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Towards Transformative Policies for Fast-Tracking Special Economic Zones Development in Africa

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Abstract

Accelerating industrialization is crucial for African countries to achieve the objectives outlined in the African Union's Agenda 2063. Special Economic Zones (SEZs) provide a valuable tool in realizing this objective. Previous research has highlighted challenges faced by SEZs and Industrial Zones on the continent. These challenges include poor quality infrastructure, inadequate legal and regulatory frameworks, a poor business environment, lack of strategic planning and demand-driven approaches, limited operational knowledge, resettlement and land acquisition issues, weak linkages with the local economy, inconsistent policies, coordination problems among government agencies, underutilized capacity, and limited technological innovation. The aim of this study is to identify, assess and rank the best policies and practices that are appropriate for the development of SEZs in Africa. This study used the experiences of some emerging industrial economies (China, Costa Rica, Mauritius, and Turkey) to identify the most suitable policies and strategies for the development of SEZs in Africa which form the main body of structured questionnaire administered to various experts, academicians and stakeholders of special economic zones based on 5-point Likert scale. The findings could allow the governments and policy makers to leverage multiple benefits from the experiences and practices of industrialized economies by adopting the policies that will significantly enhance the performance or development of SEZs in Africa.

Keywords: *Africa, Industrialization, Policies, Practices, Special Economic Zones*

1. Introduction

The African Union's Agenda 2063 emphasizes the importance of industrialization for poverty reduction in African countries (African Union, 2063). Recently, research has examined the role of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in driving growth, innovation, climate resilience, and foreign direct investment (Bai *et al.*, 2018). While SEZs have the potential to transform national economies, their success varies among countries. Some countries have effectively utilized SEZs for industrial upgrading and economic growth, resulting in significant FDI inflows, increased exports, and job creation. However, other countries treat SEZs as isolated enclaves, limiting their potential impact (Aaron, 2019).

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SEZs were first established in Africa during the 1970s in countries like Liberia (1970), Mauritius (1971), and Senegal (1974). However, accelerated development started in the 1990s as more African government sought to mimic the development of East Asian countries (Aaron, 2019). The growth of African zones can be considered haphazard as their rapid growth in early years was stalled by economic dips. Even the most successful zones take at least 5-10 years before shifting to exponential growth eventually reaching maturity (Farole, 2011). The fact that the zones in Africa are introduced during or after the rise of the Asian manufacturing superpowers can be considered as disadvantage due to the subsequent shift in trade and FDI influx away from the African zones and their inability to compete in terms of manufacturing export, infrastructure and provision of conducive business environment to investors. Also, the macro-economic environment which the zones are been created differs significantly from those experienced by the zones in Asia and Latin America (Farole, 2011).

Africa's capacity to deliver on Agenda 2063 depends on industrialization, to support this, the UN SDGs have assigned Goal 9 towards building industries and resilient infrastructure as a way of strengthening developing economies' capacity to address structural challenges and poverty alleviation (Osman, 2022). Industrialization should not be viewed as the only path for achieving sustainable development in Africa. Rather, a multi-directional industrialization focusing on forging linkages with domestic economies can help developing economies in Africa attain higher economic growth and economic diversification (Osman, 2022).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which build on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), are framed around 17 interlinked and integrated goals (UN, 2015; UN, 2021). The agenda recognizes that industrialization is one of the primary drivers of sustained economic growth and sustainable development, and most work hand-in-hand with the rest of the goals to end poverty and hunger, provide good health and well-being, improve economic growth, all while providing sustainable cities and communities. Africa's SDGs dashboard for 2020 shows Goal 9 (building resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation) as the second goal facing greatest challenge with 78% of African countries scoring red on the dashboard's system of color coding (Ambrose *et al.,* 2020). This indicates that industrialization and infrastructure is stagnating in two-thirds of the African countries and therefore is in need of immediate intervention.

Previous studies have identified several challenges faced by Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and Industrial Zones in Africa. These challenges include issues related to poor quality infrastructure (Zeng, 2015; Farole and Akinci, 2011; Iwuagwu, 2009; Zeng, 2012), legal, regulatory, and institutional frameworks (Zeng, 2015; Farole and Akinci, 2011; Iwuagwu, 2009; Zeng, 2012), poor business environment (Zeng, 2015; Farole and Akinci, 2011; Iwuagwu, 2009), lack of strategic planning and demand-driven approaches (Zeng, 2015; Farole and Akinci, 2011), zone management and operational know-how (Zeng, 2015; Iwuagwu, 2009; Zeng, 2012), resettlement and land acquisition issues (Zeng, 2015; Iwuagwu, 2009; Zeng, 2012), limited linkages with the local economy (Iwuagwu, 2009), policy consistency and coordination among government agencies (Zeng, 2015; Farole and Akinci, 2011; Zeng, 2012), improper capacity utilization (Zeng, 2012), competition for manufacturing export platforms due to the rise of other manufacturing superpowers, primarily in Asia, and the subsequent shift in trade and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) patterns (Iwuagwu, 2009). Technological innovation has also been identified as a challenge, as developed and emerging economies have transitioned to innovation-based economies, contrasting with the productivity-based focus in Africa. Furthermore, the adverse effects of the Covid-19 pandemic have disrupted the operationalization of the African Continental Free Trade Area (ACFTA) and exposed the vulnerability of African economies in terms of economic growth, industrial development, manufacturing, fragilities, and poverty, particularly due to disruptions in global supply chains (Osman, 2012). This study seeks to identify and flag up the best policies and practices that may be appropriate for the development of SEZs in Africa. The study will use the experiences of emerging industrial economies like China, Costa Rica, Mauritius, and Turkey to determine the most suitable policies and strategies for the development of SEZs in Africa.

2. Global Experiences with SEZs

Many countries, including China, Mauritius, Costa Rica, South Korea, Taiwan, Turkey, and others, have successfully utilized Special Economic Zones (SEZs) to enhance their exports, improve global competitiveness, generate employment, and drive economic policy reforms. The achievements of these countries have left a significant impact globally, inspiring many developing nations to replicate their success by adopting similar models. While there are several countries that have effectively utilized SEZs for economic transformation, this study will focus on China, Costa Rica, Mauritius, and Turkey due to their notable experiences and unique approaches in using SEZs to industrialize and diversify their

Figure 1: Map of the World Showing Selected Countries for Experiences with SEZs

Source: Author, 2023

economies. The study will examine the policies and strategies employed by these countries and analyze the economic and transformational impacts of SEZs. The selected countries' experiences will provide valuable insights into the potential benefits and effective practices associated with SEZ development. Figure 1 shows the map of the selected countries.

