border posts, ports, and logistics facilities. In parallel, negotiate and implement bilateral and regional Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) to ensure that AEOs certified in one HoAI participating State receive equivalent facilitation benefits when operating in other participating countries. Design and pilot an inter-agency AEO+ framework that extends trusted trader recognition beyond Customs to other border authorities, including SPS agencies, standards bodies, immigration, port authorities, transport regulators, and security agencies. The pilot should establish common governance arrangements, coordinated risk management procedures, interoperable digital information exchange, and integrated service delivery, with a view to progressively expanding the programme across the HoAI region.*
11. Establish a regional framework for interoperable digital payments for customs duties, border agency fees, and other cross-border charges, including	***a.** Undertake a comprehensive feasibility study to assess existing government revenue collection systems, customs payment platforms, mobile money ecosystems, banking infrastructure, payment regulations, and cross-border payment initiatives across HoAI participating States. The study should identify legal, technical, institutional, and financial barriers to interoperability and develop a phased roadmap for implementing a regional digital payment*

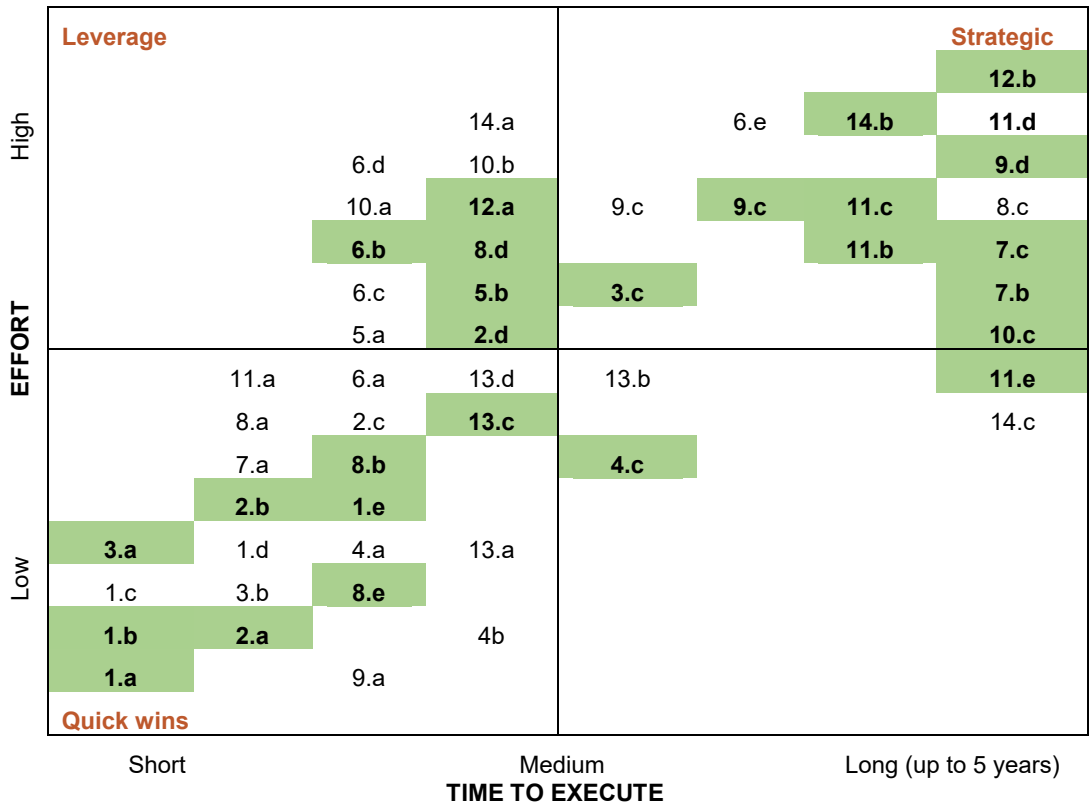
the mutual recognition of electronic proofs of payment.	*framework.*
	b. *Facilitate negotiations among central banks, revenue authorities, mobile network operators, commercial banks, and payment service providers to enable interoperable cross-border digital payments, including the use of mobile money platforms for the payment of customs duties, border agency fees, and other charges associated with import, export, and transit operations.*
	c. *Establish common technical standards, governance arrangements, cybersecurity safeguards, and legal frameworks to enable interoperable digital payments for customs duties, taxes, border agency fees, and other cross-border charges. The framework should support the mutual recognition of electronic proofs of payment and promote interoperability between national government revenue collection systems, banking platforms, mobile money services, and regional payment infrastructures, including the PAPSS where appropriate.*
	d. *Implement pilot projects at priority HoAI border crossings to enable traders and transport operators to settle border-related payments electronically using domestic banking or mobile payment instruments. The pilots should integrate customs and border agency payment systems, automate the electronic verification of payments, and test the cross-border exchange and mutual recognition of digital payment confirmations.*
	e. *Support the deployment of enabling infrastructure at border posts, including reliable internet connectivity, Point-of-Sale (POS) terminals, QR-code payment facilities, digital kiosks, and integration with Customs, National Single Windows, and border management systems. Based on the results of the pilots, progressively expand the regional framework to additional border posts, payment service providers, and government agencies while promoting adoption by traders and transport operators.*
12. Support the full operationalization of the DESSU Corridor Authority and Transport Observatory. ⚠	***a.*** *Support the full operationalization of the DESSU Corridor Authority and establish the DESSU Corridor Transport Observatory by developing its institutional framework, data governance arrangements, performance monitoring methodology, digital infrastructure, and reporting tools, enabling the regular publication of corridor performance indicators, scorecards, benchmarking reports, and analyses of operational bottlenecks.*
	b. *Develop an integrated digital corridor monitoring platform by progressively interconnecting the Observatory with national Customs systems, Electronic Cargo Tracking Systems (ECTSs), Road Corridor Management Information Systems (RRCMISs), National Single Windows, Port Community Systems, and other digital trade facilitation platforms to enable near real-time monitoring of corridor performance and evidence-based decision-making.*
13. Support the implementation of the AfCFTA Protocols through coordinated regulatory alignment and institutional capacity building.	***a.*** *Undertake a comprehensive assessment of the legal, regulatory, and institutional readiness of HoAI participating States to implement the AfCFTA Protocols. The assessment should identify legislative gaps, institutional capacity needs, implementation priorities, and opportunities for regional cooperation, and develop a phased roadmap for supporting regulatory alignment and implementation across the region.*

⚠	***b.*** *Develop regional guidelines, model legislation, implementation toolkits, and technical guidance to support the harmonized implementation of priority AfCFTA Protocols, with particular emphasis on technical regulations, SPS measures, quality infrastructure, digital trade, electronic transactions, cross-border data governance, digital payments, and measures supporting women- and youth-led enterprises. Promote regional dialogue to facilitate regulatory convergence, harmonization of standards, and the negotiation of Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) for conformity assessment results, inspection and certification procedures, and, where appropriate, the recognition of equivalence of sanitary and phytosanitary measures.*
	c. *Provide targeted technical assistance and capacity-building programmes for ministries responsible for trade, customs administrations, standards bodies, SPS authorities, accreditation agencies, competition authorities, and other relevant institutions. Establish regional peer-learning networks, communities of practice, and knowledge-sharing platforms to facilitate the exchange of implementation experiences and good practices among HoAI participating States.*
	d. *Develop a regional monitoring and coordination mechanism to track progress in implementing the AfCFTA Protocols, identify common implementation challenges, facilitate dialogue among HoAI participating States and development partners, and periodically report on progress towards regulatory convergence. The mechanism should support the alignment of HoAI trade facilitation initiatives with evolving AfCFTA obligations and priorities.*
14. Optimize and strengthen Pre-Arrival Processing (PAP) systems to accelerate cargo clearance and improve predictability of trade flows across HoAI corridors.	***a.*** *Develop a regional PAP framework establishing common operational procedures, minimum data requirements, interoperability standards, and institutional arrangements to support the exchange and processing of trade information before the arrival of consignments among Customs and other key control agencies. The framework will identify priority corridors and opportunities for linking national systems to enable more predictable and coordinated clearance processes across borders.*
	b. *Support the integration of customs systems with the IT platforms of other agencies involved in border controls, including standards, SPS, immigration, and transport authorities, to enable timely access to complete and reliable information for pre-arrival risk assessment and clearance decisions. This activity will promote the development of coordinated workflows, electronic data exchange mechanisms, and risk management tools that allow border agencies to process documentation, conduct documentary verification, and identify high-risk consignments before arrival. Where relevant, PAP solutions will be aligned with existing Single Window platforms, electronic customs systems, and other digital trade facilitation initiatives to avoid duplication and improve system efficiency.*
	c. *Strengthen the institutional and operational capacity required for effective PAP implementation through training, development of standard operating procedures, and establishment of coordination mechanisms among customs administrations, border agencies, and private sector stakeholders. This activity will promote greater adoption of PAP systems by traders, freight forwarders, and logistics operators through awareness campaigns and structured engagement platforms. It will also support the establishment of monitoring mechanisms to measure PAP performance, including clearance times, data exchange effectiveness, agency participation, and user satisfaction, ensuring continuous improvement and long-term sustainability of PAP processes.*

