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The Role of BRICS in Shaping the New World Order: A Case Study of South Africa's Influence and Opportunities in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)

Yeni Dünya Düzeninin Şekillendirilmesinde BRICS'in Rolü: Güney Afrika'nın Etkisi ve Afrika Kıtasal Serbest Ticaret Bölgesi'ndeki (AfCFTA) Fırsatları Üzerine Bir Vaka Çalışması

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Abstract

This research explores the pivotal role of BRICS in shaping the new world order, focusing specifically on South Africa's influence and opportunities within the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). As a key member of BRICS, South Africa leverages its strategic position to enhance regional integration, economic growth, and geopolitical influence in Africa. The study examines how South Africa's participation in BRICS facilitates its leadership in AfCFTA, promoting trade liberalization, investment, and sustainable development across the continent. By analyzing South Africa's diplomatic strategies, trade policies, and economic initiatives, this research highlights the potential for AfCFTA to catalyze broader economic transformation and regional stability. Additionally, the study evaluates the implications of BRICS' collective agenda for global governance, multilateralism, and South-South cooperation, emphasizing the role of emerging economies in redefining international norms and power dynamics. Through a comprehensive case study approach, the research identifies key opportunities and challenges for South Africa within AfCFTA, offering insights into the broader impact of BRICS on the global economic landscape.

Keywords: BRICS, South Africa, African Continental Free Trade Area, AfCFTA, Regional Integration, Economic Growth, Geopolitical Influence

Özet

Bu araştırma, yeni dünya düzeninin şekillendirilmesinde BRICS'in kritik rolünü incelemekte ve özellikle Güney Afrika'nın Afrika Kıtasal Serbest Ticaret Bölgesi'ndeki (AfCFTA) etkisi ve fırsatlarına odaklanmaktadır. BRICS'in önemli bir üyesi olarak Güney Afrika, stratejik konumunu kullanarak bölgesel entegrasyonu, ekonomik büyümeyi ve Afrika'daki jeopolitik etkisini artırmaktadır. Çalışma, Güney Afrika'nın BRICS içindeki katılımının, AfCFTA liderliğini nasıl kolaylaştırdığını, ticaretin serbestleşmesini, yatırımları ve kıta genelinde sürdürülebilir kalkınmayı nasıl teşvik ettiğini incelemektedir. Güney Afrika'nın diplomatik stratejileri, ticaret politikaları ve ekonomik girişimleri analiz edilerek, AfCFTA'nın daha geniş ekonomik dönüşüm ve bölgesel istikrar için bir katalizör olma potansiyeli vurgulanmaktadır. Ayrıca, çalışma BRICS'in kolektif gündeminin küresel yönetişim, çok taraflılık ve Güney-Güney iş birliği üzerindeki etkilerini değerlendirmekte ve yükselen ekonomilerin uluslararası normları ve güç dinamiklerini yeniden tanımlamadaki rolünü ön plana çıkarmaktadır. Kapsamlı bir vaka analizi yaklaşımıyla, araştırma Güney Afrika'nın AfCFTA içindeki temel fırsat ve zorluklarını belirleyerek, BRICS'in küresel ekonomik yapıya etkisine dair önemli içgörüler sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: BRICS, Güney Afrika, Afrika Kıtasal Serbest Ticaret Bölgesi, AfCFTA, Bölgesel Entegrasyon, Ekonomik Büyüme, Jeopolitik Etki

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Introduction

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), established in 2018 by the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, represents a transformative shift in the economic landscape of Africa, promising to create a single, unified market across the continent. This landmark agreement, which aims to eliminate tariffs on 90% of goods and promote the free flow of services and investments, has garnered widespread support from African nations and is poised to reshape the continent's economic dynamics (Nie, 2023). As the largest and most industrialized economy in Africa, South Africa holds a pivotal role in this ambitious project, with the potential to drive significant regional and continental changes. The opportunities and challenges associated with South Africa's involvement in AfCFTA are profound, influencing also its economic trajectory and the broader patterns of African integration and cooperation (Armel, 2020).

South Africa's leadership within AfCFTA is underscored by its strategic position as a key economic hub on the continent (Andal and Muratshina, 2022). With a well-established industrial base, advanced financial sector, and sophisticated infrastructure, South Africa is uniquely positioned to leverage the benefits of a more integrated African market. The country's involvement in AfCFTA offers a platform to enhance intra-African trade, attract investment, and drive sustainable development. This role extends beyond mere participation; it involves shaping the direction and impact of AfCFTA policies, advocating for regulatory harmonization, and addressing the infrastructural and economic challenges that could affect the successful implementation of the agreement.

