National Single Window as a Catalyst to Economic Rebirth of Nigerian Seaports, Imports and Exports

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ABSTRACT

The paper examined the National Single Window and emphasized that Nigeria's port operations have historically suffered from systemic in efficiencies including prolonged cargo dwell time, multiple regulatory inspections and excessive documentation. These challenges arise from fragmented institutional frameworks and manual clearance processes that are ill-suited to modern trade demands. The National Single Window represents a paradigm shift from fragmented port administration to coordinated digital governance. Enabling electronic submission of trade documents through a single entry point, the NSW eliminates redundancies, reduce human interface, and creates audit trails that enhance accountability. The paper examined the laws, policies and institutional roles that underpin the National Single Window, highlighting both enabling factors, legal gaps and challenges. The findings revealed that effective implementation of the National Single Window has the potential to enhance port efficiency, reduce costs, increase transparency, and strengthen Nigeria's competitiveness in maritime international trade.

Keywords: Trade facilitation seaports efficiency, National Single Window. Corruption, Multiple agencies, data electronic submission

INTRODUCTION

Maritime ports economy constitutes the backbone of international trade and remains a fundamental driver of economic development for coastal states. Nigeria, as a maritime nation strategically located along the Gulf of Guinea, relies extensively on its seaports for international commerce. Over eighty percent of Nigeria's imports and exports are transported through maritime routes, making the efficiency of seaports crucial to national economic performance.

Despite Nigeria's strategic maritime position, port operations have historically suffered from congestion, prolonged cargo dwell time, multiplicity of regulatory agencies, excessive repetitive documentation, bureaucratic delays bottlenecks and lack of coordination, leading to increased costs and inefficiencies.

Beyond its role in facilitating international commerce, the ports sector occupies a strategic position in Nigeria's economic architecture. The sector contributes significantly to employment generation, revenue mobilisation, industrial development, and foreign exchange earnings. Efficient port operations reduce transaction costs, promote export competitiveness, and support domestic manufacturing. Conversely, inefficiencies in port administration translate into higher consumer prices, reduced trade volumes, and weakened investor confidence.

In recent decades, Nigeria's ports have struggled to match the performance of comparable ports in West and Southern Africa. The concentration of trade activities in Lagos ports, particularly Apapa and Tin Can Island, has exacerbated congestion and infrastructural strain. Multiple cargo inspections, overlapping regulatory mandates, and manual documentation processes have resulted in systemic delays that undermine the ease of doing business. These challenges are not merely operational but raise serious legal and institutional concerns.

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It is against this backdrop that the National Single Window emerges as a strategic intervention and key trade facilitation mechanism. The NSW seeks to simplify and harmonized trade procedures by enabling traders to submit regulatory documents through a single electronic platform, thereby improving efficiency, transparency and compliance in port operations. The National Single Window represents a modern approach to trade facilitation, driven by advances in information and communication technology. It is designed to eliminate duplication of procedures by integrating the activities of all government agencies involved in international trade and paradigm shift from fragmented port administration.

The National Single-Window platform is the one-stop-shop operational model that is critical to removing the multiple pain points that elongate processes with adverse negative impacts on businesses, international trade, and the overall economy of Nigeria.[1] NSW platform has been recognized by organizations like the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and its centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business UN/CEFACT, the World Customs Organization (WCO), World Trade Organization (WTO), etc, and has long been adopted by many countries around the world including USA, UK, UAE, Singapore, China[2] etc.

Historical Perspective Of National Single Window In Nigeria

National Single Window represents a bold shift toward simplifying the complex and often chaotic systems that have plagued the nation's trade industry for decades.[3] The initiative promises to consolidate all trade-related processes into one unified platform, replacing the fragmented multi-window system. For example, customs has its own window, the Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA) has its own, the government has another, and even the Central Bank operates its own window.

Originally, introduced in 2016 and revived in 2024 by the Federal Government.[4] The NSW is an electronic portal designed to connect all the players in Nigeria's trade ecosystem – government agencies, importers, exporters, and customs officials – on a single, integrated platform. By addressing long-standing issues such as delays, lack of transparency, and revenue leakages, the NSW aims to boost trade efficiency, enhance government revenue, and improve national security at Nigeria borders. These improvements are crucial, especially considering Nigeria's consistently low ranking on global ease-of-doing-business indexes.[5]

The NSW initiative is not a sudden innovation. It's the next logical step in a series of efforts to modernize Nigeria's trade system. Over the years, the country has cycle through different systems – from the Nigeria Integrated Customs System (NICIS II) to the Automated System for customs Data (ASYCUDA + and ASYCUDA ++).[6] Each evolution has been an attempt to solve the same problems: inefficiency, opacity, and the constant challenge of navigating multiple, disconnected systems. With the NSW, the goal is clear – to create a seamless, one-stop-shop for all trade-related transactions.[7] A single window ensures harmonized data exchange among all trade-related agencies.

According to the president, National Council of Managing Directors of Licensed Customs Agents (NCMDLCA), Lucky Amiwero,[8] "ASYCUDA was a customs processing system, not an initiative of the customs service or the Federal Government it was developed for destination inspection and digital trade facilitation". Going by Amiwero's informed perspective, it means that on the behest of the NSW project, all trade-related agencies, such as Nigerian Customs Service (NCS), Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA), Central bank of Nigeria (CBN), national Agency for Food, Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), Standards Organisation of Nigeria (SON), and others, will now operate under a single, unified system, powered by a one-stop-shop that will streamline documentation and transactions into a single application.[9]

[1] The Nations, Friday February 13, 2026 P. 32
[2] P. 32
[3] The Nation, Monday, February 17, 2025 P. 3
[4] Ibid P. 3
[5] Ibid P. 3
[6] Ibid P. 3
[7] Ibid P. 3
[8] Ibid P. 3
[9] Ibid P. 3

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The National Single Window (NSW) is part of a global shift towards smarter, more efficiency trade systems.[10] At its core, the single window concept is a digital platform through which importers and exporters can submit all required documentation in one place, rather than navigating multiple agencies and processes. It is meant to reduce duplication, shorten processing, time, improve transparency, and ultimately, lower the cost of doing business.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) recommends that "if information is electronic then individual data elements should only be submitted once".[11]

The managing director of Trade Development and Facilitation Consulting (TDAF) at the World Trade Centre II, Geneva Switzerland, Mr. Tom Butterly said "The Single Window reform is now helping, to create a fundamental change of the mindset. Countries even in Africa, that have embraced and are implementing the single window have been able to reduce the cost of doing business significantly and are doing so well. They include Coasta Rica and Rwanda, and Ghana is also able to save about $200 million in 2015. Ghana is also forecast to move up from the current global position of 171 to 121 out of 189 countries and the sub-saharan Africa-rank of 36 to 16 out of 47 countries in 'World Bank Trading Acres Borders' (Ease of Doing Business) Survey by 2020"[12]

The WTO Agreement Article 10.4 discusses the single window, while Article 4.1 states that members shall endeavour to establish or maintain a single window single entry, point where all trade information can be assessed by government agencies and the private sector.