2.1. Policies and Strategies Adopted by Selected Countries

China effectively utilizes Special Economic Zones (SEZs) to drive economic, urban, and industrial development. The success of China's SEZs can be attributed to clear policies, a well-defined development strategy and broad governmental involvement in zone management and policy implementations (Tao *et al.,* 2018). Some of the major policies adopted by China to industrialize its economy are making SEZs an integral part of a long-term development strategy (Tao *et al.,* 2018); strong commitment and backing from the government in zone managing and policy implementation (Gao and Li, 2018); setting up zones at strategic and appropriate locations (Gao and Li, 2018; Li *et al.,* 2019); preferential investment and tax policy for firms operating in the zones (Jaroslaw and Cicha-Nazarczuk, 2021); clear objectives, benchmarks, and competitions among zones (Jaroslaw and Cicha-Nazarczuk, 2021); Technology learning, innovation, upgrading and improvement of innovative cultures (Zhang, 2022); and making sure the zones have strong linkages with the domestic economy (Li *et al.,* 2019).

Costa Rica has achieved remarkable success in Latin America by implementing a process of liberalization, offering tax incentives, and adopting an open approach to attract export-oriented firms and foreign direct investment. This has resulted in improved exports and positive spillover effects, as multinational companies contribute to the training and development of local workers (Monge, 2017). Costa Rica is one of the countries that successfully uses FDI to transform their economy. They achieve this by offering streamlined administration, upgraded logistics, industrial infrastructure, and generous tax and custom incentives to investors (WTO, 2019); governmental involvement in development of sectors with comparative advantage (the country's biodiversity and its well-educated workforce) (Monge, 2017); removing ownership restrictions on foreign investments (Lafuente *et al.*, 2018); shift in investment promotion efforts from the apparel industry, which is more competitive, to more strategic sectors (electrical and electronics) (Aaron, 2019); combining medium technology (biotechnology) and high-technology (electronics) to increase export (Spar, 1998); introduction of industry oriented and pragmatic education policy to tailor high-school and further education to the needs of prevailing industry (Gonzalez, 2011).

Mauritius has achieved remarkable success in Africa by utilizing Export Processing Zones (EPZs) to diversify its economy, stimulate industrialization, and generate employment opportunities (Yao *et al.,* 2005). The success of Mauritius can be attributed to the implementation of remedial policies and the establishment of effective institutions during the developmental stages of EPZ programs (Svirydzenka and Petri, 2014). Some of the strategies adopted are learning from the experiences of Asian countries (mostly Singapore) before establishing EPZ programs (Aaron, 2019); adopting of "free point" system, which allows SEZ status to be given to firms independent of their location on the island (Aaron, 2019); implementing active industrial policy that was export driven (Svirydzenka and Petri, 2014); harmonization of tax and tariff regimes inside and outside the MEPZs (Subramanian and Roy, 2001); encouraging domestic firms to invest and operate in the zones (Subramanian and Roy, 2001); and the successful incorporation of the economic zones into the national economy (Frankel, 2010).

Table 1: Classification of Identified Policies by Countries

S. No.	China's Policies	Costa Rica's Policies	Mauritian Policies	Turkish Policies
1.	Making SEZs an integral part of a long-term development strategy	Offering streamlined administration, upgraded logistics, industrial infrastructure, and generous tax and custom incentives to investors	Learning from the experiences of first movers before establishing SEZs programs	Using SEZs as an environment that is necessary for the emergence and growth of small and medium scale enterprises
2.	Strong commitment and backing from the government in zone managing and policy implementation	Governmental involvement in development of sectors with comparative advantage	Adopting of "free point" system, which allows SEZ status to be given to firms independent of their location	Constituting SEZs in the development plan by national planning organization
3.	Setting up zones at strategic and appropriate locations	Removal of ownership restrictions on foreign investments	Implementing active industrial policy that is export driven	Establishment of zones for supporting industrial expansion, regional development and rehabilitation of existing industrial area
4.	Preferential investment and tax policy for firms operating in the zones	Shift in investment to more strategic sectors	Harmonization of tax and tariff regimes inside and outside the SEZs	Creation of four governing organs of industrial parks (Enterprising Committee, Board of Directors, Board of Auditors, and Regional Directorate) to reduce bureaucratic bottlenecks in management of the Zones
5.	Clear objectives, benchmarks, and competitions among zones	Combining medium technology and high-technology to increase export	Encouraging domestic firms to invest and operate in the zones	Clustering of industries into specialized industrial zones to tackle the issue of environmental pollution
6.	Technology learning, upgrading, and improvement of innovative culture	Introduction of industry oriented and pragmatic education policy to tailor high-school and further education to the needs of prevailing industry	Successful incorporation of the economic zones into the national economy	Constant upgrading of industries to boost their competitive advantage
7.	Making sure the zones have strong linkages with the domestic economy			

Turkey has strategically identified industrial sector as a key driver for national development and economic policies are carefully devised to realize the long-term goal of using industrial zones as the backbone of the economy. The concept of organized industrial zones can be regarded as Turkish miracle of industrialization as it has an immense positive impact on the national economy, industry, regional and local development and is peculiar only to turkey (Mehmet and Zeynep, 2019). Some of the policies and strategies adopted to realize Turkish miracle of industrialization are creation of SEZs as an environment that is necessary for the emergence and growth of small and medium scale enterprises (Özgüç, 1999); constituting SEZs in the five-year development plan of the 1970 by state planning organization (Türk, 2006); establishment of zones for supporting industrial expansion, regional development and rehabilitation of existing industrial area (Türk, 2006); creation of four governing organs of industrial parks (Enterprising Committee, Board of Directors, Board of Auditors, and Regional Directorate) to reduce bureaucratic bottlenecks in management of the Zones (Balaban, 2000); clustering of pollutant industries into specialized industrial zones to tackle the issue of environmental pollution (Türk, 2006); and constant upgrading of industries to boost their competitive advantage (Mehmet and Zeynep, 2019). Table 1 summarizes the identified policies adopted by each of the selected countries.