2. Prioritization of Activities

The Activities described above are organized in this Section according to their prioritization and expected impact. Prioritization refers to the effort and time required to implement an Activity, while impact refers to the extent to which an Activity can contribute to improvements in the broader trade facilitation environment and enable progress across related areas. Activities with a high expected impact are marked in green. The Activities were developed through discussions and meetings with stakeholders from HoAI participating countries during a consultation process conducted between June and August 2026. Their prioritization was further discussed during a regional workshop held in Nairobi on 13-14 August 2026 attended by high-ranking officials from Ministries of Trade and Finance of HoAI participating countries. The resulting prioritization is illustrated in Figure 4 below, which maps Activities according to their implementation effort and strategic impact. The lower-left quadrant identifies quick wins: Activities that require relatively limited effort and can deliver results within a short timeframe. The upper-left quadrant comprises Activities that can also be implemented relatively quickly but require greater effort. The upper-right quadrant includes Activities that are more demanding and require a longer implementation period but can generate significant strategic impact. The lower-right quadrant comprises Activities that require longer implementation timelines while offering comparatively limited improvements.

Figure 4: Prioritization of Activities diagram



V. IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

This Roadmap establishes a comprehensive framework of strategic activities to be implemented over a five-year period (2026–2031), reflecting the expanded strategic vision for trade facilitation in the Horn of Africa. To ensure effective implementation, progress monitoring, and accountability, the Roadmap will be operationalized through three consecutive phases: Start-Up and Institutionalization, Delivery and Project Execution, and Review, Alignment, and Next-Generation Planning.

Phase 1: Start-Up and Institutionalization Phase

Duration: Six to 12 months following Roadmap endorsement by HoAI Ministers of Finance and Trade

The first phase will establish the institutional, governance, and operational foundations required to coordinate the implementation of the Roadmap's strategic objectives. It will focus on securing political ownership, establishing implementation arrangements, strengthening technical capacity, and preparing the mechanisms required for resource mobilization and effective delivery.

A key milestone of this phase will be the adoption of a **Joint Declaration by Ministers of Trade** establishing the Horn of Africa Initiative Regional Trade Facilitation Committee (HoAI-RTFC) as the primary coordination mechanism for implementation. The HoAI-RTFC will serve as a lean and agile regional platform bringing together representatives from participating countries, including one designated public sector coordinator and one private sector representative from each State.

HoAI Ministers of Trade, in conjunction with HoAI Ministers of Finance are also required to formally endorsing the upgraded Roadmap.

In parallel with the establishment of the HoAI-RTFC, trade experts from HoAI participating countries, under the coordination of the HoAI Thematic Leaders for Trade, will develop the Terms of Reference (ToRs) of the HoAI-RTFC, defining its mandate, governance structure, operational procedures, and coordination functions. **The TORs will be approved by the HoAI-RTFC at the first session following its establishment**. To support the Committee in carrying out its mandate, one or more specialized technical experts will be recruited during this phase to provide dedicated support in areas such as implementation coordination, monitoring and reporting, technical analysis, stakeholder engagement, and preparation of project proposals for resource mobilization.

Lastly, this phase will include the development of the **HoAI Trade Facilitation Scorecard**, hosted through the official HoAI platform, to provide a transparent mechanism for tracking progress against agreed objectives, milestones, and performance indicators. The Scorecard will serve as a central monitoring tool for assessing implementation progress across HoAI participating States and facilitating evidence-based decision-making by the HoAI-RTFC.

During this phase, national institutions, supported by designated focal points and technical advisors, will begin preparing project concept notes derived from the Roadmap's strategic goals. These concepts will provide the basis for engagement with DPs and donor agencies, supporting the mobilization of financial and technical resources required for implementation.

Phase 2: Delivery and Project Execution Phase

Duration: Three and a half to four years following Roadmap endorsement

The second phase represents the core implementation period of the Roadmap and will focus on translating the strategic activities identified in the Roadmap into concrete project concepts and implementation programmes. During this phase, the HoAI-RTFC, supported by the specialized technical experts, will work closely with relevant national government agencies responsible for the thematic areas covered by each intervention to define project objectives,

implementation arrangements, technical requirements, resource needs, and financing strategies. This collaborative process will ensure that proposed projects are aligned with national priorities, reflect regional objectives, and are structured in a manner suitable for engagement with DPs and potential sources of financing. This will include defining technical specifications and estimated implementation budgets.

Following approval of financing arrangements with DPs, participating countries will proceed with project preparation, procurement, and execution. Implementation will follow a prioritization approach based on impact, feasibility, and regional relevance, combining short-term measures with longer-term transformational reforms.

Short-term priority actions (quick wins) will focus on reforms that can generate immediate improvements in trade facilitation performance. These will include the establishment of pilot STRs at selected border posts characterized by high levels of informal trade, the development of a regional Trade Information Portal providing accessible and harmonized information on trade procedures and requirements, and the implementation of initial digital interconnection initiatives among HoAI Customs administrations and other relevant border agencies to facilitate data exchange and strengthen inter-agency coordination.

Medium- and long-term strategic actions will focus on advancing regional digital integration and strengthening smart border management. These will include the interconnection of national Single Window systems, the development of a regional Electronic Cargo Tracking System and associated electronic seal management mechanism, and the integration of smart border technologies (such as automated inspection and identification systems) into national and regional border management strategies.

Throughout the implementation period, the HoAI-RTFC will monitor progress through the Trade Facilitation Scorecard, tracking achievements against agreed milestones and benchmarking performance against international indicators.

Phase 3: Review, Alignment, and new Planning Phase

Duration: Six months before the conclusion of the Roadmap period

The final phase will focus on evaluating results, consolidating lessons learned, and preparing the next generation of regional trade facilitation interventions. It will serve both as an accountability mechanism and as a bridge toward future strategic planning.

A comprehensive regional review will assess implementation outcomes against the Roadmap's performance indicators, examining the extent to which interventions have contributed to reducing transit times, lowering trade costs, addressing non-tariff barriers, improving border efficiency, and increasing the formal participation of small-scale traders.

The review will also assess alignment with evolving continental and international frameworks, including the implementation of relevant AfCFTA Protocols, particularly those related to Digital Trade and Women and Youth in Trade. This will ensure that HoAI reforms remain consistent with broader African integration objectives and emerging digital trade standards.

Drawing on evidence generated through corridor monitoring mechanisms, including the DESSU Transport Observatory, regional monitoring systems, and the HoAI Trade Facilitation Scorecard, the HoAI-RTFC will prepare the successor Regional Trade Facilitation Roadmap. This will ensure continuity, preserve institutional momentum, and enable the region to progressively advance toward more integrated, digitally enabled, and resilient trade systems.