According to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) trade facilitation anchored on building and implementing the single window platforms for all players in the international trade chain can help the global economy to save up to $1 trillion annually.[13] Trade facilitation means the simplification, standardization and harmonization of trade procedures and associated information flow required to move goods from seller to buyer and to make payment for the goods.[14]

Definition: Conceptual Clarification

A National Single Window (NSW)[15] is a trade facilitation mechanism that allows parties involved in international trade and transport to submit standardized information and documents through a single electronic entry point to fulfill all regulatory requirements relating to importation, exportation, and transit of goods.[16] Once submitted, the information is shared among all relevant government agencies, thereby eliminating repetitive data submission and manual processing.

The NSW concept is strongly supported by international trade law instruments, particularly the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), which encourages member states to establish or maintain a single window to enhance efficiency, transparency, and predictability in cross-border trade.[17]

The United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) provides the most widely accepted definition of a Single Window as:

"A facility that allows parties involved in trade and transport to lodge standardized information and documents with a single entry point to fulfill all import, export, and transit-related regulatory requirements."[18]

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[10] This Day 23, April 2026 P. 23
[11] Leadership, Wednesday, March 9, 2016 P. 39
[12] Ibid. P. 39
[13] Ibid. P. 39
[14] Ibid. P. 39
[15] UN/CEFACT, Recommendation and Guidelines on Establishing a single window (Recommendation No 33;) (2005).2.
[16] https://www.miti.gov.my/index.php/pages/view/content18d7.html?utm *The Ministry of investment, Trade and Industry* (Malaysia) explicitly defines a National Single Window (NSW) in the same terms, emphasizing submission of standardized information and documents through a single entry point to meet all relevant regulatory requirements for imports, exports, and transit.
[17] Under Article 10.4 of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, WTO members "*shall endeavor to establish or maintain a single window, enabling traders to submit documentation and/or data requirements for importation, exportation, or transit of goods through a single entry point to the participating authorities or agencies*," with the aim of simplifying and harmonizing cross-border procedures.

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This definition underscores three essential elements of an effective NSW:

1. Single Entry Point: All documentation and data submission occur through one digital gateway, eliminating the need for traders to approach multiple agencies separately.

2. Standardized Information: Information is submitted in a uniform format, enabling seamless processing across different regulatory agencies.

3. Regulatory Compliance: The platform serves as the mechanism for fulfilling all legal requirements associated with cross-border trade.[19]

Distinction from Port Community System

It is important to distinguish the National Single Window from a Port Community System (PCS), as these terms are sometimes used interchangeably but represent distinct concepts.

As explained by the Nigerian Ports Authority, the Port Community System is primarily concerned with complying with the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) Convention on Facilitation of International Maritime Traffic (FAL), while the NSW serves as the "central piece in the modernisation of trade facilitation."[20]

Key Features of a National Single Window

An effective National Single Window typically incorporates the following features:[21]

a) Electronic Data Submission

Traders submit all required documentation electronically through a secure online portal, eliminating paper-based processes and physical visits to multiple agency offices.

b) Data Harmonization and Standardization

Information is structured according to international standards, enabling automatic processing and reducing errors associated with manual data entry.

c) Coordinated Regulatory Processing

The system routes information to all relevant government agencies simultaneously, enabling parallel rather than sequential processing of approvals.

d) Single Payment Mechanism

Traders can make all applicable payments (duties, fees, levies) through a single electronic payment gateway.

e) Transparency and Traceability

All regulatory actions are logged and traceable, allowing traders to monitor the status of their transactions in real-time and reducing opportunities for corruption.

f) Data Sharing and Interoperability

The system enables secure information sharing between government agencies while maintain appropriate data protection safeguards.

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[18] United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT), 'Single Window Recommendation (2020)
[19] World Customs Organization, 'Single Window Compendium' (202) 15.
[20] Nigerian Ports Authority, 'Nigerian Ports Today' (Q1 2025) 3.
[21] Asian Development bank, 'Single Window Implementation Guide' (2019) 23-28.

Legal Foundation Of The National Single Window

The legal basis for Single Window systems is anchored in Article 10.4 of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), which encourages members to establish a single entry point for submission of trade documentation.[22]

The TFA recognizes that simplification and harmonization of procedures reduce trade costs and promote transparency.[23] Similarly, the World Customs organization (WCO) promotes coordinated border management and electronic customs systems as international best practice.[24]

These instruments collectively establish NSW as a legally supported mechanism within international trade law.

The implementation of a National Single Window (NSW) in Nigeria is deeply dependent on the legal and institutional framework governing trade facilitation, customs administration, and port operations. The NSW, by its nature, requires coordinated statutory authority, institutional cooperation, and regulator clarity, since it centralizes the submission of trade and shipping documentation across multiple government agencies.

While Nigeria had adopted various reforms in trade facilitation and port management, the absence of a dedicated NSW law has created legal and operational ambiguities that can affect system efficiency, enforcement, and compliance.

i. Legislation and Policy

Customs and Trade Facilitation Laws

The Customs and Excise Management Act (CEMA)[25], along with the Nigeria Customs Service Act, provides the primary legal foundation for customs administration. The laws empower the Nigerian Customs Service (NCS) to regulate imports and exports, assess and collect duties, and enforce border controls.[26]

Although originally designed for paper-based operations, these laws now underpin electronic customs processes and pre-arrival clearance, forming a critical component of the NSW architecture. Furthermore, Nigeria's commitments under the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement[27] reinforce the legal imperative to digitize trade procedures and streamline regulatory compliance.

ii. National Trade Policy and Port Reforms

Nigeria's national Trade Policy (NTP) emphasizes trade facilitation, the reduction of procedural bottlenecks, and integration into global trade networks. Port reforms, including the 2006 terminal concessioning programme[28] and the establishment of the Nigerian Shippers Council as economic regulator, reflect the government's intent to modernize port operations and promote private sector participation.