3. Methods

For quality assurance, this study used available literature and a rigorous process for selecting relevant cases and countries. Previous studies have highlighted the policy implications of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in facilitating development (Narula and Zhan, 2019). A study by Zeng (2016) emphasizes the importance of joint actions and coordination to help SEZs adapt to their specific host country's context. Similarly, Alexianu *et al.* (2019) emphasize the use of a country-specific approach and the reduction of growth barriers to ensure that the benefits of SEZs outweigh their costs. (Aaron, 2019), explores the experiences of emerging economies to determine a suitable SEZ model for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Additionally, MENA-OECD (2009) identifies best practices and guidelines for economic zone development in the MENA region. However, few or no study explored the identification and assessment of SEZ policies that are specifically focused or tailored to enhance or improve the performances of zones in Africa.

3.1. Eligibility Criteria

China, Costa Rica, Mauritius, and Turkey are selected for this study due to the following:

i. The selected countries are fore runners of SEZ programs in their respective regions.

ii. The countries have successfully utilized SEZs to increase their competitiveness.

Table 2: Competitive Industrial Performance Indices of the Selected Countries 2020

S. No.	List of Countries	Rank	Development Stage Group		Manufacturing			
				GDP	Exports	Value Added	Exports Per Capita	Value Added Per Capita
1	China	2nd	Emerging Industrial Economy	$13,446 bn	$3,892 bn	$2,405 bn	$2,726 bn	$1,685 bn
2	Costa Rica	66th	Emerging Industrial Economy	$60.4 bn	$6,835 mn	$7,951 mn	$1,367 mn	$1,590 mn
3	Mauritius	87th	Emerging Industrial Economy	$13.1 bn	$1,577 mn	$1,692 mn	$1,245 mn	$1,335 mn
4	Turkey	29th	Emerging Industrial Economy	$980.1 bn	$167.3 bn	$148.4 bn	$2,032 bn	$1,802 bn

Source: Author's production adopted from CIP, 2020

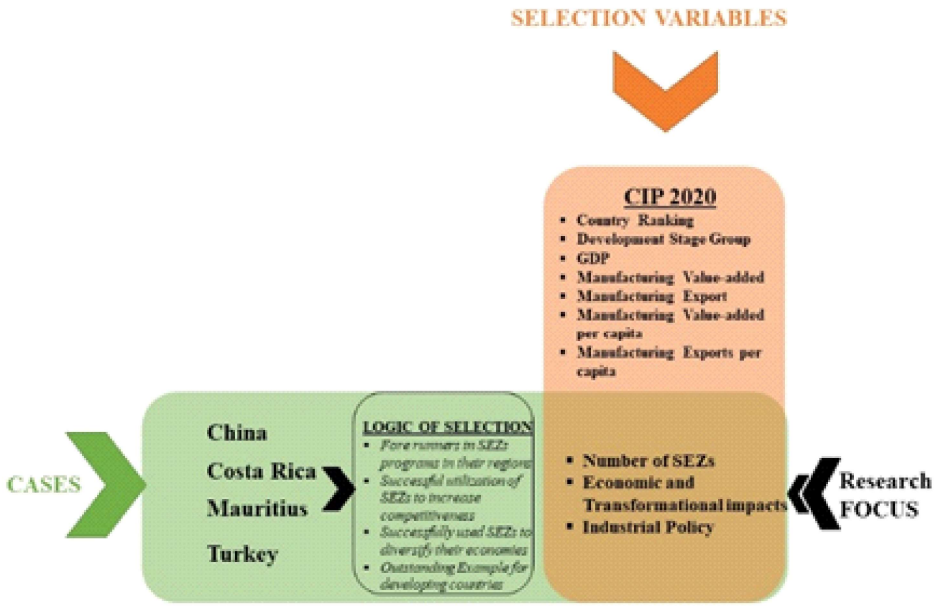

Figure 2: Relationship Between Selected Countries, and Research Focus

Source: Author, 2023

iii. They have successfully used SEZs to diversify their economies and generate employment.

iv. They are all classified as emerging industrial economies by United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).

v. They belong to global alliances, emerging economies and super powers such as BRICS, MINT, and GASEZ.

To assess the eligibility of the selected countries, United Nations Industrial Development Organization's Competitive Industrial Performance index (CIP), "a tool used to indicate how successfully a country's industries are at producing and selling their goods in domestic and foreign markets and enables cross country comparisons of industrial competitiveness and provide a strong policy signals to enhance countries' industrial development" UNIDO (2021) is used identify selected countries' development stage, GDP, manufacturing value added, manufacturing exports, manufacturing value added per capita, and manufacturing export per capita as shown in Table 2. Figure 2 highlights the relationship between the selected countries and research focus.

3.2. Methods

Drawing from the experiences of selected countries (China, Costa Rica, Mauritius, and Turkey), the study identifies a range of best policies, practices, and strategies to enhance the development and performance of SEZs in Africa as summarized in Table 1. These include: Making SEZs an integral part of long-term development plan, Strong commitment and backing from the government in zone managing and policy implementation, Setting up zones at strategic and appropriate locations, Preferential investment and tax policy for firms operating in the zones, Clear objectives, benchmarks, and competitions among zones, Technology learning, upgrading, and improvement of innovative culture, Making sure the zones have strong linkages with the domestic economy, Offering streamlined administration, upgraded logistics, industrial infrastructure, and generous tax and custom incentives to investors, Governmental involvement in development of sectors with comparative advantage, Removal of ownership restrictions on foreign investments, Shift in investment to more strategic sectors, Combining medium technology and high-technology to increase export, Introduction of industry oriented and pragmatic education policy to tailor high-school and further education to the needs of prevailing industry, Learning from the experiences of first movers before establishing SEZs programs, Adopting of "free point" system, which allows SEZ status to be given to firms independent of their location, Implementing active industrial policy that is export driven, Harmonization of tax and tariff regimes inside and outside the SEZs, Encouraging domestic firms to

invest and operate in the zones, Successful incorporation of the economic zones into the national economy, Using SEZs as an environment that is necessary for the emergence and growth of small and medium scale enterprises, Constituting SEZs in the development plan by national planning organization, Establishment of zones for supporting industrial expansion, regional development and rehabilitation of existing industrial area, Creation of four governing organs of industrial parks (Enterprising Committee, Board of Directors, Board of Auditors, and Regional Directorate) to reduce bureaucratic bottlenecks, Clustering of industries into specialized industrial zones to tackle the issue of environmental pollution, and Constant upgrading of industries to boost their competitive advantage.