HORN OF AFRICA INITIATIVE (HoAI)

Regional Trade Facilitation Roadmap Implementation Schedule | 5-Year Strategy (2026–2031)

STRATEGY LAUNCH — ENDORSEMENT / YEAR 1 — YEAR 4.5 AUDIT — YEAR 5 COMPLETION

PHASE 1: START-UP

Foundations & Governance

DURATION: 6 – 12 MONTHS

CRITICAL MILESTONES & DELIVERABLES

- **Ministerial Endorsement**
  HoAI Ministers of Finance & Trade formally endorse the upgraded regional roadmap.
- **Establishment of HoAI-RTFC**
  Adoption of Joint Declaration establishing the Regional Trade Facilitation Committee.
  Structure: 1 Public Coordinator + 1 Private Rep per State.
- **ToRs & Technical Capacity**
  Formulation and approval of committee ToRs. Recruitment of specialized technical experts to drive regional coordination and analysis.
- **Trade Facilitation Scorecard**
  Launch of transparent digital tracking tool hosted on the central HoAI web portal.
- **Resource Mobilization**
  National bodies draft targeted project concept notes to pitch to global development partners.

PHASE 2: DELIVERY & EXECUTION

Core Program Deployment

DURATION: 3.5 – 4 YEARS

PROGRAMMATION & TARGET ARCHITECTURE

ENGINEERING FLOW

Design & Budgeting → Donor Alignment → Procurement → Deployment

Short-Term Priority Actions ("Quick Wins")

- **Pilot Simplified Trade Regimes (STR):** Target border posts with high informal trade.
- **Regional Trade Information Portal:** Harmonize and publish baseline trade rules.
- **Customs Interconnection:** Establish fundamental data exchange links.

Medium- & Long-Term Strategic Interventions

- **Single Window Interconnection:** Deep cross-border systems integration.
- **Regional Electronic Cargo Tracking (RECTS):** Joint seal management systems.
- **Smart Border Architectures:** Biometrics, automated scanning, and identification.

PHASE 3: REVIEW & EVOLUTION

Auditing & Succession

DURATION: FINAL 6 MONTHS

CLOSING ACCOUNTABILITY MATRIX

- **Comprehensive Regional Review**
  Evaluate hard outcomes against key performance metrics: reduction in transit times, transaction costs, NTBs, and small-scale trade formalization.
- **AfCFTA Framework Alignment**
  Assess systemic alignment with continental rules, explicitly optimizing for the Digital Trade and Women & Youth in Trade Protocols.
- **Data-Driven Strategy Formulation**
  Incorporate analytics gathered via the DESSU Transport Observatory and the online Scorecard to lock down empirical progress maps.
- **Successor Roadmap Drafting**
  Formulate the next-generation strategy plan prior to Phase 3 end to preserve regional operational momentum.

VI. GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The successful implementation, monitoring, and continuous improvement of this Roadmap require a dedicated governance mechanism capable of ensuring effective coordination among HoAI participating States, alignment between national and regional priorities, and sustained engagement with private sector stakeholders. The governance framework is designed to provide both implementation oversight and institutional continuity, ensuring that lessons emerging from implementation are captured and incorporated into future updates of the Roadmap.

The HoAI-RTFC will serve as the central governance mechanism for the Roadmap. Supported by the HoAI Secretariat, the Committee will provide strategic coordination, monitor implementation progress, facilitate regional cooperation, and lead the preparation of future revisions and updates of the Roadmap based on implementation experience, emerging priorities, and evolving trade facilitation needs.

1. HoAI Regional Trade Facilitation Committee (HoAI-RTFC): Governance and Coordination Mechanism

The HoAI-RTFC will constitute the core institutional platform responsible for overseeing implementation of the Roadmap and ensuring coordination among participating countries. It will provide the link between political commitments, technical implementation, and stakeholder engagement, while ensuring that the Roadmap remains a living strategic instrument that evolves based on evidence and lessons learned.

Composition:

To maintain an agile and effective structure, the HoAI-RTFC will consist of two designated representatives from each active HoAI participating country:

Public Sector Representative: The National Coordinator of the National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) or equivalent national trade facilitation coordination mechanism;

Private Sector Representative: A designated representative from national chambers of commerce, logistics associations, or traders' organizations formally appointed by the Minister of Trade in each HoAI country.

Political Endorsement and Reporting:

The HoAI-RTFC will operate under the political endorsement of HoAI Ministers responsible for Trade and Finance, who will provide strategic guidance. The Committee will report progress, challenges, and recommendations requiring political intervention to the relevant ministerial platforms.

Core Responsibilities:

- Coordinate and oversee implementation of the Roadmap's strategic goals and activities;
- Monitor progress against agreed milestones through the HoAI Trade Facilitation Scorecard and other monitoring tools;
- Facilitate coordination among national institutions responsible for trade facilitation reforms;
- Identify and support the resolution of cross-border implementation challenges, including Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs);
- Promote dialogue between public authorities and private sector stakeholders;
- Review and validate project concepts and implementation proposals;
- Coordinate the preparation of future Roadmap updates based on implementation results, lessons learned, and changing regional priorities.

2. Technical Implementation Support: Thematic Working Groups

The HoAI-RTFC will be supported by specialized Working Groups responsible for providing technical inputs, developing detailed proposals, and supporting implementation of activities under the Roadmap. These groups will ensure that reforms are technically sound, aligned with national systems, and supported by the relevant sector institutions.

The TWGs will be organized around three main thematic areas:

Trade Working Group: Composed of focal points from Ministries responsible for Trade and Commerce, focusing on trade procedures, market access, trade information systems, Simplified Trade Regimes, and private sector facilitation.

Transport Working Group: Composed of focal points from Ministries responsible for Transport and Infrastructure, as well as corridor management authorities, focusing on transport facilitation, corridor performance, logistics systems, and connectivity.

Customs Working Group: Composed of focal points from Customs and Revenue Administrations, focusing on customs modernization, transit systems, risk management, digitalization, and border clearance processes.

Core Responsibilities:

- Develop technical proposals and implementation plans for activities under their respective areas;
- Prepare technical specifications, regulatory requirements, and operational procedures;
- Support cross-border coordination and implementation of regional initiatives;
- Provide progress updates and technical recommendations to the HoAI-RTFC.

The composition of the TWGs may be expanded on an ad hoc basis to include experts from relevant national administrations, regional organisations and specialised institutions whenever the subject under discussion falls within their areas of competence. This may include, for example, technical experts from IGAD and the DESSU Corridor Management Authority, as well as other relevant corridor, transport, customs or trade institutions. Such participation will ensure that the TWGs can draw on the appropriate technical expertise and operational experience required for specific activities without creating unnecessary institutional structures.

Institutional Support: HoAI Secretariat

The HoAI Secretariat will provide administrative, technical, and coordination support to the HoAI-RTFC and its associated working structures. It will facilitate communication among HoAI participating States, organize meetings and reporting processes, maintain regional datasets and knowledge products, and support monitoring of implementation progress.

The Secretariat will also support the recruitment and coordination of specialized technical experts who will provide dedicated assistance to the HoAI-RTFC in areas including implementation coordination, monitoring and evaluation, technical analysis, stakeholder engagement, and preparation of project proposals.

VII. RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

The human and financial resources required for the implementation of the Activities identified in the Roadmap, as well as their associated costs, cannot be fully determined at this stage. Consequently, the preparation of detailed resource project concept notes for each Activity will constitute one of the key actions to be undertaken during the Start-up Phase of the implementation schedule presented in section V. These resource plans will define the technical assistance requirements, institutional capacities, implementation costs, and potential financing sources needed to operationalize the Roadmap.