These policy frameworks provide partial legal support for NSW implementation, particularly in areas of inter-agency coordination, cargo handling, and customs modernization.

iii. Role of the Nigerian Customs Service NCS)

The NCS serves as the central implementing agency for the NSW. Its statutory powers over customs declarations, revenue collection, and cargo inspection place it at the core of digital trade facilitation. Electronic customs platforms, risk management systems, and pre-arrival processing initiatives are all NCS-led innovations that form the backbone of Nigeria's emerging NSW.

[22] WTO, Trade Facilitation Agreement (2013) art 10.4.
[23] Ibid.
[24] World Customs Organisation, Coordinated Boarder Management Compendium (WCO 2017)
[25] CEMA, Cap. C45, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria (2004).
[26] Nigeria Customs Service Act, No. 33 of 1991.
[27] WTO, Trade Facilitation Agreement, 2013. (wto.org)
[28] Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA), 2006 Terminal Concessioning Programme.

Integration of the NCS with other agencies such as the Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA), NIMASA, SON, and NAFDAC is essential to ensure that all relevant regulatory requirements are addressed efficiency through a single digital interface.

Operational Mechanism Of Nsw

In practice, the NSW functions through:

1. Single electronic submission of trade-related documents (e.g., manifests, bills of lading, certificate).[29]
2. Automated risk management systems, enabling targeted inspections.
3. Electronic payment platforms for duties, levies, and fees.[30]
4. Digital issuance of permits, licenses, and clearances.[31]
5. End-to-end tracking of cargo clearance status.

This integrated process ensures that regulatory compliance is achieved efficiently without compromising border security or revenue collection.

The Role of Technology in the NSW

Technology is the backbone of the NSW system and determines its effectiveness and sustainability.

(a) Digitization of Trade Documentation[32]

NSW platforms replace paper-based documentation with electronic records, including:

- Customs declarations,
- Cargo manifests,
- Certificates of origin,
- Phytosanitary and sanitary certificates.

Digitization reduces document loss, processing delays, and forgery, while enabling secure data storage and retrieval.

(b) Electronic Customs Declarations and Automation

Through electronic customs declaration systems, traders can submit declarations remotely, allowing customs authorities to process entries before cargo arrival. Automation supports:

- Pre-arrival processing,
- Risk profiling and selectivity, and
- Post-clearance audit systems.

These features significantly improve customs efficiency and revenue assurance.

[29] UN/CEFACT (United nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business) – Defines NSW functionalities including electronic submission of standardized documents, integration with automated risk management, and electronic payments. (UN/CEFACT, 2013)
[30] World Bank, Doing Business & Trade Facilitation Reports – Notes that NSW systems commonly include digital document submission, risk-based inspections, electronic payment of duties, permits/licenses issuance, and cargo tracking for enhanced efficiency. (World Bank, 2020).
[31] Asian Development Bank (ADB) National Single Window Guidance Note – Highlights the operational mechanisms of NSW, emphasizing electronic submission, automated risk management, online payment, digital issuance, and end-to-end cargo tracking. (ABD, 2016).
[32] UN/CEFACT (2013): National Single Windows facilitate the electronic submission of standardized trade documents to fulfill regulatory requirements for imports, exports, and transit. (UN/CEFACT NSW Concept Note)

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(c) Interoperability and Data Sharing

An effective NSW relies on interoperable IT systems that allow seamless data exchange among multiple agencies. This requires standardized data formats, common reference data, and secure communication channels to ensure confidentiality and integrity.

International Best Practices

Comparative analysis of countries that have successfully implemented NSW systems provides valuable insights into best practices and pitfalls.

Key Components Of The Nsw

An effective NSW comprises several interconnected components, including:

- Centralized data exchange platform;[33]
- Integrated customs management system;[34]
- Electronic licensing and permit modules;[35]
- Digital payment systems;
- Risk management and selectivity engines; and
- Audit and compliance monitoring tools

Integration With Government Agencies

The success of an NSW depends largely on its ability to integrate all relevant government agencies involved in trade and port operations, such as:

- Nigeria Customs Service (NCS);
- Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA);
- Nigerian maritime Administration and safety Agency (NIMASA);
- Nigerian Immigration Service;
- Standards Organization of Nigeria (SON); and
- National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC).

Effective integration requires statutory mandates, interoperable systems, and clear protocols for data sharing and decision-making.

National Single Window: Operational Mechanism In Nigeria

The National Single Window (NSW) is a digital platform that enables traders to submit all required documents and information to a single point of entry, facilitating international trade. Information and documents submitted will include Advance Cargo Information (ACT) declarations, customs declarations, applications for import and export permits, sanitary and health certificates, summary data, certificates of origin, invoices, bills of lading, packing lists, and anything else that is required to import goods into a specific country. It's a one-stop-shop for traders to comply with regulatory requirements, making it easier to import, export, and transit goods.

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[33] UN/CEFACT *2013): Emphasizes that a fully functional NSW integrates a centralized data platform, electronic licensing, risk management, and audit tools to facilitate trade. (UN/CEFACT NSW Concept Note)

[34] Asian Development Bank (ADB, 2016): Identifies core NSW components as including customs integration, electronic payment systems, permit issuance, risk management engines, and compliance monitoring. (ADB, National Single Window Guidance Note)

[35] World Bank (2020): Highlights that the NSW structure involves a central electronic platform, digital documentation, automated processing, and integrated monitoring tools to enhance efficiency and transparency in trade. (World Bank, National Single Windows and Trade Facilitation)

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Nigeria's NSW initiative brings agencies like Customs, NAFDAC, SON, FIRS, etc., onto one platform. Many countries have implemented NSW, including Singapore, Ghana, and Kenya. Nigeria is also rolling out its NSW to boost trade facilitation and economic growth.

By addressing, issues such as delays, lack of transparency, and revenue leakages, the NSW aims to boost trade efficiency, enhance government revenue and improve national security. Speaking on NSW, the president, National Council of Managing Directors of Licensed Customs Agents (NCMDLCA), Mr. Lucky[36] Amiwero, pointed out that the NSW is distinct from NICIS I and NICIS II the other systems, which are only procedural frameworks; instead of platforms with a single window. According to Amiwero

"A true single window is about streamlining documentation and transactions into a single application, often referred to as a one-stop-shop. Explaining further, the NCMDLA chief said, unlike NICIS, which focuses on checks, a single widow ensures harmonized data exchange among, trade-related agencies. He added that, "similarly, ASYCUDA++, which I played a key role in introducing, was a customs processing system, not an initiative of the customs service or the Federal Government. It was developed based on a proposal I authored, forming part of the broader push for destination inspection and digital trade facilitation".[37]

Going by Amiwero's perspective, all trade-related agencies, such as the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), Nigeria Ports Authority (NPA), Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), National Agency for Food, Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), and Standards Organisation of Nigeria (SON) will operate under a single unified system powered by a one-stop-shop that will streamline documentation and transactions into a single application.[38]

Once an importer imputs a product's its code, the platform generates the required documentation and routes it to the appropriate agencies, while payments and application tracking are handled within the same interface.[39]

The aim according to Tola Fakolade[40] is to reduce physical visits, cut duplication and limit human contact in a process long dominated by manual steps.