Based on the identified strategies above, this study developed a set of 26 questions to assess the impact of the identified policies, strategies, and practices on the performance of African SEZs. The questions were designed using a 5-point Likert scale, allowing respondents to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with the effectiveness of these measures. The scale ranged from "Definitely would" with a score of 5 points, to "Definitely would not" with a score of 1 point. In contrast to previous studies that primarily rely on case studies and observations, this study utilizes public opinion to evaluate the effectiveness of the identified policies.

A participatory study in Denmark selected 90 participants (Tress and Tress, 2003), while another study measuring public opinion on landscape conversion depended on only 93 responses (Yadav *et al.,* 2013). Similarly, a study on analysis of spatial, public and corporate views on landscape change in Iskandar, Malaysia also depended on 125 responses (Barau, 2017).

The sampling approach for respondents was based on the regions of the selected countries, which aligns with the development of SEZs in those specific regions. As a result, the selection of respondents reflects the SEZ performance within the chosen countries rather than the entire region. The questionnaire, drafted in English, was administered by four assistants recruited from each selected region, allowing for a collaborative research process with the respondents. The study involved a total of 100 respondents exclusively from the selected regions, with this in mind, the choice of 25 respondents per region could represent a sample of public opinion

Table 3: Economic and Transformational Impacts of SEZs on Selected Countries

S. No.	Name of Countries	No. of Zones	Economic and Transformational Impacts of SEZs on Selected Countries	References
1.	China	2,543	1. Significant contribution to development in terms of total output, incubation of enterprises, scientific and technological progress, openness to the outside world, ecological preservation and environmental protection. 2. Economic and technological development zones and high-tech industrial development parks have together contributed RMB18.6 tn to the Chinese economy, making up more than one fifth (22.5%) of the GDP. 3. Generated a tax revenue of RMB3.3 tn or 22.9% of total national tax revenue in 2017. 4. The national economic and technological development zones accounts for a total import and export of RMB7 tn accounting for 21.7% of the county's total import county's total import and export	(Zeng, 2012; China Economic Net, 2018; UNCTAD, 2022; Tao *et al.,* 2018)
2.	Costa Rica	49	1. EPZs diversify and stabilize the economy through the export of non-traditional product and help in transformation of trade from dominant products to new products and attract FDI. 2. EPZs enhances the development of small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) and oversaw significant macroeconomic impacts on growth in production, foreign trade, FDI, employment, salaries, and socioeconomic security 3. EPZs accounts for 50% of Costa Rica's export after the turn of the century and has been the key driver of global value chain across the country 4. By 2018, about 443 firms are operating within the country's SEZs with 55.5% operating in service sector, 44.8% in manufacturing and 3.6% in agri-business.	(Monge, 2017; Monge and Gilberto, 2005)

Table 3 (Cont.)

S. No.	Name of Countries	No. of Zones	Economic and Transformational Impacts of SEZs on Selected Countries	References
3.	Mauritius	1	1. the enactment of Export Processing Zone Act No. 51 of 1970 and the experiences of Asian first movers (Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, India and Philippines) were the turning point of EPZs in the country 2. By the end of the first decade, 63 firms are already operating in the zones and SEZs contribution to employment reaches 12,000 and ₹4.5 mn in investment. 3. The second decade presents a more stable macroeconomic environment and oversaw a significant increase in employment and investment as their levels reached about 60,000 people and ₹14 mn 4. The 2000s witnessed both vertical and horizontal diversification in areas of production and SEZs employment reaches 86,000, investment averages ₹17 mn while SEZ export stands at ₹331 mn	(Aaron, 2019; 23. Yao *et al.*, 2005; Madani, 1998; Tang, 2019; Bonaglia and Fukasaku, 2003)
4.	Turkey	102	1.This Development of Turkish industrialization is credited to the creation and establishment of organized Industrial Zones (OIZs) across the country. With an allocated credit of about $384 mn, the OIZs created about 6,472 parcels for industries and employ about 539,000 workers during that period. 2. OIZs are not only created to expand planned industrialization in turkey but also to attain balanced growth by attracting industries to the under-developed regions of the country, improve urban environment by systematically clustering firms into a specialized zone and generate balanced employment opportunities across the entire country 3.Creation and establishment of OIZs results in acceleration of industrialization which allows Turkey to become a member of G20 countries 4. As at 2019, the number of completed OIZs increases significantly from 70 in 2002 to 152 (completed through public loan system). Also, the number of industrial parcels created increased from 17,000 to 65,000, similarly, the number of employed workers within the firms operating in the zones rises from 370,000 to 1.8 million.	(Ozguc, 1999; Türk, 2006; Mehmet et al., 2019)

Mean item score (weighted average) is used to analyze the results from the administered questionnaires using the mean deviation formula.

$x = \Sigma fx/N$

where,

x = The mean value of the set of data

f = Frequency of the individual data

N = Sum of frequencies

4. Result

Based on the literature review, Table 3 presents the notable economic and transformational impacts of SEZs on the selected countries. While each country employs SEZs differently to achieve their diversification goals, the table demonstrates that SEZs have significant effects on transforming economies, developing infrastructure, creating employment opportunities, increasing exports, generating revenue, making substantial contributions to domestic economies, boosting GDP, promoting the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises, increasing production, supporting ecological preservation, and fostering the incubation of enterprises.

China is widely recognized as a highly successful country in utilizing Special Economic Zones (SEZs) to drive extensive economic transformation. It is also viewed as a role model for developing nations aiming to diversify their economies and achieve modernization, urbanization, and industrialization. As highlighted in Table 3, China's Special Economic Zones (SEZs) have made substantial contributions to development across various aspects. These contributions include significant advancements in total output, scientific and technological advancements, and openness to

international engagement (Tao *et al.*, 2018). Also, economic and technological development zones, along with high-tech industrial development parks, have made a significant contribution of RMB18.6 tn to the Chinese economy in 2017. This accounts for more than one fifth, specifically 22.5%, of the country's GDP (China Economic Net, 2018). Their impact on the economy is substantial, reflecting the crucial role these zones and parks play in driving economic growth and fostering technological advancements in China. Similarly, the national economic and technological development zones generate a Gross Regional Product (GRP) of approximately RMB11 tn, representing 11% of China's total GDP (Yuyang, 2022). Moreover, these zones contribute significantly to the country's import and export activities, with a total trade volume of RMB7 tn, accounting for 21.7% of China's overall import and export figures (Yuyang, 2022). These statistics highlight the considerable economic impact and international trade significance of China's SEZs.

