IMANI Update: Ghana’s ‘New’ Port Technology System Derails Trade

1. Our ports have been de-digitized to pre-2002 era. Shipping lines, freight forwarders/ clearing agents are now being requested to provide photocopies of documents previously used to clear goods on the more efficient, but crudely sacked GCNET/West Blue platform as basis for manual verification of similar goods currently being imported/exported.

2. Never mind, that values, prices change all the time. This in essence means, the acclaimed superior ICUMS/UNIPASS system has NO pricing data against which they could determine current prices and respective taxes that must be paid to the state.

3. ICUMS/ UNIPASS does not have data on cars coming from Japan for instance. Which is why a vehicle that cost Ghs12, 000 to clear on the GCNET/West Blue platform now clears for GHs 6,000 on a very manual UNIPASS.

4. Better still, when UNIPASS attempts to use its quack electronic platform a 2016 model Chevrolet could be processed for Ghs 14. Yes, you read right, Ghs 14!

5. Clearing Agents are reportedly being begged to manually pay the difference in expected values/ prices/ taxes on goods poorly assessed by UNIPASS.

6. Takoradi sector commander of Customs is reported to be begging clearing agents and gives them special tax codes to manually pay duty difference if they realize their duties "have come down" compared to what they used to pay on GCNET.

7. One freight forwarder said to me this evening, "now all risk levels of consignments are manually routed to examination platform for physical examination to be conducted after scanning. Under normal circumstances in GCNET/West Blue era, yellow consignments are supposed to exit after scanning if the image analysed is without any discrepancies. Green consignments are supposed to exit the port after scanning without any human interference while, Red channel are physically examined. This is because scanned images together with the details of the declaration cannot be accessed in the UNIPASS/ICUMS system"

8. And then it takes more than a week to manually clear a single vehicle- imagine the loss in revenues in a pandemic era.- Revenues are down by 30% in Takoradi. Tema is incalculable.

9. Imagine the impact on our neighbour landlocked countries that rely on our ports- Imagine the cascading impact on warehousing of goods, tracking and retail prices for ordinary consumers like us!

10. The Ghana Union of Traders’ Association has expressed their displeasure with the transitional arrangement of Ghana’s Universal Pass (UNIPASS) system as it costs the importer more than before.

“The GUTA is therefore calling on government to fix associated challenges and bring operations at the port to normalcy with the enhanced efficiency that was promised the business community.

A statement signed by Dr Joseph Obeng, GUTA President and copied to the Ghana News Agency in Accra said prior to the introduction of the UNIPASS system, the Association was briefed on the efficiency that the new system would bring to enhance the clearing process at the ports. The statement said the Association was assured of a smooth transition and that the pilot programmes took place at other places other than the Tema Port and “this is why GUTA was mute and observing the trend of affairs.”

It said it was therefore surprised that the system was full of challenges that caused delay, which eventually cost the importer, in terms of demurrage and rent charges.

Source: https://3news.com/guta-not-satisfied-with-unipas-transitional-arrangement/

11. If UNIPASS was this superior, it shouldn't take the trade minister and one of his deputies three months to be visiting the ports just to calm unending protests by shipping / clearing agents. They have virtually become clearing agents themselves busily vouching for a system that is delivering impressive pain and draining needed revenues.

12. Makes mockery of Ghana hosting AfCTA. But there is a method and a reason for this paralysis-- the deputy minister confessed to me on Metro TV that he had not seen or read the UNIPASS contract. Let that sink in.

13. IMANI has suggested to the government to;

A. Temporarily suspend operations of UNI-PASS and allow GCNET and West Blue to operate for the remainder of the year in order to assure the nation of revenues, most likely GHS10bn given depressed trade activity due to covid-19.

B. Conduct an independent review of the UNI-PASS system.

C. The Ministry of Trade and Finance should share revenue projections from implementing UNI-PASS with Ghanaians.

Useful guide to the above update

1. The Ghana Revenue Authority Calls for the Return of the GCNET and West Blue Port Systems following Failures in the Integrated Customs Management System (ICUMS)/UNIPASS.https://imaniafrica.org/2020/04/29/the-ghana-revenue-authority-calls-for-the-return-of-the-gcnet-and-west-blue-port-systems-following-failures-in-the-integrated-customs-management-system-icums-unipass/

2. OPEN LETTER: Why Ghana Link’s Terminated ‘Single-Window’ Contract in Sierra Leone Should Guide Ghana’s UNI-PASS Customs and Ports Technology Contract- IMANI Petitions President. https://imaniafrica.org/2020/03/21/why-ghana-links-terminated-single-window-contract-in-sierra-leone-should-guide-ghanas-uni-pass-customs-and-ports-technology-contract-imani-petitions-president/

3. IMANI: A Review of Trade Facilitation Agreement Between the Government of Ghana and Ghana Link Network Services Limited for the Provision of a Fully Integrated Trade Facilitation and Customs Management System. https://imaniafrica.org/2020/02/17/imani-a-review-of-trade-facilitation-agreement-between-the-government-of-ghana-and-ghana-link-network-services-limited-for-the-provision-of-a-fully-integrated-trade-facilitation-and-customs-manangeme/

4. IMANI: Why Government must Reconsider its Decision on the Controversial UNI-PASS Customs and Ports Technology. https://imaniafrica.org/2020/01/31/imani-why-government-must-reconsider-its-decision-on-the-controversial-uni-pass-customs-and-ports-technology/

5. Need Information on Trade Facilitation Systems-UNI-PASS, GCNet, WEST BLUE. https://imaniafrica.org/2018/07/17/need-information-on-trade-facilitation-systems-uni-pass-gcnet-west-blue/