The system also introduce a risk algorithm that uses historical trade data, including product type and country of origin, to classify shipments. Compliant traders could be cleared faster under a "green" channel, others under "yellow" are flagged for document checks while those marked "red" will require physical examination. Agencies performance will also be reviewed. Delaying agents could also be track based on how long the aligned period is to approve a permit.[41]

Case Studies Of Successful Nsw Implementations

(a) Kenya – Kenya Trade network Agency (KENTRADE)[42]

Kenya's NSW, operated by KENTRADE, integrates customs, port authorities, standards agencies, and immigration services. The system has significantly reduced cargo clearance time at the Port of Mombasa and enhanced transparency by automating permit issuance and inspections.[43]

[36] Nigerian Ports Today, vol. 13 No 40; July 2025
[37] Ibid P. 10
[38] Ibid P. 11
[39] BusienssDay, Wednesday, 25 march 2026 P. 24.
[40] Ibid. P. 24
[41] Ibid P. 24
[42] Kenya Trade Net System (NSW) – Managed and implemented by Ken Trade, the platform integrates electronic systems of multiple government entities involved in international trade documentation nd approvals, serving as a single entry point for trade processes.
[43] Integration of Agencies – Ken Trade's Single Window system brings together more than 35 government *Partner Government Agencies* (PGAs), including customs, ports, standards, health, and other regulatory services, allowing them to process and approve trade documents via one platform.

Key features include:

- Multi-agency integration,
- Electronic permit processing,
- Strong legal backing and institutional coordination.

(b) Singapore – TradeNet System

Overview

Singapore, a global trading hub, launched the TradeNet system in 1989 to digitize trade documentation and integrate multiple regulatory agencies.[44]

Key Features

a. Single electronic submission point for import/export documents.

b. Automated processing of permits and licenses.

c. Integration with banks for electronic payment

d. Risk-based inspections to expedite low-risk cargo

e. High-level political commitment

f. Robust legal framework

g. Continuous system upgrades

Outcomes

a. Clearance times reduced from days to minutes

b. Increased trade volume and global competitiveness

c. Reduced bureaucratic bottlenecks and informal payments

Lesson for Nigeria: Digital integration, strong government backing, and inter-agency coordination are essential for effective NSW implementation.[45]

(c) South Korea – uTradeHub

Overview

South Korea developed uTreadeHub, a comprehensive NSW system linking customs, logistics provides, banks, and regulatory agencies.[46]

Key Features

a. Electronic submission and processing of trade documents.

b. Integration with multiple ministries and agencies.

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[44] World Bank, Doing Business 2020: Trading Across Boarders (World Bank 2020).
[45] UN/CEFACT, Recommendation NO 33: Establishing a Single Window (UNECE 2005).
[46] OECD, Trade Facilitation Indicators: The Potential Impact of Trade Facilitation on Developing Countries Trade (OECD Publishing 2018).

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c. Automated risk assessment for cargo inspection.

d. Real-time tracking and reporting.

Outcomes

a. Significant reduction in cargo clearance time.

b. Improved customs revenue collection

c. Enhanced transparency and accountability

Lesson for Nigeria: Integration of all relevant stakeholders including financial institutions and inspection agencies ensures efficiency and revenue optimization.[47]

(d) Ghana – Ghana National Single Window (GNSW)

Overview

Ghana implemented its National Single Window in 2017 to reduce port congestion and improve trade competitiveness.[48]

Key Features

a. One-stop electronic submission for import/export documents

b. Integration with customs, port authorities, and other regulatory bodies.

c. Digital payment platform for duties and taxes.

Outcomes

a. Reduced cargo clearance from an average of 14 days to 3 days

b. Increased compliance with regulatory requirements

c. Improve trade competitiveness in West Africa.

(e) Dubai – Dubai Trade

Dubai Trade serves as an integrated digital platform connecting customs, ports, free zones, and logistics providers. It supports real-time cargo tracking, electronic payments, and trade analytics, contributing significantly to Dubai's status as a global maritime hub.

Lesson Nigerian Can Learn from These Experiences

From these international examples, Nigeria can draw several critical lessons:

- Strong political will and legal backing are essential for successful NSW implementation.
- Clear delineation of agency roles reduces overlap and conflict.
- Phased implementation allows for gradual system adoption and capacity building.
- Private sector engagement improves system design and compliance.
- Continuous technological upgrades are necessary to maintain system relevance.

[47] Maritime Anti-corruption Network, Nigeria Port sector Report (MACN 2020).
[48] Ghana Trade Facilitation Office, National Single Window Project Report (Ghana TFO 2018).

Key Lessons from Comparative Analysis

From these case studies, several lessons emerge:

1. **Government Commitment** – Strong political and institutional support is essential for successful NSW implementation.

2. **Stakeholder Integration** – Coordinating customs, port authorities, banks, and regulatory agencies ensures seamless operations.

3. **Digital Infrastructure** – Investment in ICT systems and interoperability is critical to reduce clearance times and improve efficiency.

4. **Legal and Regulatory Framework** – Laws must recognize electronic documents, signatures, and digital payments to enable full functionality.

5. **Risk Management and Transparency** – Automated risk assessment and traceable digital records reduce corruption and enhance accountability.

6. **Phased Implementation** – Gradual roll-out allows for testing, capacity building, and system optimization.

These lessons provide a roadmap for Nigeria to design and implement an effective National Single Window system adapted to local contexts.

Challenges Noted in Other Countries

Even successful NSW systems faced challenges that Nigeria must anticipate:

a. Resistance from agencies accustomed to manual procedures.

b. Initial high cost of infrastructure and training.

c. Inter-agency coordination difficulties

d. Data security and cybersecurity risks.

Planning for these challenges reduces the risk of implementation failure.

World Trade Organisation (Wto) Trade Facilitation Agreement And National Single Window (Nsw)

The WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) is a global treaty aimed at simplifying, harmonizing, and expediting international trade procedures. Nigeria ratified the TFA in 2016, committing to implement measures that facilitate trade, increase transparency, and reduce costs.

(WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement)[49] Provisions:

- Article 10: Provides for Publication and availability of information
- Article 11: Provides for Advance rulings
- Article 12: Provide for Appeal or review procedures
- Article 23: Provisions for national Single Window

The WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) aims to speed up trade by simplifying customs, while the national Single Window (NSW) is a key tool for achieving this by creating a single digital platform for traders

[49] WTO Agreement on Trade Facilitation (TFA) art 10, 11, 12, 23s.

to submit all import/export data to multiple agencies, boosting transparency, reducing costs, and enhancing economic efficiency as mandated by the Trade Facilitation Agreement. The National Single Window integrates various government bodies, streamlining processes and ensuring data is submitted only once, directly fulfilling Trade Facilitation Agreement commitments on streamlining procedures and information exchange.

Focus on Single Window: (Article 10.4 of the Trade Facilitation Agreement)[50] specifically, encourages members to establish or maintain a single window system for submitting trade-related documentation and data.

Streamlining Custom Procedures and Documentation

Streamlining customs procedures and documentation is crucial for Nigeria's trade efficiency. The National Single Window (NSW) system aims to simplify and harmonize customs processes, reducing bureaucracy and costs. (The Customs and Excise Management Act)[51] empowers the Nigerian customs service to manage customs procedures, aligning with NSW's objectives.

The Nigerian Customs Service is implementing various initiatives, including:

- Electronic Customs Management System (e-CMS): Digitalizing customs processes.
- Pre-Arrival Processing (PAP): Facilitating faster clearance.
- Risk Management System (RMS): Targeting high-risk consignments.

Streamlining customs procedures and documentation is a critical aspect of Nigeria's trade facilitation efforts. The National Single Window (NSW) system and other initiatives aim to simplify and harmonize customs processes, reducing bureaucracy and costs. The key aspects include:

- Digitalization: Electronic submission and processing of customs documents, reducing paper-based transactions.
- Single Interface: One platform for all trade-related transactions, eliminating multiple submissions.
- Automated Clearance: Electronic customs clearance, minimizing human intervention.
- Standardized Documentation: Harmonized customs forms and procedures, reducing errors.
- Risk Management: Targeted inspections and clearance, focusing on high-risk consignments.

Essential documents to Streamline

- Commercial Invoice: Details goods, value, terms, and aids in duty calculation.
- Packing List: Details contents of each package, weight, dimensions.
- Certificate of Origin (COO): Proves where goods were made, essential for trade agreements.
- Bill of lading/Air Waybill (B/L or AWB): Contract of carriage.
- Import/Export Licenses: Required for controlled goods.
- Insurance Certificate: Verifies coverage for customs valuation.

[50] WO Agreement on Trade Facilitation TFA) art 10.4
[51] Customs and Excise Management Act, 2004 Cap C45, ss 3-5

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Benefits of Streamlining Custom procedures and Documentation

- Reduced Costs: Lower administrative overhead and fewer penalties.
- Faster Clearance: Expedites goods movement and delivery.
- Improved Reliability: More predictable supply chains.
- Compliance: Ensures adherence to national and international regulations.

Economic Benefits Of The National Single Window (Nsw) For Nigerian Seaports

The Nigerian maritime industry has long been plagued by entrenched inefficiencies, outdated procedures, and an absence of digital integration. The legacy system, heavily reliant on manual documentation and multiple regulatory touch-points, results in duplication of effort, substantial delays, corruption opportunities, and high operational costs. These systemic failures contribute to revenue leakage and weak ease-of-doing-business indicators, undermining the competitiveness of Nigeria's ports in both regional and global markets. Multiple stakeholders including government bodies and trade research organizations affirm that the absence of a unified trade facilitation platform directly hampers operational efficiency and economic performance in the sector.

The National Single Window (NSW) is designed to transform this landscape by providing a single electronic platform where traders can submit all trade-related documents, eliminating redundant submissions to separate agencies and drastically simplifying the import/export process.

The NSW offers targeted solutions for key challenges at Nigerian seaports, particularly in the areas of inefficiency, corruption, high transaction costs, and slow clearance times:

Inefficiencies and Bureaucratic Delays

The current fragmented customs clearance and regulatory processes handled independently by agencies such as the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA), SON, NAFDAC, and others contribute to prolonged cargo dwell time and bottlenecks. A unified platform would harmonize these processes, reducing procedural duplication and paperwork.

High Transaction Costs

The cost of doing business at Nigerian ports is estimated to be up to 40% higher than in comparable West African countries due to administrative delays and bottlenecks.[52] The World Bank and government projections suggest that NSW implementation could reduce these costs by at least 25%, enhancing competitiveness.[53]

Transparency and Corruption Weakening

NSW reduces the level of direct human interface required in processing clearances, which historically has created opportunities for corrupt practices. Automated submission, real-time status tracking, and integrated data sharing increase transparency and accountability in port operations.

Reduced Clearance Times

Stakeholders argue that NSW could significantly shorten cargo clearance and cargo dwell times. For example, similar implementations in neighboring ports (e.g. Cotonou) have reduced delivery times from over 40 days to under 10 days, suggesting strong potential gains for Nigeria once fully operational.[54]

[52] https://nannews.ng/2025/01/29/fg-aims-25-cut-in-port-costs-via-single-window/?utm As highlighted by the World Bank and cited by Nigerian government officials, the cost of doing business at Nigerian seaports is up to 40% higher than in other West African countries because of delays and administrative bottlenecks, contributing to an estimated annual revenue loss of ₦2.5 trillion.

[53] https://nannews.ng/2025/01/29/fg-aims-25-cut-in-port-costs-via-single-window/>utm Government projections presented at a National Single Window stakeholders' forum state that implementing the NSW system could enhance efficiency and streamline operations, potentially reducing port business costs by at leas 25%.

Job Creation and Employment Opportunities

The National Single Window (NSW) project in Nigeria is expected to create substantial job opportunities by streamlining trade, boosting economic growth, and requiring skilled personnel in ICT, logistics, and data management, with projections suggesting over 100,000 direct/indirect jobs and attracting major investment, fostering growth for MSMEs and traders, and reducing operational costs, thereby enabling businesses to expand.

The NSW project is expected to create opportunities in logistics, trade, and tech sectors, including data analytics, cybersecurity, and software support.