The successful implementation of the Activities described in Sectio IV (and, in particular, the fulfilment of the enabling actions identified in Section VIII under the column “Assumptions”) will require dedicated financial and technical support. Such support will be necessary to

finance activities including capacity-building programmes, technical assistance, feasibility studies, stakeholder consultations, workshops, peer-learning initiatives, and study tours. Mobilizing adequate resources from DPs and other financing sources will therefore be essential to translate the Roadmap's objectives into concrete reforms and ensure effective implementation across HoAI participating States.

VIII. RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

In the context of this Trade Facilitation Roadmap, a risk is defined as an uncertain event or condition that, if it occurs, may negatively affect the successful implementation or completion of an Activity. A mitigation strategy, on the other hand, consists of one or more measures or actions designed to reduce the likelihood of a risk occurring and/or minimise its potential impact on the successful implementation or completion of the Activity. Risk mitigation is therefore an integral part of the Roadmap's implementation framework, intended to anticipate potential obstacles, identify appropriate responses, and strengthen the ability of participating countries and implementing institutions to maintain progress when risks materialize. The key risks identified for the implementation of the Roadmap, together with the corresponding mitigation measures, are summarised in Table 2.

A key cross-cutting risk affecting all Activities is the availability of adequate and timely financing. Insufficient or delayed funding may prevent priority Activities from progressing beyond the planning and pilot stages to full implementation. To mitigate this risk, the project concept notes proposed in Section V, together with corresponding resource mobilisation strategies, should be developed during the initial phase of operationalisation of the HoAI-RTFC. These efforts should be guided by the prioritisation matrix presented in Section IV.2, ensuring that resource mobilisation is aligned with the sequencing, expected impact, and implementation requirements of the prioritised Activities.

Table 2: Risk Mitigation Strategy

Goals	Activity	Identified Risk(s)	Recommended Mitigation Strategy
1.	***a***	• RTFC members may lack the capacity to effectively perform their new regional coordination functions. • Ministries of Trade of HoAI countries may delay the designation of their members in the RTFC. • Delays in establishing the governance, technical and financing mechanisms required during the Start-up Phase may create cascading delays across subsequent Activities and reduce implementation momentum.	• Provide structured capacity building and technical expertise to RTFC members, supported by dedicated technical experts and clear guidance on their mandate, responsibilities and reporting functions. • HoAI Secretariat to send official letters to Ministers of Trade requesting the member designations. • Establish a sequenced implementation plan for the Start-up Phase, identify critical dependencies and milestones, assign clear institutional responsibilities, and monitor progress of Activities in the roadmap through the HoAI Trade Facilitation Scorecard,
	b.	The elaboration of TORs can encounter delays due to the need to find an agreement among representatives of HoAI participating countries.	• Anticipate consultation of national states for the drafting of the TORs before the Ministerial Meeting of 2-3 September 2026. • Prepare zero-draft TORs to guide and accelerate discussions.

	c.	Delayed recruitment due to bureaucratic hiring procedures or candidate shortages with specialized regional trade expertise.	Verify possibility to use the Multi-Donor Trust Fund for recruitment and establish a joint recruitment panel of HoAI-supporting donors with clear TORs.
	d.	Low compliance in updating matrix data by national agencies, or lack of political will to report sensitive trade barriers transparently.	Ministries of Trade adopt administrative instructions establishing mandatory periodic reporting to be submitted to the RTFC.
	e.	Limited participation of private-sector stakeholders and women traders may reduce the representativeness and effectiveness of stakeholder engagement activities.	Partner with local chambers of commerce, women's trader associations, and transport unions to deliver tailored multi-language workshops.
2.	***a.***	• Security constraints at remote border posts or resistance from informal traders due to mistrust of revenue officials. • Bureaucratic resistance to altering existing tariff structures or complex national customs procedures.	• Engage local community leaders and non-governmental actors to facilitate field surveys; implement strict anonymity for research data. • Focus on pragmatic, bilateral incremental alignment; benchmark against proven regional best practices (e.g., EAC/COMESA STRs).
	b.	Divergence in priority product lists across countries, leading to prolonged negotiations and political pushback.	Standardize target threshold values and focus initial common lists on essential agricultural goods and basic daily consumables.
	c.	• High turnover among informal traders and language/literacy barriers may limit the effectiveness of sensitization activities. • Traders reluctance or distrust may reduce access to the STR.	• Develop simplified pictorial user guides and local-language radio/mobile campaigns, and use peer-to-peer trainer networks. • Conduct structured public-private dialogues and targeted training for small-scale and women traders, involving trusted local intermediaries.
	d.	Underutilization of TIDs due to poor location placement, understaffing, or lack of reliable internet/infrastructure.	Place TIDs at high-footfall passenger clearance zones; equip desks with offline-capable digital tools and dedicated staff.
3.	***a.***	Fragmented data structures, proprietary agency formats, or legacy IT systems resisting assessment integration.	Adopt international data standards (WCO/UN/CEFACT Data Models) and establish open API guidelines early in the assessment phase.
	b.	Technical delays in API data synchronization and security concerns regarding cross-border data exposure.	Deploy robust encryption protocols, restrict access to non-sensitive regulatory procedures during pilot, and run stress testing.
	c.	Trade portals becoming outdated or displaying obsolete trade rules due to unclear long-term ownership and maintenance responsibilities.	Formulate binding Service Level Agreements (SLAs) between national trade ministries and the regional portal team, coupled with automated audit alerts.
4.	***a.***	Inter-agency mistrust or reluctance of private sector operators to share sensitive transit delay/cost metrics.	Standardize non-disclosure agreements, establish multi-agency task forces, and highlight mutual commercial

			benefits.
	b.	Methodological disagreements on measuring physical inspection vs. administrative release times across multiple agencies.	Use standard WCO TRS guidelines supplemented with clear digital indicators for energy, connectivity, and TID performance.
	c.	• Limited institutional commitment and follow-through may delay implementation of agreed corrective measures. • Joint TRS++ assessments may generate findings or corrective actions that participating institutions are unwilling or unable to implement due to resource constraints, institutional mandates or political sensitivities • Sensitivity around publicizing poor performance metrics leading countries to restrict report publication.	• Secure formal institutional commitments, jointly validate action plans, assign clear responsibilities and timelines, prioritise corrective measures according to feasibility and impact, and integrate follow-up actions into the HoAI Trade Facilitation Scorecard. • Ensure that action plans are jointly validated by participating institutions, prioritize corrective measures according to feasibility and impact, assign clear institutional responsibilities and timelines, and integrate follow-up actions into the HoAI Trade Facilitation Scorecard. • Anonymize sensitive comparative rankings when appropriate and emphasize progress metrics and capacity-building needs.
5.	***a.***	Inconsistent vehicle safety, axle-load regulations, and insurance enforcement standards across HoAI participating states.	Establish a comparative regulatory matrix to identify quick-win alignment areas (e.g., standardizing axle limits and insurance recognized under Yellow Card/COMESA).
	b.	• Domestic transport lobby groups resisting external competition and delaying agreement ratifications. • Infrequent meetings or lack of real-time escalation mechanisms when permits are rejected at border posts.	• Include domestic transport associations in consensus-building dialogues and introduce transitional quota mechanisms. • Create digital incident logging channels (e.g., dedicated WhatsApp/SMS helplines) linked to Joint Border Committees for rapid dispute resolution.
6.	***a.***	Incompatible proprietary vendor technologies and refusal by national agencies to replace existing hardware.	Focus on interfaces and middleware and software API integrations that allow existing hardware to communicate with a unified regional layer.
	b.	Cellular dead-zones along isolated corridor stretches causing signal dropouts and false tamper alarms.	Require tracking solutions capable of maintaining or storing location data during network outages, with automated synchronisation once connectivity is restored, and establish clear procedures for managing temporary signal loss.
	c.	High loss, theft, or damage rates of electronic seals, leading to device shortages at origin ports.	Establish regional seal pooling and reverse-logistics agreements with logistics vendors for device re-distribution.
	d.	Data privacy concerns from private logistics operators regarding	Implement role-based access control