Costa Rican Export Processing Zones (EPZs) are established with the aim of diversifying and stabilizing the economy through the export of non-traditional products. As highlighted in Table 4, SEZs play a crucial role in transforming the country's trade, moving away from the reliance on dominant products such as coffee, bananas, sugar, and meat, and shifting towards new industries like electronics and semiconductor assembly. Additionally, these EPZs actively seek to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), as emphasized by Monge and Gilberto (2005). The ultimate goal is to foster economic growth and cultivate a more dynamic and modern industrial sector. Also, EPZs have a significant impact on the development of SMEs and generate substantial macroeconomic effects in terms of production, foreign trade, FDI, employment, salaries, and socioeconomic security (Monge, 2017). Their presence contributes significantly to overall economic growth and stability. Similarly, EPZs account for 50% of Costa Rica's exports since the beginning of the 21st century and have played a crucial role in driving the country's participation in global value chains (Aaron, 2019). They have emerged as a key driver of economic activity, facilitating significant export growth and integration into global markets. As of 2018, Costa Rica had 443 firms operating within its SEZs, with the service sector accounting for 55.5%, manufacturing for 44.8%, and agri-business for 3.6%. The concentration of SEZs in San Jose has facilitated industrial symbiosis, infrastructure development, and a substantial increase in FDI of around 69.2% compared to 2013 (Aaron, 2019).

Mauritius' subsequent achievements have been credited to a variety of policies. The implementation of effective domestic trade policies was complemented by the successful execution of trade diplomacy (Svirydzenka and Petri, 2014). The country's textile and sugar industries enjoyed preferential access, resulting in significant economic gains. In the 1980s and 1990s, these sectors contributed rents equivalent to 7% and 4.5% of GDP per year, respectively, which helped maintain high investment levels. Notably, domestic savings played a prominent role in financing domestic investment during this period, rather than relying heavily on foreign sources (Subramanian and Roy, 2001). The successful utilization of export rents enabled substantial investments in human capital, supported by both public and private

Table 4: Assessment of the Identified Policies

P1	Making SEZs an integral part of a long-term development strategy	62	30	8	0	0	100	4.54
P2	Strong commitment and backing from the government in zone managing and policy implementation	12	22	66	0	0	100	3.46
P3	Setting up zones at strategic and appropriate locations	60	30	10	0	0	100	4.5
P4	Preferential investment and tax policy for firms operating in the zones	55	20	15	10	0	100	4
P5	Clear objectives, benchmarks, and competitions among zones	20	40	30	10	0	100	3.5
P6	Technology learning, upgrading, and improvement of innovative culture	60	11	29	10	0	100	4.31
P7	Making sure the zones have strong linkages with the domestic economy	47	20	33	0	0	100	4.14
P8	Offering streamlined administration, upgraded logistics, industrial	53	32	15	0	0	100	4.38

Table 4 (Cont.)

	infrastructure, and generous tax and custom incentives to investors							
P9	Governmental involvement in development of sectors with comparative advantage	64	24	12	0	0	100	4.52
P10	Removal of ownership restrictions on foreign investments	0	68	20	12	0	100	3.56
P11	Shift in investment to more strategic sectors	10	40	50	0	0	100	3.6
P12	Combining medium technology and high-technology to increase export	30	30	30	10	0	100	4
P13	Introduction of industry oriented and pragmatic education policy to tailor high-school and further education to the needs of prevailing industry	56	24	20	0	0	100	4.36
P14	Use of experiences of developed economies in technical training and zone management	60	10	20	0	10	100	4.1
P15	Learning from the experiences of first movers before establishing SEZs programs	60	30	10	0	0	100	4.5
P16	Adopting of “free point” system, which allows SEZ status to be given to firms independent of their location	20	60	20	0	0	100	4
P17	Implementing active industrial policy that is export driven	10	10	80	0	0	100	3.3
P18	Harmonization of tax and tariff regimes inside and outside the SEZs	40	20	40	0	0	100	4
P19	Encouraging domestic firms to invest and operate in the zones	47	33	8	12	0	100	4.15
P20	Successful incorporation of the economic zones into the national economy.	30	50	10	10	0	100	4
P21	Using SEZs as an environment that is necessary for the emergence and growth of small and medium scale enterprises	66	23	7	4	0	100	4.51
P22	Constituting SEZs in the development plan by national planning organization	70	30	0	0	0	100	4.7
P23	Establishment of zones for supporting industrial expansion, regional development and rehabilitation of existing industrial area	12	68	12	0	8	100	3.76
P24	Creation of four governing organs of industrial parks (Enterprising Committee,	62	28	10	0	0	100	4.52

Table 4 (Cont.)								
	Board of Directors, Board of Auditors, and Regional Directorate) to reduce bureaucratic bottlenecks in management of the Zones							
P25	Clustering of industries into specialized industrial zones to tackle the issue of environmental pollution	20	60	10	10	0	100	3.8
P26	Constant upgrading of industries to boost their competitive advantage	74	16	0	6	4	100	4.5

funding. Also, the signing of the Double Taxation Avoidance Treaty with India in 1983 played a pivotal role in driving the development of Mauritius' offshore financial sector (Svirydzenka and Petri, 2014). Additionally, by the end of the first decade of EPZ implementation, 63 firms were already operating in the zones, resulting in a contribution of 12,000 jobs and an investment of ₹4.5 mn. During the 2000s, employment in SEZs reached 86,000, with an average investment of ₹17 mn, and SEZ exports amounted to ₹331 mn (Aaron, 2019).