Impact of Nigerian Business

Nigeria's National Single Window (NSW) aims to revolutionize trade by cutting costs (25-30% reduction in logistics), slashing cargo clearance times (from weeks to days), and boosting transparency, ultimately making Nigerian businesses, especially SMEs, more competitive globally by simplifying documentation, reducing corruption, and attracting investment through streamlined, digitized port processes, aligning with national economic goals.

Efficiency and Cost Reduction

One of the most significant economic benefits of implementing a National Single Window (NSW) in Nigerian seaports is the improvement in operational efficiency and the reduction of trade-related costs. By eliminating fragmented procedures and manual processing, the NSW directly addresses the structural inefficiencies that have historically plagued Nigeria's port system.

Faster Customs Processing

The NSW enables pre-arrival processing and electronic submission of trade documentation, allowing customs authorities and other regulatory agencies to begin clearance procedures before cargo arrives at the port. This significantly reduces cargo dwell time and vessel turnaround time, which are major contributors to high port costs.

Streamlined Paperwork and Reduced Duplication

Under a traditional port system, traders are required to submit similar information repeatedly to multiple agencies. The NSW eliminates this duplication by allowing a single submission of standardized data, which is then shared across relevant agencies. This reduces administrative delays and compliance costs for importers and exporters.

Reduction of Corruption and Informal Costs

By minimizing human contact and discretionary decision-making, the NSW reduces opportunities for unofficial payments and rent-seeking behavior. Increased transparency and automated processes promote accountability and lower the hidden costs associated with port operations in Nigeria.

According to the Director, National Single Window[55] Mr. Tola Fakolade. "National Single Window will streamline processes, create more conducive environment likewise, the National Single Window is a revolutionary trade facilitation portal designed to streamline import and export processes in Nigeria. Allowing, importers or their representatives to submit documents only once, the system efficiently routes them to the relevant regulatory approvals, simplifying, the process and reducing lead times for clearing, containers from ports. This digital platform drives transparency by enabling real-time tracking of regulatory agencies approval

[54] https://dailyreport.nng/fg-targets-under-7-day-cargo-clearance-at-nigerian-ports-by-2026 Reports on port performance in West Africa note that cargo dwell times at Cotonou, Benin Republic's primary maritime gateway, can be as low as four days following reforms to clearance procedures, compared with much longer dwell times in Nigeria; advocates for a National Single Window in Nigeria argue such systems have reduced delivery times significantly and improved efficiency.

[55] Nigerian Ports Today, vol 13 No 40; July 2025 P. 14

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times. The benefit to the economy are numerous: faster clearance processes and make Nigeria an attractive destination for business. A simplified and transparent process attracts foreign investors, thereby boosing economic growth. The federal and state governments benefit from increased revenue generated by efficient trade processes and real-time tracking and monitoring help reduce corruption and increase accountability".

Likewise, the Managing Director of the Nigerian Ports Authority, Dr. Abubakar Dantsoho,[56] emphasized the significance of the NSW by stating, that "it is a global best practice for the electronic exchange of information in the transportation industry. Dantsoho further said, "the single window operation is the global trade best practice for the electronic exchange of information relating to over 500 million TEU (Twenty-foot Equivalent Unit) movements and billions of tonnes of cargo for sea, air, land transport modes".[57]

Challenges Of National Single Window (Nsw)

Six weeks after the launch of NSW on March 27, 2026, a national shipping portal introduced to centralize trade documentation is facing mounting criticism from operators who contended that it has lengthened clearance timelines and increased import costs rather than cut them.[58] Complaint against NSW are:

1. A dozen importers and freight forwarders said uploads and approvals for key documents like the Standard Organisation of Nigeria (SON) and the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) permits were delayed or rejected on the portal, forcing some consignments to remain at the ports until demurrage and storage charges kicked in. the delays are most evident in processing the Pre-Arrival Assessment Report (PAAR), a mandatory customs document for cargo clearance. Before the NSW, compliant importers could obtain PAAR within 48 hours. Operators now say it can take between two and three weeks[59] without PAAR, cargo cannot be cleared, leaving consignments stranded and accumulating demurrage and storage charges from terminal operators and shipping lines.

2. Compounding technical problems, operators have raised concerns over new licensing requirements linked to the NSW that were not previously communicated.[60] Operators were being asked to obtain a N250,000 license from the Council for the Regulation of Freight Forwarding in Nigeria (CRFFN) as part of onboarding onto the NSW platform. They were given 60 days to pay or lose access to the portal.[61]

3. Legal Challenges and Gaps:

The legal framework presents several challenges to effective NSW implementation:

1. Fragmented statutory mandates – Agencies operate under separate laws that sometimes conflict or create duplication.

2. Lack of specific NSW legislation – No single law governs the establishment, operation, or enforcement of NSW processes.

3. Outdated provisions – Many laws do not adequately recognize electronic documents, data sharing, or cybersecurity obligations.

The legal implications of the National Single Window extend into evidentiary, contractual, and administrative law domains. The recognition of electronic documents generated through the NSW raises important questions regarding authenticity, integrity, and admissibility in judicial proceedings. The Evidence Act (as amended) provides a framework for the admissibility of electronically generated evidence, thereby supporting the legal validity of NSW transactions.

[56] Ibid. P. 14
[57] Ibid P. 14
[58] BusinesDay, Thursday 14 May 2026 P. 1
[59] Ibid P. 1.
[60] Ibid P. 1
[61] Ibid P. 1

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Liability allocation represents another critical concern. Where system failures, data inaccuracies, or administrative errors within the NSW result in financial loss to traders, clear legal rules must determine responsibility among participating agencies. Without statutory clarity, affected parties may face prolonged disputes and uncertainty. This highlights the necessity of embedding liability provisions and dispute resolution mechanisms within an enabling legal framework.

4. Several legal challenges such as the Nigerian Ports Authority Act and the Customs Act, obtaining necessary approvals from relevant regulatory agencies; to adopting digital platforms for cargo clearance;[62]

Aligning the NSW project with international trade laws and agreements (e.g, WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement).