		exposure of commercially sensitive cargo details.	(RBAC), [30] ensuring stakeholders only access data necessary for their operational role.
	e.	Operational confusion among frontline customs officers regarding rapid-response procedures for seal tamper alerts.	Conduct joint cross-border training simulations and publish standard operating procedures (SOPs) for tamper response.
7.	***a.***	• National security concerns over sharing critical infrastructure asset data and vulnerability details. • Unreliable manual data inputs resulting in outdated road condition alerts for transport operators.	• Implement data classification protocols, allowing public sharing of operational status while restricting raw infrastructure assets. • Integrate automated road sensors, crowdsourced driver alerts, and official transit agency feeds into the platform.
	b.	Technical glitches during integration of disparate national road asset databases.	Run pilot on a well-digitized corridor first; refine system architecture based on lessons learned before wider expansion.
	c.	High long-term maintenance and cloud hosting costs after donor funding transitions.	Develop a long-term sustainability and financing plan combining national/corridor authority budget allocations, development-partner support during transition, and, where appropriate, cost-recovery mechanisms for premium commercial services.
8.	***a.***	Inter-agency rivalry (e.g., Customs vs. Immigration vs. Security) hindering unified framework adoption.	Define clear statutory mandates, lead-agency roles, and shared performance KPIs sanctioned at the national cabinet level.
	b.	Bureaucratic inertia leading to irregular high-level executive meetings and delayed problem escalation.	Integrate border management metrics directly into institutional performance reviews of participating agency heads.
	c.	Inconsistent delegate representation between meetings leading to repeated foundational discussions.	Require designated institutional focal points and establish a permanent administrative secretariat for continuity.
	d.	Local operational conflicts between border officials of neighboring countries due to language or legal disparities.	Conduct joint cross-border orientation programs and establish co-chaired leadership roles (alternating periodically).
	e.	Escalation of regional security threats interrupting JBC field meetings and operations in volatile border zones.	Embed secure communication channels, virtual meeting options, and coordinated security protocols for operations in high-risk frontier areas.
9.	***a.***	Unwillingness of national agencies to fully disclose legal or technical system vulnerabilities during	Conduct assessments under formal non-disclosure frameworks and align findings with the HoAI Digital Trade Gap

[30] Role-Based Access Control (RBAC) is an information security mechanism that restricts system access to authorized users based on their role within an organization rather than their individual identity. Instead of assigning specific permissions directly to every individual employee, permissions are tied to a job function (e.g., HR Specialist, System Admin, Finance Manager). Users are then assigned to one or more roles, granting them all the privileges associated with those roles.

		assessment.	Analysis.
	b.	Incompatibility between national data protection laws and international cross-border data exchange mandates.	Draft standardized bilateral/regional data-sharing agreements containing robust privacy and cybersecurity safeguards.
	c.	Resistance from customs brokers and clearing agents accustomed to manual processing and paper documentation.	Mandate digital submission incrementally while offering reduced processing fees or fast-track clearance for digital filings.
	d.	Power outages, hardware failure, or cyber-attacks disabling smart border devices at remote posts.	Install solar power backups, redundant offline processing capabilities, and continuous multi-factor cybersecurity monitoring.
10.	***a.***	Significant disparities in validation standards and trust levels between national customs authorities.	Align national criteria strictly with WCO SAFE Framework standards and conduct joint inter-agency validation audits.
	b.	Low SME participation in AEO programs due to stringent compliance requirements favoring large multinationals.	Create tiered AEO certification levels tailored to medium-sized traders and provide technical compliance assistance.
	c.	• Non-AEO trucks blocking designated fast-track lanes due to poor border traffic physical infrastructure. • Other agencies (e.g., Standards, SPS) being hesitant to waive physical inspections based on Customs-only validation.	• Improve physical traffic management at border approaches through dedicated lanes, clear signage, automated or semi-automated vehicle identification where feasible, and effective separation of AEO and non-AEO traffic. • Develop joint cross-agency risk criteria, allowing SPS and Standards bodies to participate in joint validation audits.
11.	***a.***	Foreign exchange volatility and strict national central bank capital control regulations limiting cross-border transfers.	Partner with regional settlement platforms (e.g., PAPSS) to enable local currency clearing and settlement.
	b.	Disagreement among banks, mobile network operators and payment providers over transaction fees and revenue-sharing arrangements may delay interoperability.	Establish capped processing fee structures and emphasize high-volume transaction benefits to financial service providers.
	c.	Fraudulent electronic receipts or spoofed payment confirmations presented at border posts.	Implement real-time, API-verified digital payment verification systems accessible directly on frontline customs terminals.
	d.	Technical downtime of mobile/banking gateways during peak trading hours at border points.	Implement dual-path payment gateways with fallback offline transaction queueing systems.
	e.	Vandalism, physical damage, or theft of POS terminals and digital kiosks installed at border facilities.	Place equipment in secure, monitored administrative zones and establish service maintenance contracts with

			vendor SLAs.
12.	***a.***	• Ratification delays or institutional friction regarding multinational corridor protocols. • Non-compliance by port authorities or transport agencies in submitting operational bottleneck data.	• Provide targeted legal and technical assistance to HoAI participating States, establish a clear ratification roadmap, and use interim administrative arrangements where legally feasible to sustain implementation momentum pending formal approval. • Formalize data-sharing protocols backed by corridor council directives and publish aggregated performance indices.
	b.	Data pipeline failures and mismatched updates from disparate technical sources.	Implement automated data validation pipelines and continuous system health monitoring dashboards.
	c.	Regional diplomatic tensions or transit corridor competition derailing multi-country governance alignment.	Establish neutral, technical corridor working groups focused on economic benefits and shared trade growth
13.	***a.***	Delayed responses from national trade ministries undergoing competing regulatory reform priorities.	Deploy technical advisors within national ministries of trade to support legal assessments.
	b.	Slow domestic legislative approval cycles delaying adoption of harmonized model trade laws.	Provide models and templates pre-aligned with regional RECs (EAC, COMESA, IGAD) to fast-track parliamentary approvals.
	c.	High staff turnover in public institutions diluting the impact of technical training sessions.	Institutionalize training modules within national customs academies and establish digital e-learning repositories.
	d.	Overlapping and fragmented reporting requirements across AfCFTA, RECs and other regional initiatives may increase administrative burdens and reduce capacity of HoAI participating states to provide timely and consistent progress reports.	Harmonize reporting templates and indicators across relevant regional bodies and establish a single-entry reporting mechanism where feasible.
14.	***a.***	Resistance from customs brokers accustomed to lodging declarations only after goods physically arrive at border posts.	Offer financial or operational incentives, such as priority clearance queues and lower risk-profiling for PAP filers.
	b.	Inter-agency reluctance to share pre-arrival risk criteria or automate processing decisions.	Establish joint risk management centers with unified risk rules and reciprocal database access rights.
	c.	Low compliance and poor quality of advance data submitted by traders leading to manual re-work at borders.	Conduct continuous capacity building for clearing agents and enforce digital validation checks on advance declarations.

IX. SUMMARY

The following table is an instrument to support the management of the Roadmap implementation. It gives an overview of: (a) the Goals to be reached; (b) which Activities will lead to those Goals; (c) which will be the leading entity/entities responsible for the development of project concept notes related to the implementation of the described Activities; (d) the estimated timeframe for implementing each Activity.