The development of Turkish industrialization is attributed to the establishment and creation of organized Industrial Zones (OIZs) throughout the country. With a dedicated credit of approximately $384 mn, the OIZs successfully provided around 6,472 parcels of land for industrial purposes, ultimately employing approximately 539,000 workers during that period (Özgüç,1999). These OIZs have played a pivotal role in fostering industrial growth and creating employment opportunities in Turkey. The creation and establishment of OIZs in Turkey have played a significant role in accelerating

Table 5: Ranking of Identified Policies

S. No.	Identified Policies	Mean Item Score	Remark	Ranking
P22	Constituting SEZs in the development plan by national planning organization	4.7	Definitely Would	**1st**
P1	Making SEZs an integral part of a long-term development strategy	4.54	Definitely Would	**2nd**
P9	Governmental involvement in development of sectors with comparative advantage	4.52	Definitely Would	**3rd**
P24	Creation of four governing organs of industrial parks (Enterprising Committee, Board of Directors, Board of Auditors, and Regional Directorate) to reduce bureaucratic bottlenecks in management of the Zones	4.52	Definitely Would	**3rd**
P21	Using SEZs as an environment that is necessary for the emergence and growth of small and medium scale enterprises	4.51	Definitely Would	**4th**
P3	Setting up zones at strategic and appropriate locations	4.5	Definitely Would	**5th**
P15	Learning from the experiences of first movers before establishing SEZs programs	4.5	Definitely Would	**5th**
P26	Constant upgrading of industries to boost their competitive advantage	4.5	Definitely Would	**5th**

Table 5 (Cont.)

S. No.	Identified Policies	Mean Item Score	Remark	Ranking
P8	Offering streamlined administration, upgraded logistics, industrial infrastructure, and generous tax and custom incentives to investors	4.38	Probably Would	**6th**
P13	Introduction of industry oriented and pragmatic education policy to tailor high-school and further education to the needs of prevailing industry	4.36	Probably Would	**7th**
P6	Technology learning, upgrading, and improvement of innovative culture	4.31	Probably Would	**8th**
P19	Encouraging domestic firms to invest and operate in the zones	4.15	Probably Would	**9th**
P7	Making sure the zones have strong linkages with the domestic economy	4.14	Probably Would	**10th**
P14	Use of experiences of developed economies in technical training and zone management	4.1	Probably Would	**11th**
P4	Preferential investment and tax policy for firms operating in the zones	4	Probably Would	**12th**
P12	Combining medium technology and high-technology to increase export	4	Probably Would	**12th**
P16	Adopting of “free point” system, which allows SEZ status to be given to firms independent of their location	4	Probably Would	**12th**
P18	Harmonization of tax and tariff regimes inside and outside the SEZs	4	Probably Would	**12th**
P20	Successful incorporation of the economic zones into the national economy.	4	Probably Would	**12th**
P25	Clustering of industries into specialized industrial zones to tackle the issue of environmental pollution	3.8	Probably Would	**13th**
P23	Establishment of zones for supporting industrial expansion, regional development and rehabilitation of existing industrial area	3.76	Probably Would	**14th**
P11	Shift in investment to more strategic sectors	3.6	Probably Would	**15th**
P10	Removal of ownership restrictions on foreign investments	3.56	Probably Would	**16th**
P5	Clear objectives, benchmarks, and competitions among zones	3.5	Probably Would	**17th**
P2	Strong commitment and backing from the government in zone managing and policy implementation	3.46	Not Sure	**18th**
P17	Implementing active industrial policy that is export driven	3.3	Not Sure	**19th**

industrialization and contributing to the country's membership in the G20 (Mehmet and Zeynep, 2019). By 2019, the number of completed OIZs witnessed a substantial increase, rising from 70 in 2002 to 152, with these developments being facilitated through the public loan system (Türk, 2006). The number of industrial parcels created within the OIZs also rose from 17,000 to 65,000, while employment within these zones surged from 370,000 to 1.8 million workers (Özgüç,1999). These developments underscore the instrumental role of OIZs in driving industrial growth, expanding employment opportunities, and bolstering Turkey's economic progress.

The respective mean item score (weighted average) values were analyzed based on the range below to allow for a remark (from 4.5-5.0 is Definitely Would; 3.5-4.4 is Probably Would; 2.5-3.4 is Not Sure; 1.5- 2.4 is Probably Would Not; 0.5-1.4 is Definitely Would Not) for each of the identified policies and strategies applied by selected countries.

Based on the weighted opinions of the respondents and the corresponding mean item scores presented in Table 5, it can be observed that policy P22 achieved the highest Mean Item Score (MIS) of 4.7, closely followed by P1 with a score of 4.54. P9 and P24 both obtained a score of 4.52, while P21 received a score of 4.51. P3, P15, and P26 all garnered an MIS of 4.5, and P8 achieved a score of 4.38. Policies P13, P6, P19, P7, and P14 scored MIS values of 4.36, 4.31, 4.15, 4.14, and 4.1, respectively. Policies P4, P12, P16, P18, and P20 all maintained the same MIS value of 4.00. P25, P23, P11, P10, and P5 obtained MIS values of 3.8, 3.76, 3.6, 3.56, and 3.5, while P2 and P17 scored MIS values of 3.46 and 3.6, respectively.

Based on the information presented in Table 6, respondents' opinions regarding the effectiveness of various policies and practices for enhancing the performance and development of SEZs in Africa can be categorized as follows:

i. Eight of the identified policies were considered to "Definitely Would" have a positive impact.

ii. Sixteen of the identified policies were seen as "Probably Would" be beneficial.

iii. Additionally, respondents expressed uncertainty or were "Not Sure" about the effectiveness of two of the identified policies.

According to the weighted opinions of the respondents, the policy of constituting SEZs in the development plan by national planning organizations was identified as the most important policy, receiving the highest Mean Item Score (MIS) value of 4.7 and ranking. This policy is highly valued because it aligns SEZs with national development objectives, leading to long-term planning, infrastructure development, interagency coordination, and investor confidence. Its implementation has played a pivotal role in the rapid development and success of SEZs in selected countries. For example, in China, this policy has laid the foundation for economic development and global integration. In Turkey, the inclusion of SEZs in the development plan has provided a clear vision, stability, and a supportive policy framework, contributing to their success. In Mauritius, the policy has established SEZs as key drivers of economic growth and development. Similarly, in Costa Rica, integrating SEZs into the development plan signals the government's commitment to supporting zone development, attracting industries with export potential, advanced technology, and high value addition. This approach has led to economic diversification and increased employment opportunities. Therefore, adopting the policy of including SEZs in the development plan can enable African countries to effectively harness the potential of SEZs for driving economic growth, industrialization, and sustainable development.