5. Council for the regulation of freight forwarding exclusion may crate legal obstacles, as it holds a regulatory mandate over freight forwarding activities.[63]

6. Delays linked to the migration to the National Single Window (NSW) platform increased the volume of containers trapped at the port by 50 percent from 10,000 units in March 2026 to 15,000 units in May 2026.[64] Findings also revealed that uncleared containers were laden with goods worth N750 billion.[65]

7. On the economic losses to importers and the expected waivers from the shipping companies and terminal operators as a result of NSW implementation experience glitches at the ports, it was gathered that no waiver has been issued also by National Single Window (NSW) secretariat.[66] The Managing Director of Scepter Consult Limited and a cargo consolidator, Jayeola Ogamode, explained that importers of the boxes, some of which are laden with perishable goods, were trapped at the port over single window migration failures.[67] He noted that on a monthly basis, more than N3.5 trillion worth of goods flooded the port, noting that about N350 billion or 10 percent of the consignments have not exited the ports because of hitches experienced during the NSW launch despite government promises[68] Ogamode emphasized that traffic congestion had returned to port access road due to many containers in the ports.[69]

8. Stakeholders identified multiple technical challenges plaguing the platform, including failed manifest uploads, difficulties in transmitting product certificates required for PAAR processing, and integration gaps among agencies. Other issues include data entry limitations, missing product codes, ambiguous error messages, and challenges linking Tax Identification Numbers (TIN) to user profiles.[70]

9. Stakeholders are increasingly calling for the suspension of the platform until the underlying issues are resolved and that, the federal government to temporarily halt the National Single Window warning that the current glitches are inflicting severe economic damage.[71]

10. Former acting national president of ANLCA, Dr. Kayode Farinto,[72] described the situation as a national emergency, stressing that port operations have been effectively paralysed since the platform's introduction on March 27, 2026. "We have been unable to carry out cargo declarations, which is critical process. This is beyond normal teething problems; it is a total blockage", he said. Farinto warned that business are incurring heavy losses running into hundreds of millions of naira with some service providers allegedly exploiting the situation by increasing charges. He blamed the crisis on poor planning and lack of proper stakeholder

[62] Nigerian Ports Today, Vol 13 NO 40; July 2025 P. 17
[63] Ibid P. 17.
[64] New Telegraph Tuesday, May 12, 2026 P. 1
[65] Ibid P. 1
[66] Ibid P. 1
[67] Ibid P. 3
[68] Ibid P. 3
[69] Ibid P. 3
[70] National Economy, Monday April 20, 2026 P. 2
[71] Ibid P. 2
[72] Ibid P. 2

engagement, noting that key players such as shipping companies and terminal operators were not adequately integrated into the system before its rollout.[73]

11. A frontline clearing agent, Dr. Segun Musa, cautioned that the ongoing implementation of the National Single Window at the nation's seaports could undermine the Federal Government's economic gains if executed prematurely.[74] Musa, who is Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of widescope Group, argued that Nigeria is not yet prepared for the project, citing inadequate infrastructure, weak institutional capacity, and the absence of uniform ethical standards among industry operators. According to Musa, "This National Single Window will frustrate a lot of people out of business. It has no significance for now," he said, "who are the operators? Are they ready? Is the infrastructure available? Do we have a uniform ethical standard? A lot of importers and manufacturers will shut down if we proceed like this."[75] Musa further said, "why the rush? We are still struggling with individual agencies that are not effective why move to a single window when the foundation is weak? It is risky for the economy."

Musa explained that for the NSW to function effectively, all stakeholders in the trade ecosystem, including freight forwarders, shipping companies, terminal operators, airlines, and government agencies must first achieve operational efficiency and data uniformity. He stressed that agencies such as the Nigeria Customs Service, NAFDAC, Standards Organisation of Nigeria (SON), and the plant quarantine service must harmonize their processes and improve efficiency before integration.[76]

12. The challenge of foreign exchange volatility continues to affect port shipping costs for importers and other port users. Likewise, national Publicity secretary, Association of Nigerian Licensed Customs Agents (ANCLA), Emmanuel Onyema,[77] accused shipping companies of poor service delivery and exploitive practices that increase the cost of clearing cargo at the country's ports. Onyema also condemned what he described as duplication of charges, particularly regarding Telex Release fees, noting that importers already pay between $45 and $50 abroad for telex Release documentation, only to be charged an additional N12,500 in Nigeria by the same shipping companies.[78]

13. The importance of shifting government priorities from focusing solely on revenue generation to facilitating trade. Persistent focus on revenue collection hampers smooth trade operations and ultimately undermines both business efficiency and revenue targets.[79]

14. Lack of effective sanctions on government agencies that violate or distort the NSW process. Without such disciplinary measures, the system would be rendered ineffective, as agencies would continue to operate outside its intended framework.[80]

15. The NSW risks becoming "a shell without content"[81] if all the agencies fail to fully commit to online processing of trade transactions. A resistance from even one agency could cripple the system, as consignments would not be able to leave the port without complete digital clearance. If even one agency refuses to process documents online, consignments will not leave the port.

16. Digitalization alone cannot resolve deep-rooted operational weaknesses, without performance standards and accountability mechanism; the single widow could amount to "just another jamboree".[82]

17. An economic analyst, Prof. Ndubisi Nwokoma,[83] highlighted that "Nigeria does not suffer from a lack of policies but rather from poor implementation". While noting that Nigeria's trade sector is plagued by

[73] Ibid P. 2
[74] Ibid P. 2
[75] Ibid P. 2
[76] Ibid P. 2
[77] The Guardian, Wednesday, May 13, 2026 P. 23
[78] Ibid P. 23
[79] The nations Monday, February 17, 2025 P. 3.
[80] Ibid P. 3
[81] Sunday Telegraph, Sunday march 22, 2026 P. 8
[82] Ibid P. 8

systemic inefficiencies, which hinder smooth policy execution, he said every administration whether under Obasanjo, Buhari, or Jonathan has introduced good policies to tackle such systemic inefficiencies. Prof. Nwokoma insisted that Nigeria's problem has never been about policy formulation but about implementation. He identified corruption, bureaucratic bottlenecks and revenue leakages as major hinderances, warning that policy success elsewhere does not guarantee effectiveness in Nigeria due to the peculiarities of the operating environment".[84]

18. Need for enabling law from the National Assembly necessary to establish a legal framework for the project's implementation; enabling law clearly define the roles of relevant agencies and stakeholders; provides regulatory oversight for the NSW platform and ensures CRFFN's proper integration into the NSW project.[85]

19. To facilitate a smooth transition: stakeholder engagement and consultations should be prioritized; adequate training and technical support should be provided; mechanisms to address concerns and resistance should be implemented.