Goals (a)	Activities (b)	Leading entity/entities for the implementation of the Activity (c)	Implementation Horizon (d)
1. Strengthen collaboration mechanisms for identification, reporting and resolution of NTBs in the HoA through the establishment of a permanent regional coordination platform that facilitates structured dialogue among governments, regional institutions and the private sector.	***a.*** *Establish the HoAI Regional Trade Facilitation Committee (HoAI-RTFC) as a regional coordination platform composed of one designated representative from the National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC)/National Monitoring Committee (NMC), and one private-sector representative from each HoAI participating country.*	***Ministries of Trade***	***0-6 months***
	b. *Develop Terms of Reference defining the mandate, governance structure, functions, operational modalities, and working arrangements of the HoAI-RTFC.*	***Ministries of Trade***	***0-6 months***
	c. *Recruit dedicated technical experts to provide analytical, coordination, monitoring, and technical support to the HoAI-RTFC.*	***DPs***	***0-6 months***
	d. *Develop and maintain a regional NTB monitoring and resolution matrix to register reported barriers, monitor their status, assign responsibilities, track corrective actions, and report progress on their resolution.*	***Ministries of Trade***	***9-12 months***
	e. *Organize awareness, sensitization, and training programmes for public and private-sector stakeholders to promote the use of national and regional NTB reporting mechanisms and strengthen capacities for identifying, reporting, and resolving non-tariff barriers.*	***Ministries of Trade***	***12 months***

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2. Implement Simplified Trade Regimes at HoAI borders at HoAI borders to facilitate legitimate small-scale cross-border trade, with particular attention to supporting women traders, who represent a significant share of informal commerce in the region.	***a.** Conduct studies at key border posts in the region with high levels of informality to assess the scale and characteristics of informal trade, including the volume and value of informal transactions, the main categories of goods traded informally, the means of transport and trading modalities used, the profile of traders involved, and the underlying factors driving reliance on informal channels. This should include mapping formalities and tariffs/taxes to be paid at the border in relation to the trade of such goods, in view of simplification and harmonization of regulations and standards for small-scale traders.*	***DPs***	***Within 2 years***
	***b.** Adopt Bilateral Agreements/Protocols establishing lists of common goods covered by the simplification measures.*	***Ministries of Trade-Customs***	***Within 2 years***
	***c.** Support the establishment/strenghtening of traders' associations (where not existing) with inclusion of women and youth traders for inclusiveness, and launch sensitization programs to increase awareness of trade procedures and traders' rights.*	***Ministries of Trade***	***Within 2 years***
	***d.** Establish Trade Information Desks at HoA borders and Integrate design of trade information desks for SMEs and cross-border markets.*	***Ministries of Trade***	***Within 3 years***
3. Develop a regional Portal that connects national Trade Information Portals and other relevant national databases, providing traders in the HoA with a single, interoperable access point to accurate and up-to-date information on cross-border trade procedures.	***a.** Conduct a regional assessment of existing Trade Information Portals, customs and border-related databases, and information-sharing practices in HoAI participating countries, identifying interoperability requirements, priority datasets, institutional responsibilities, and technical standards for establishing a regional access point.*	***Ministries of Trade, Customs***	***1 year***
	***b.** Develop and implement a pilot regional Trade Information Portal connecting existing national TIPs and selected trade-related databases from countries with operational systems, using common data standards, interoperability protocols, and mechanisms to ensure regular updating of information.*	***Ministries of Trade, Customs***	***18 months***
	***c.** Establish governance, data sharing and maintenance arrangements for the regional portal, including responsibilities for data provision, validation, updating, and coordination among national trade authorities and border agencies.*	***Ministries of Trade***	***3 years***
4. Conduct joint Time Release Studies (TRS++) at	***a.** Initiate consultations among Customs administrations and relevant border agencies in HoAI countries to identify priority border posts and corridors, agree institutional responsibilities, and establish the coordination*	***Customs***	***18 months***

priority border posts, along key trade corridors, or at the regional level among HoAI countries, and develop joint bilateral or regional action plans to implement the recommendations emerging from these assessments.	*arrangements required for conducting joint TRS++ exercises. This should include the establishment of structured engagement mechanisms with private-sector stakeholders, including traders, transport operators, logistics providers, and business associations, to collect operational evidence on bottlenecks and validate TRS++ findings and recommendations.*		
	***b** Develop and adopt Terms of Reference and a common methodology for joint TRS++ assessments, covering Customs, immigration, SPS authorities, standards agencies, transport regulators, and other relevant border control institutions. The methodology should also incorporate an assessment of digital connectivity, energy availability, and border infrastructure conditions, as well as the specific constraints affecting small-scale cross-border trade, including access to information, simplified procedures, compliance requirements, and the functioning of dedicated support mechanisms (Trade Information Desks).*	***DPs***	***Within 2 years***
	***c.** Conduct pilot joint TRS++ assessments at selected priority border posts and/or strategic corridors, followed by the preparation of bilateral or regional action plans defining corrective measures, responsible institutions, implementation timelines, and monitoring arrangements. This will include the establishment of a mechanism for integrating key findings and performance indicators from TRS assessments into the HoAI Trade Facilitation Scorecard, including changes in release times, border-crossing performance, and progress in implementing agreed recommendations. Full TRS reports and related documentation may be made available through the HoAI knowledge management platform, subject to approval by the relevant national authorities.*	***Customs***	***3 years***
5. Establish mutual recognition of cross-border road transport permits among HoAI participating States	***a.** Undertake a comparative assessment of existing national road transport regulations, permit regimes, and technical requirements to identify areas of convergence and divergence. This should include vehicle and operator requirements, insurance obligations, safety standards, and enforcement procedures across HoAI participating States to identify regulatory gaps and opportunities for harmonization.*	***Ministries of Transport***	***18 months***

to facilitate the free circulation of trucks and reduce administrative barriers along regional corridors	***b.*** *Develop and adopt bilateral or corridor-based frameworks for the mutual recognition of cross-border road transport permits, defining the scope of eligible transport operations, operator and vehicle requirements, technical and safety standards, compliance obligations, verification procedures, and institutional responsibilities. Based on these frameworks, support neighbouring countries along priority trade corridors in negotiating and concluding mutual recognition agreements for cross-border road transport permits. Establish joint monitoring mechanisms involving transport authorities, customs agencies, and private-sector representatives to identify implementation challenges and progressively refine the arrangements.*	***Ministries of Transport***	***3 years***
6. Establish interoperable Electronic Cargo Tracking System (ECTS) frameworks for end-to-end monitoring of goods movements along strategic trade corridors in the Horn of Africa.	***a.*** *Conduct a comprehensive assessment of existing Electronic Cargo Tracking Systems, Integrated Fleet Management Systems, customs transit platforms, and related digital infrastructure across HoAI participating States to identify gaps in coverage, technology, institutional arrangements, and operational performance. Based on the assessment, develop a regional ECTS interoperability framework defining common technical standards, data exchange protocols, governance arrangements, and minimum functional requirements for ensuring seamless cargo visibility across borders. The framework should determine whether existing national systems can be interconnected or whether a complementary regional platform would be required for specific corridors..*	***DPs***	***18 months***
	b. *Support the integration and expansion of ECTS capabilities along priority regional corridors, including Nairobi–Moyale–Addis Ababa, Berbera–Tog Wajaale–Addis Ababa, Djibouti–Galafi–Addis Ababa, and LAPSSET/Northern Kenya–South Sudan corridors. This activity will focus on connecting national tracking systems, enabling cross-border data exchange, and ensuring continuous monitoring of cargo movements from origin to destination without requiring replacement or reactivation of tracking devices at border crossings. Where national systems are not yet available, support the deployment of appropriate ECTS solutions adapted to corridor requirements.*	***DPs***	***2-3 years***
	c. *Establish common technical specifications, certification requirements, and operational procedures for electronic seals and tracking devices used across HoAI corridors. This will include developing mechanisms for the registration, reuse, maintenance, and redistribution of tracking devices through a regional seal management system supported by a centralized*	***Customs/Revenue authorities***	***2 years***