The policy of making SEZs an integral part of a long-term development strategy received the second highest MIS value of 4.54 and ranked second in importance according to respondents. This policy is valued for providing a stable and supportive framework that encourages continuous investment in infrastructure, human capital, and innovation. Implementation of this policy has consistently improved the performance of SEZs in the selected countries. For example, China recognized the potential of SEZs in attracting foreign investment, promoting technology transfer, and driving export-oriented industrialization, leading to their inclusion in the long-term development plan. This strategic integration has resulted in the remarkable growth of SEZs and their contribution to China's economic transformation. Similarly, the policy allowed Turkey to strategically position its zones to address regional development disparities, stimulate industrial growth, and attract investments. Therefore, implementing this policy within African zone programs has the potential to bring about transformative impacts, accelerating the development of SEZs and enhance their performance. This, in turn, will contribute to the economic growth of the countries.

The policies of governmental involvement in sectors with comparative advantage and the creation of governing organs of industrial parks received the third highest (MIS) value of 4.52 and were ranked third by the respondents. These strategies have proven effective in reducing bureaucratic hurdles, streamlining administrative processes, improving coordination among stakeholders, and providing targeted support to sectors with growth potential in the selected countries. For instance, Costa Rica's establishment of the Costa Rican Investment Promotion Agency (CINDE) has played a crucial role in reducing bureaucratic bottlenecks and act as an intermediary between businesses and government agencies. This policy has streamlined administrative processes, provided support services, and facilitated coordination

among various stakeholders. Similarly, the government's involvement in sectors with comparative advantage, such as high-tech industries and services, has led to the development of specialized SEZs that attract investments, promote innovation, and enhance competitiveness. The creation of governing organs, including enterprising committees, boards of directors, auditors, and regional directorates, has significantly reduced bureaucratic hurdles in SEZ management in Turkey. Furthermore, the government's involvement in sectors with comparative advantage, such as automotive, textiles, and electronics, has provided strategic guidance, investment incentives, and targeted support to attract businesses and foster their growth within SEZs. By implementing these strategies, African countries can enhance the attractiveness of their SEZs, facilitate increased investment inflows, promote industrial growth, and enhance their competitiveness on a global scale.

The policy of using SEZs as an environment necessary for the emergence of small and medium-scale industries received a Mean Item Score (MIS) value of 4.51 and was ranked fourth by the respondents. This policy has the potential to foster entrepreneurship, create employment opportunities, stimulate economic growth, facilitate technology transfer and innovation, enhance linkages with the domestic economy, and contribute to regional development. Costa Rica provides a compelling example of the importance of this strategy. By utilizing SEZs for the development of Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), Costa Rica has created a vibrant ecosystem where startups and small businesses can access resources, collaborate with other companies, and benefit from a favorable business environment. This approach has facilitated the growth of local enterprises, generated income and improve the living standards of individuals and communities. By adopting this policy, African countries can create conducive environments for the emergence and growth of SMEs, driving economic development, job creation, and sustainable growth.

The policies of setting up zones at strategic and appropriate locations, learning from the experiences of first movers, and constant upgrading of industries to boost their competitive advantage received a Mean Item Score (MIS) value of 4.5 and were ranked fifth by the respondents. These policies have played a crucial role in driving economic growth, attracting investments, fostering innovation, and enhancing the competitiveness of industries within SEZs in selected countries. For example, the strategic location of SEZs in areas with geographical advantages, such as coastal regions and border areas, has facilitated international trade, attracted foreign investment, and stimulated regional development in China. Similarly, by studying and adopting best practices, policy frameworks, and regulatory approaches from other countries, Mauritius has been able to create an investor-friendly environment, provide necessary infrastructure, and offer comprehensive support services within its SEZs. Furthermore, Turkey's focus on research and development, advanced manufacturing, and technology-intensive sectors has enhanced the competitiveness of industries operating within SEZs. By constantly upgrading and investing in these sectors, Turkey has attracted high-quality investments, developed export-oriented industries, and improved the value and sophistication of its products and services. By implementing these policies, African countries can strategically establish SEZs in favorable locations, leverage the experiences, policies and approaches of first movers to prioritize constant upgrading and innovation to enhance the competitiveness of their industries within SEZs.

According to the weighted opinions of the respondents, there are several policies that would probably enhance the performance of SEZs in Africa. These include offering streamlined administration, upgraded logistics, industrial infrastructure, and generous tax and custom incentives to investors (ranked sixth), introducing industry-oriented and pragmatic education policies to tailor education to industry needs (ranked seventh), promoting technology learning, upgrading, and fostering an innovative culture (ranked eighth), encouraging domestic firms to invest and operate in the zones (ranked ninth), ensuring strong linkages between the zones and the domestic economy (ranked tenth), and leveraging the experiences of developed economies in technical training and zone management (ranked eleventh).

Other policies that were identified as potential enhancers of SEZ performance include preferential investment and tax policies for firms operating in the zones, combining medium and high technology to increase exports, adopting a flexible system for granting SEZ status to firms regardless of their location, harmonizing tax and tariff regimes inside and outside the SEZs, successfully incorporating the economic zones into the national economy (all ranked twelfth), clustering industries into specialized zones to address environmental pollution (ranked thirteenth), establishing zones to support industrial expansion, regional development, and rehabilitation of existing industrial areas (ranked fourteenth), shifting investments towards more strategic sectors (ranked fifteenth), removing ownership restrictions on foreign investments (ranked sixteenth), and setting clear objectives, benchmarks, and competitions among zones (ranked seventeenth).

The respondents expressed uncertainty regarding the policies of strong commitment and backing from the government in zone managing and policy implementation, as well as implementing an active industrial policy that is export-driven, in terms of enhancing the performance or development of SEZs in Africa.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Previous studies in the field of SEZs in developing countries resolved by either presenting best approaches to enhance zones performances (Aaron, 2019), highlighting elements to be focused on when establishing SEZs (MENA-OECD, 2009), making policy recommendation for developing countries establishing SEZs (Alexianu *et al.,* 2019), or highlighting some elements to ensure the success of zone programs in developing countries (Zeng, 2016). However, this study raises concerns about the lack of inclusive policies that can stimulate the growth and development of SEZs in Africa. The findings show that approximately 30% of the identified policies would definitely improve the performance of African SEZs, while about 60% would probably enhance their performance. However, there is uncertainty regarding the impact of around 10% of the identified policies. This indicates that the majority of policies identified from emerging industrial economies have the potential to transform African zone programs. This implies that African SEZ policies requires strategic reorientation, regulatory reform, and proper repackaging.