20. Policy consultation and policy coherence: it is important to deactivate/discontinue existing policies that operated in silos across Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDA) that are duplications or are in conflict with the NSW, so as to ensure that there are no double tariff payments or operational logjams or corruption loopholes that could be used by recalcitrant corrupt governments officials with stiff sanctions for non-compliance, negligence or misconducts that will undermine the NSW.[86]

RECOMMENDATIONS

Nigeria's decision to adopt the National Single Window reflects a recognition of long-standing challenges within the maritime sector (complex procedures, overlapping institutional roles, delays in cargo clearance) and a determination to address them through modern solutions.[87] In that sense, the policy is both timely and necessary, therefore based on the findings of this paper the following recommendations are preferred:

(1) For the National Single Window to function effectively, all stakeholders in the trade ecosystem including freight forwarders, shipping companies, terminal operators, and government agencies must first achieve operational efficiency and data uniformity.

(2) The success of NSW will depend not just on the strength of its design, but on the effectiveness of its execution and the flexibility to adapt where necessary. Reforms of this nature are rarely without initial difficulties what matters most is how those difficulties are addressed.[88]

(3) Agencies such as the Nigeria Customs Service, NAFDAC, Standards Organsiation of Nigeria (SON) and the Plant Quarantine Service must harmonise their processes and improve efficiency.[89] The absence of synchronization among agencies could render the entire system ineffective, even if some components function optimally.[90] It's possible for customs to complete inspection, collect revenue, and release cargo, only for another agency like NAFDAC or SON to delay the process due to system failures or incomplete documentation. At that point all prior efforts become wasted.[91]

(4) If any agent deliberately causes delays in cargo clearance, importers should have legal recourse, including the ability to demand compensation for storage costs or pursue legal action.[92]

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[83] The Nation, Monday, February 17 2025 P. 3
[84] Ibid P. 3.
[85] Nigeria Ports Today, Vol 13 No 40, July 2025, P. 17
[86] The Nation, Friday February 13, 2026 P. 32
[87] BusinessDay, Thursday 23 April 2026 P. 23
[88] Ibid P. 23
[89] Daily Independent, Wednesday, April 22, 2026 P. 15
[90] Ibid P. 15
[91] Ibid P. 15
[92] The Nation, Monday February 17, 2025 P. 3

(5) The National Single Window is achievable if there is a solid legal framework in place. The framework must ensure accountability. Also the imposition of strict sanctions on government agencies that violate or distort the NSW process.[93]

(6) There should be an expansion of the NSW beyond cargo clearance at ports. Also, the inclusion of a time-release study, which would track the movement of released cargo from port terminals to consignees' warehouses. This would help eliminate unnecessary bureaucratic bottlenecks.[94]

(7) Collective effort, transparency, inter-agency cooperation, and adherence to international standards must remain guiding principles.

(8) To propel progress, the government should establish a clear and unequivocal mandate backed by genuine political will. Restructure government agencies in the port, including identifying the leading agency for the initiative, defining roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders and foster genuine collaboration among stakeholders.

(9) The needs for the government to establish Trade Information Portal that will allow traders to access all relevant trade rules, regulations, procedures, fee schedules and forms from all the agencies through a single user-friendly web site – an electronic single window system.

(10) Importers and Exporters should embrace digital compliance systems and actively participate in capacity building programs related to NSW usage.

(11) Data Protection and Cybersecurity

The NSW platform must incorporate robust data protection and cybersecurity measures:

- Encryption of all data transmissions
- Access controls limiting information access to authorized personnel
- Audit logging of all system activities
- Regular security audits and penetration testing
- Compliance with Nigeria Data Protection Regulation requirements.

(12) Legislative Reform

The National Assembly should enact comprehensive National Single Window legislation that:

- Clearly defines the legal mandate, governance structure, and operational framework of the NSW.
- Authorizes electronic submissions and digital signatures across all trade-related agencies.
- Provides for mandatory participation by all government agencies involved in import, export, and transit procedures.
- Establishes data protection safeguards governing collection, use, and sharing of trader information.
- Creates offenses for unauthorized access of misuse of NSW data.[95]

[93] Ibid P. 3
[94] Ibid P. 3

[95] National Single Window Project, 'Governance Structure' (2024); Presidential Enabling Business Environment Council, 'Ease of Doing Business Report' (2024).

Pending comprehensive legislation, existing sectoral laws including the Nigerian Ports Authority Act, Customs and Excise Management Act, and agency enabling statutes should be amended to explicitly authorize information sharing through the NSW platform.

(13) Institutional Strengthening

The National Single Window Project Steering Committee should be placed on permanent statutory footing with defined powers and responsibilities. The Committee should:

- Maintain oversight of NSW operations and performance.
- Resolve inter-agency disputes relating to platform governance.
- Approve policies and procedures fo system operation.
- Report regularly to the Federal Executive Council on implementation progress.

The Project Representatives Committee should be retained as a technical working group responsible for day-to-day coordination and problem-solving.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria is standing at the threshold of a commercial renaissance, pivoting away from the bureaucratic friction of the past toward a streamlined, digital future. At the heart of this transformation lie the full-scale implementation of the National Single Window (NSW). Experts estimate that Nigeria loses more than N1 trillion annually due to the lack of port automation and modern infrastructure, as congestion, delays, and administrative duplication increase logistics cost for businesses and discourage shipping lines.

The result has been a paradox: Africa's largest economy operating with ports that have struggled to watch the capacity and efficiency of smaller neighbouring economies. In addition, inefficient port operations have undermined Nigeria's regional competitiveness. West African ports in countries such as Ghana, Togo and Benin Republic, equipped with modern facilities and digital trade systems, have captured significant volumes of cargo originally destined for Nigeria.[96]

The National Single window is a catalyst for Nigeria's economic rebirth, and its success will depend on sustained efforts from government agencies, private sector and stakeholders in the Maritime Ports Domain.

Embracing the NSW is imperative for the country to sustain engagement in expanded and efficient global trade facilitation and regional integration conversely, countries delaying the successful implementations risks facing significant barriers to national trade efficiency and economic growth.

The National Single Window is, by all indications, a reform with significant long-term benefits. If effectively implemented, it has the potential to transform Nigeria's ports by reducing delays, improving efficiency, enhancing transparency, and strengthening the over-all trade environment. These are outcomes that would benefit not just port users, but the wider economy. If the challenges of NSW are carefully absorbed and acted upon, the National Single Window can still evolve into a cornerstone of Nigeria's trade facilitation framework, fulfilling its promise as a gateway to efficiency, rather than obstacle to it.[97]

Encouragingly, the challenges being observed also provide an opportunity to identify gaps, strengthen coordination, and build a more resilient system with responsive adjustments, enhanced technical support, and sustained engagement, the National Single Window is poised to boost Nigeria's competitiveness, attract foreign investment, and increase trade volumes.

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