	digital inventory. The activity will also explore cost-sharing arrangements and options for regional procurement or seal management centres to improve device availability, reduce operational costs, and ensure sustainability.		
	***d.** Transform ECTS platforms from customs control tools into multi-user corridor management systems accessible to customs authorities, transport ministries, logistics operators, insurance providers, and enforcement agencies. This activity will support the development of governance models, user access arrangements, and financing mechanisms that ensure operational sustainability while reducing the burden of ECTS costs on transport operators alone. The system should enable stakeholders to benefit from improved cargo visibility, enhanced risk management, reduced physical escorts, and more predictable logistics operations.*	***Customs/Revenue authorities***	***2 years***
	***e.** Develop operational guidelines and strengthen institutional capacities for the effective deployment and use of interoperable ECTS systems across HoAI corridors. This activity will ensure that tracking solutions are adapted to different cargo characteristics and corridor realities, including containerized, bulk, and non-containerized shipments, through the appropriate combination of electronic seals, GPS/GSM tracking, physical security measures, and alternative monitoring solutions. It will support customs administrations, transport authorities, and other relevant agencies in establishing standard operating procedures, cross-border coordination mechanisms, rapid response arrangements, and effective use of ECTS data for risk management, enforcement, and corridor performance monitoring. Capacity building will also focus on integrating ECTS platforms with broader trade facilitation instruments, including customs transit systems, Single Windows, and corridor observatories.*	***Customs/Revenue authorities***	***4-5 years***

7. Develop a Regional Road Corridor Management Information System (RRCMIS) to monitor the condition, usability, resilience, and operational performance of priority trade corridors in the Horn of Africa.	***a.*** *Conduct a feasibility study to identify existing road management information systems, available datasets, institutional capacities, and interoperability requirements and define the technical architecture, data governance arrangements, cybersecurity requirements, communication protocols, and institutional responsibilities for establishing a regional platform that connects such systems, while preserving national ownership of road information. This will include the identification of common standards, protocols, and procedures for the exchange of selected road corridor data among participating countries. These arrangements should define priority datasets to be shared, including road conditions, traffic flows, incidents, weather-related disruptions, axle-load restrictions, construction works, bridge closures, and other factors affecting corridor performance.*	***Ministries of Transport***	***18 months***
	b. *Develop and pilot the RRCMIS along selected strategic trade corridors, initially focusing on corridors linking countries with more advanced road asset management capabilities, such as Ethiopia and Kenya, Kenya and South Sudan and Djibouti and Ethiopia. The pilot should integrate available data from road management systems, traffic monitoring tools, and other relevant digital platforms to provide a shared operational view of corridor conditions and identify bottlenecks affecting freight movements. Lessons from the pilot should inform the progressive expansion of the system to other HoAI participating States.*	***Ministries of Transport***	***5 years***
	c. *Expand the RRCMIS into a regional corridor performance and resilience platform. Progressively integrate additional data sources, including Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS), satellite imagery, IoT sensors, Electronic Cargo Tracking Systems (ECTSs), customs and border management platforms, and corridor observatories. Develop user interfaces, APIs, and mobile applications to provide relevant information to transport operators, logistics providers, and public authorities. The expanded platform should support predictive maintenance, incident management, route planning, and evidence-based investment decisions, contributing to more resilient and efficient regional trade corridors.*	***Ministries of Transport***	***5 years***
8. Establish a Regional Border Management Coordination Forum and Institutionalize	***a.*** *Conduct an assessment of existing border coordination mechanisms at key HoAI borders and develop a regional framework for coordinated border management*	***Customs, Ministries of Trade***	***1 year***
	b. *Support HoAI participating States to establish or strengthen high-level national border management coordination platforms, adapted to their*	***Customs, Ministries of Trade***	***18 months***

Joint Border Committees at HoAI Border Posts	*institutional contexts, bringing together Customs, immigration, security agencies, standards and SPS authorities, transport regulators, and other relevant institutions. These mechanisms should provide strategic oversight, facilitate inter-agency coordination, and create clear escalation channels for resolving operational challenges identified at border level.*		
	***c.** Create a permanent Regional Border Management Coordination Forum bringing together senior representatives of national border management coordination mechanisms. The Forum would facilitate strategic and technical dialogue among HoAI participating States, promote the exchange of good practices, support convergence of border management approaches, and provide technical inputs to the HoAI Regional Trade Facilitation Committee (HoAI-RTFC) on border-related challenges requiring regional policy responses or investment interventions.*	***Customs, Ministries of Trade***	***5 years***
	***d.** Establish Joint Border Committees (JBCs) at strategic HoAI border posts where such structures do not yet exist. JBCs should bring together border management, customs, immigration, security, and other relevant agencies operating on both sides of the border to coordinate procedures, address operational bottlenecks, facilitate information exchange, monitor the implementation of bilateral arrangements, coordinate joint inspections and risk management activities, and engage with private-sector users of border facilities. Beyond their trade facilitation functions, JBCs should also contribute to strengthening border security and resilience by supporting joint security assessments, coordinated responses to emerging risks, information sharing among security agencies, and, where appropriate, joint patrols and other collaborative activities aimed at improving safety and stability in border areas.*	***Customs, Ministries of Trade***	***2 years***
	***e.** Develop a pilot program for JBCs establishment at borders where insecurity is prevalent and implement joint training programmes, exchange visits, and peer-learning initiatives among border officials and agencies to strengthen understanding and application of Coordinated Border Management principles. These activities should promote common operational practices, enhance institutional trust among neighbouring administrations, and support the effective functioning of national coordination mechanisms, the Regional Forum, and Joint Border Committees.*	***Customs, Ministries of Trade***	***1 year***
9. Establish a	***a.** Conduct a comprehensive regional digital interoperability assessment to*	***Customs, Ministries of Trade***	***18 months***

regional framework for cross-border data sharing and interoperability among Customs and other border agencies through the interconnection of national digital trade and border management systems.	*map existing Customs, immigration, SPS, standards, transport, Single Window, port, and cargo tracking systems across HoAI participating States, identify technical, institutional, legal, and operational gaps affecting cross-border data exchange, and develop a phased implementation roadmap. The HoAI Digital Trade Gap Analysis should serve as a foundation for this assessment, providing an initial overview of existing digital capabilities and priority areas for intervention.*		
	***b.** Establish common technical and institutional arrangements enabling secure exchange of trade, transport, and border management information while preserving national ownership of information systems. The framework should define interoperability standards, data models, authentication mechanisms, cybersecurity requirements, data protection safeguards, and institutional responsibilities. It should be aligned with international standards, including the WCO Data Model and UN/CEFACT reference frameworks, as well as continental digital trade initiatives.*	***Customs, Ministries of Trade***	***3 years***
	***c.** Develop a regional trade automation and data sharing roadmap between neighbouring countries and agencies by prioritizing high-volume trade corridors and strategic border crossings. Initial pilots could focus on the electronic exchange of priority datasets, including customs declarations, transit information, certificates of origin, SPS certificates, inspection results, and non-intrusive inspection (NII) scanner images. Lessons from these pilots should inform the progressive expansion of the framework to additional countries, agencies, and datasets.*	***Customs, Ministries of Trade***	***4 years***
	***d.** Progressively connect Customs management systems, immigration platforms, National Single Windows, Electronic Cargo Tracking Systems, and other relevant digital platforms through a regional interoperability layer. Support the deployment of complementary smart border technologies, including automated vehicle identification, biometric verification, OCR systems, IoT-enabled monitoring tools, and digital inspection solutions, to translate improved information exchange into faster, more secure, and risk-based border procedures.*	***Customs, Ministries of Trade***	***5 years***
10. Develop dedicated fast-track lanes at Horn of Africa border posts for Authorized	***a.** Conduct a regional assessment of existing and planned AEO programmes in HoAI participating States, reviewing legal frameworks, eligibility criteria, validation procedures, benefits, digital systems, and institutional capacities. Building on the COMESA and EAC frameworks, prepare a phased roadmap for harmonizing national programmes,*	***Customs***	***30 months***