Based on the findings of this study, the 26 policies identified can be categorized into three groups following the respondents' perceptions. Policies that are definitely recommended (eight policies), Policies that are probably recommended (sixteen policies), and Policies that received uncertain responses (two policies).

The eight policies that were strongly recommended by the respondents include constituting SEZs in the development plan by national planning organizations, making SEZs an integral part of a long-term development strategy, governmental involvement in the development of sectors with comparative advantage, creation of four governing organs of industrial parks to reduce bureaucratic bottlenecks, using SEZs as an environment for the emergence of small and medium-scale enterprises, setting up zones at strategic locations, learning from the experiences of first movers, and constant upgrading of industries for competitive advantage. These policies address the main challenges faced by most of African SEZs. They emphasize the importance of integrating SEZs into broader development strategies, aligning them with long-term goals, and prioritizing investments and infrastructure development accordingly. By adopting these policies, African countries can strategically plan their SEZs, foster coordinated infrastructure development, and attract targeted investments aligned with their specific development priorities. For instance, Ghana's implementation of Free Zones as part of its 10-point transformation agenda demonstrates the effectiveness of strategic planning and focusing on areas where the country has a comparative advantage (Otchia, 2021). These policies can enable African countries to maximize the potential benefits of SEZs and contribute to economic growth, industrialization, and job creation.

The policies can also streamline administrative processes, reduce bureaucratic hurdles, enhance efficiency, oversee SEZ management, coordinate interagency efforts, and facilitate effective decision-making. For instance, in Ethiopia, the establishment of key institutions such as the Ethiopian Investment Board (EIB) and the Ethiopian Investment Commission (EIC) demonstrates the government's strong commitment and support. These institutions are responsible for formulating policies and strategies, promoting investment, formulating industrial park policies, managing day-to-day operations, attracting investors to targeted sectors, and regulating industrial park developers, operators, and firms. Their collaborative efforts have significantly contributed to Ethiopia's progress in SEZ development (Rodríguez-Pose *et al.,* 2022). By implementing similar policies and establishing dedicated institutions, African countries can create a conducive environment for SEZs, promote investment, and ensure effective management and coordination among relevant stakeholders.

Additionally, these policies can have a significant impact on the development of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), promote inclusive growth, support local businesses, foster economic diversification, and create opportunities for collaboration, knowledge sharing, and value addition, leading to broader economic benefits for countries. For instance, the Coega Industrial Development Zone (IDZ) in South Africa, established near Port Elizabeth in 2001, has implemented specific initiatives to facilitate the participation and benefit of local firms in its industrial activities. These initiatives include the establishment of an SME Development Unit responsible for the SME Development Program, which aims to promote the formation of local businesses through the creation of a supplier database, customized training and development programs, and technical mentoring to support local firms in competing for higher value-added tenders (CDS, 2020a). By implementing similar policies, other African countries can foster the development of a skilled workforce, enhance technological capabilities, and increase their competitiveness in global markets.

The sixteen policies probably recommended are offering streamlined administration, upgraded logistics, industrial infrastructure, and generous tax and custom incentives to investors, introducing industry-oriented and pragmatic education policies to tailor education to industry needs, promoting technology learning, upgrading, and fostering an innovative culture, encouraging domestic firms to invest and operate in the zones, ensuring strong linkages between the zones and the domestic economy, leveraging the experiences of developed economies in technical training and zone management, preferential investment and tax policies for firms operating in the zones, combining medium and high

technology to increase exports, adopting a flexible system for granting SEZ status to firms regardless of their location, harmonizing tax and tariff regimes inside and outside the SEZs, successfully incorporating the economic zones into the national economy, clustering industries into specialized zones to address environmental pollution, establishing zones to support industrial expansion, regional development, and rehabilitation of existing industrial areas, shifting investments towards more strategic sectors, removing ownership restrictions on foreign investments, and setting clear objectives, benchmarks, and competitions among zones. These policies offer potential benefits to African SEZs by addressing specific challenges and leveraging opportunities. Effective implementation of these policies can attract investments, facilitate business operations, nurture an innovative culture, stimulate sectoral growth, enhance competitiveness, promote sustainable development, increase value addition, boost export potential, accelerate economic transformation, address skill gaps, improve labor productivity, promote industrialization, facilitate trade, foster integration between SEZs and the domestic market, support value chain development, and promote local industry growth.

The two policies, namely strong commitment and backing from the government in zone management and policy implementation, as well as implementing an active industrial policy that is export-driven, received uncertain responses from the respondents. This uncertainty can be attributed to concerns regarding the effectiveness of active industrial policies in Africa, potential market distortions, challenges in finding the right balance between export orientation and meeting domestic market needs, and the risks associated with excessive government intervention. Further research and stakeholder consultations are needed to better understand the effectiveness of active industrial policies in the African context and determine the optimal balance between government support and private sector autonomy. Factors such as market conditions, sectoral strengths, and dynamics of the global value chain should be considered when designing and implementing policies that promote exports while ensuring sustainable and inclusive growth.

The interconnections and potential synergies among the identified policies play a crucial role in achieving successful outcomes. It is important to adopt a comprehensive and integrated approach that considers the different policy dimensions and their mutual influences. For instance, policies such as constituting SEZs in the development plan, setting up zones at strategic locations, and governmental involvement in sectors with comparative advantage should be aligned to ensure coherence and effectiveness. By strategically locating SEZs in areas that align with sectors of comparative advantage, targeted development and specialization can be achieved within the zones. Moreover, policies such as learning from first movers and constant upgrading of industries can guide the allocation of resources towards areas that show potential for success. It is also important to integrate policies related to environmental protection, social inclusion, and resource efficiency alongside economic policies. This holistic approach requires the involvement of diverse stakeholders, including local communities, industry representatives, labor unions, and environmental groups. By considering the interconnections among policies and involving relevant stakeholders, a comprehensive approach can be adopted to ensure that policies work in harmony towards common goals such as economic growth, job creation, and sustainable development.

Africa is clearly considered as a very small player in global SEZs performance, investment and trade. However, this study indicated that with appropriate and accountable policies, SEZs can transform African economies by creating employment, attracting FDI, providing resilient infrastructure, fostering innovation, and promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization. In general, this study has shown that African SEZs can compete with those in Southeast Asia and Europe if appropriate policies are put in place to unlock and optimize their competitive advantage.

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