Economic Operators (AEOs) and progressively establish a regional AEO+ programme based on mutual recognition and coordinated border management.	*establishing Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs), and progressively developing a regional AEO+ model involving multiple border agencies.*		
	***b.** Support HoAI participating States in establishing or strengthening national AEO programmes through the harmonization of eligibility criteria, authorization and validation procedures, post-authorisation monitoring, and benefit packages. Particular attention should be given to strengthening digital AEO management systems and ensuring compatibility with regional interoperability initiatives.*	***Customs***	***3 years***
	***c.** Support the development of dedicated fast-track lanes and priority service arrangements for Authorized Economic Operators plus at OSBPs, priority border posts, ports, and logistics facilities. In parallel, negotiate and implement bilateral and regional Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) to ensure that AEOs certified in one HoAI participating State receive equivalent facilitation benefits when operating in other participating countries. This activity will include the design and pilot an inter-agency AEO+ framework that extends trusted trader recognition beyond Customs to other border authorities, including SPS agencies, standards bodies, immigration, port authorities, transport regulators, and security agencies. The pilot should establish common governance arrangements, coordinated risk management procedures, interoperable digital information exchange, and integrated service delivery, with a view to progressively expanding the programme across the HoAI region.*	***Customs***	***5 years***
11. Establish a regional framework for interoperable digital payments for customs duties, border agency fees, and other cross-border charges, including the mutual recognition of electronic proofs of payment.	***a.** Undertake a comprehensive feasibility study to assess existing government revenue collection systems, customs payment platforms, mobile money ecosystems, banking infrastructure, payment regulations, and cross-border payment initiatives across HoAI participating States. The study should identify legal, technical, institutional, and financial barriers to interoperability and develop a phased roadmap for implementing a regional digital payment framework.*	***Ministries of Finance, Central Banks, Ministries of Trade***	***18 months***
	***b.** Facilitate negotiations among central banks, revenue authorities, mobile network operators, commercial banks, and payment service providers to enable interoperable cross-border digital payments, including the use of mobile money platforms for the payment of customs duties, border agency fees, and other charges associated with import, export, and transit operations.*	***Ministries of Finance, Central Banks, Ministries of Trade***	***4 years***

	c. *Establish common technical standards, governance arrangements, cybersecurity safeguards, and legal frameworks to enable interoperable digital payments for customs duties, taxes, border agency fees, and other cross-border charges. The framework should support the mutual recognition of electronic proofs of payment and promote interoperability between national government revenue collection systems, banking platforms, mobile money services, and regional payment infrastructures, including the PAPSS where appropriate.*	***Ministries of Finance, Central Banks, Ministries of Trade***	***5 years***
	d. *Implement pilot projects at priority HoAI border crossings to enable traders and transport operators to settle border-related payments electronically using domestic banking or mobile payment instruments. The pilots should integrate customs and border agency payment systems, automate the electronic verification of payments, and test the cross-border exchange and mutual recognition of digital payment confirmations.*	***Ministries of Finance, Central Banks, Ministries of Trade***	***5 years***
	e. *Support the deployment of enabling infrastructure at border posts, including reliable internet connectivity, Point-of-Sale (POS) terminals, QR-code payment facilities, digital kiosks, and integration with Customs, National Single Windows, and border management systems. Based on the results of the pilots, progressively expand the regional framework to additional border posts, payment service providers, and government agencies while promoting adoption by traders and transport operators.*	***Ministries of Finance, Central Banks, Ministries of Trade***	***5 years***
12. Support the full operationalization of the DESSU Corridor Authority and Transport Observatory	***a.*** *Support the full operationalization of the DESSU Corridor Authority and establish the DESSU Corridor Transport Observatory by developing its institutional framework, data governance arrangements, performance monitoring methodology, digital infrastructure, and reporting tools, enabling the regular publication of corridor performance indicators, scorecards, benchmarking reports, and analyses of operational bottlenecks.*	***Ministry of Transport***	***3 years***
	b. *Develop an integrated digital corridor monitoring platform by progressively interconnecting the Observatory with national Customs systems, Electronic Cargo Tracking Systems (ECTSs), Road Corridor Management Information Systems (RRCMISs), National Single Windows, Port Community Systems, and other digital trade facilitation platforms to enable near real-time monitoring of corridor performance and evidence-based decision-making.*	***Ministry of Transport***	***5 years***

13. Support the implementation of the AfCFTA Protocols through coordinated regulatory alignment and institutional capacity building	***a.*** *Undertake a comprehensive assessment of the legal, regulatory, and institutional readiness of HoAI participating States to implement the AfCFTA Protocols. The assessment should identify legislative gaps, institutional capacity needs, implementation priorities, and opportunities for regional cooperation, and develop a phased roadmap for supporting regulatory alignment and implementation across the region.*	***Ministries of Trade***	***2 years***
	b. *Develop regional guidelines, model legislation, implementation toolkits, and technical guidance to support the harmonized implementation of priority AfCFTA Protocols, with particular emphasis on technical regulations, SPS measures, quality infrastructure, digital trade, electronic transactions, cross-border data governance, digital payments, and measures supporting women- and youth-led enterprises. Promote regional dialogue to facilitate regulatory convergence, harmonization of standards, and the negotiation of Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) for conformity assessment results, inspection and certification procedures, and, where appropriate, the recognition of equivalence of sanitary and phytosanitary measures.*	***Ministries of Trade***	***3 years***
	c. *Provide targeted technical assistance and capacity-building programmes for ministries responsible for trade, customs administrations, standards bodies, SPS authorities, accreditation agencies, competition authorities, and other relevant institutions. Establish regional peer-learning networks, communities of practice, and knowledge-sharing platforms to facilitate the exchange of implementation experiences and good practices among HoAI participating States.*	***Ministries of Trade***	***1-2 years***
	d. *Develop a regional monitoring and coordination mechanism to track progress in implementing the AfCFTA Protocols, identify common implementation challenges, facilitate dialogue among HoAI participating States and development partners, and periodically report on progress towards regulatory convergence. The mechanism should support the alignment of HoAI trade facilitation initiatives with evolving AfCFTA obligations and priorities.*	***Ministries of Trade***	***Within 2 years***

14. Optimize and strengthen Pre-Arrival Processing (PAP) systems to accelerate cargo clearance and improve predictability of trade flows across HoAI corridors	***a.*** *Develop a regional PAP framework establishing common operational procedures, minimum data requirements, interoperability standards, and institutional arrangements to support the exchange and processing of trade information before the arrival of consignments among Customs and other key control agencies. The framework will identify priority corridors and opportunities for linking national systems to enable more predictable and coordinated clearance processes across borders.*	***Customs***	***3 years***
	b. *Support the integration of customs systems with the IT platforms of other agencies involved in border controls, including standards, SPS, immigration, and transport authorities, to enable timely access to complete and reliable information for pre-arrival risk assessment and clearance decisions. This activity will promote the development of coordinated workflows, electronic data exchange mechanisms, and risk management tools that allow border agencies to process documentation, conduct documentary verification, and identify high-risk consignments before arrival. Where relevant, PAP solutions will be aligned with existing Single Window platforms, electronic customs systems, and other digital trade facilitation initiatives to avoid duplication and improve system efficiency.*	***Customs***	***4 years***
	c. *Strengthen the institutional and operational capacity required for effective PAP implementation through training, development of standard operating procedures, and establishment of coordination mechanisms among customs administrations, border agencies, and private sector stakeholders. This activity will promote greater adoption of PAP systems by traders, freight forwarders, and logistics operators through awareness campaigns and structured engagement platforms. It will also support the establishment of monitoring mechanisms to measure PAP performance, including clearance times, data exchange effectiveness, agency participation, and user satisfaction, ensuring continuous improvement and long-term sustainability of PAP processes.*	***Customs***	***5 years***