However, South Africa's potential to maximize the opportunities offered by AfCFTA is not without its challenges (Ahad Bhat, Jamal and Beg, 2022). The country faces significant infrastructural deficits that could hinder its ability to participate efficiently and benefit from continental trade. In addition, the need for regulatory harmonization poses a challenge as differing national standards and customs procedures can create trade barriers. Increased competition from other African countries further complicates the landscape, as South Africa must navigate a more competitive regional market while striving to maintain its economic advantage. For example, Nigeria's rapidly growing manufacturing sector, particularly in cement production with companies like Dangote Cement expanding across the continent, presents direct competition to South Africa's industrial players (Abrego et al. 2019). Similarly, Kenya's dominance in agricultural exports, such as tea and horticultural products, challenges South African agribusinesses in accessing key markets under AfCFTA. Despite these challenges, the opportunities presented by AfCFTA offer South Africa a chance to drive significant regional and continental advancements. By leveraging its position as a leading economy, South Africa can foster sustainable development, enhance intra-African trade, and strengthen its economic standing. The success of this endeavor will depend on how effectively South Africa addresses its infrastructural and regulatory challenges, capitalizes on its competitive strengths, and contributes to the broader goals of African integration (Lagutina, 2022).

1. South Africa's Strategic Role within BRICS

South Africa's unique position and contributions within the BRICS coalition

South Africa's unique position and contributions within the BRICS coalition are pivotal in understanding the dynamics of this group of emerging economies (Cilliers, 2021). As the first African member to join the BRICS, South Africa serves as a bridge between BRICS and the African continent, providing a vital link for integrating African perspectives into the coalition's initiatives (Akinkugbe, 2020). Through platforms such as the BRICS Business Council, South Africa has advocated for increased investment in African infrastructure projects, such as the Grand Inga Dam in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which aligns with the continent's broader energy goals. Additionally, South Africa has played a key role in ensuring that BRICS financial institutions, like the New Development Bank, allocate funding to African development projects, exemplified by loans granted for renewable energy initiatives in countries like Namibia and Tanzania. By pushing for the inclusion of African priorities in BRICS discussions on global trade, South Africa has also emphasized the importance of fairer trade agreements that support the industrialization of African economies, as seen in its efforts to secure preferential market access for African exports within BRICS nations (Amadi and Lenaghan, 2020).

South Africa's strategic role within BRICS is underscored by its robust diplomatic efforts and economic policies aimed at fostering collaboration among member states. One notable example is South Africa's leadership in advocating for the New Development Bank (NDB), established by BRICS to support infrastructure and sustainable development projects in member countries and other emerging economies (Atif and Akbar, 2019). South Africa has been instrumental in pushing for the NDB's involvement in African projects, highlighting its commitment to leveraging BRICS resources for the continent's benefit.

Another significant contribution of South Africa within BRICS is its role in promoting trade and investment flows between Africa and the other BRICS nations. South Africa has been proactive in hosting and participating in various BRICS business forums and summits, such as the BRICS Business Council, which aim to enhance economic ties and create new opportunities for trade and investment. For instance, the 2018 BRICS Summit in Johannesburg marked a significant milestone where South Africa facilitated discussions on industrialization and inclusive growth, emphasizing the importance of aligning BRICS initiatives with the African Union's Agenda 2063. This agenda aims to transform Africa into a global powerhouse through inclusive and sustainable development (Nie, 2023).

South Africa's contributions are also evident in its diplomatic strategies within BRICS, where it champions issues pertinent to developing countries, particularly those in Africa (Amadi and Lenaghan, 2020). By advocating for reform in global governance institutions such as the United Nations Security Council and the International Monetary Fund, South Africa ensures that the voices of emerging and developing economies are heard on the global stage. This advocacy is crucial in addressing historical imbalances and promoting a more equitable international order, aligning with BRICS' broader objectives.

Moreover, South Africa's unique position allows it to address shared challenges within the BRICS framework, such as poverty alleviation, healthcare, and education. Collaborative efforts in these areas have been seen through various initiatives, including the BRICS Vaccine Research and Development Center, where South Africa plays a key role in addressing public health challenges and ensuring equitable access to vaccines in Africa (Nie, 2023). These examples illustrate how South Africa leverages its position within BRICS to not only further its national interests but also to contribute to the collective goals of the coalition and the broader aspirations of the African continent.

South Africa leverages BRICS membership to influence regional and global economic policies

South Africa leverages its BRICS membership to influence regional and global economic policies through a multifaceted approach that underscores its strategic diplomacy and economic initiatives (Zhao et al., 2018). By participating in BRICS, South Africa amplifies its voice in global economic governance, advocating for reforms that reflect the interests and aspirations of developing nations. For instance, South Africa has been a vocal proponent of restructuring the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to ensure more equitable representation and decision-making power for emerging economies. This advocacy is vital in addressing historical imbalances in global financial institutions and promoting a fairer global economic order. During the BRICS Summit in Xiamen in 2017, South Africa emphasized the need for a more inclusive and representative global governance framework, which resonated with other BRICS members and contributed to a unified stance on this issue (Avdasheva and Radchenko, 2018).

South Africa also uses its BRICS platform to foster regional economic integration and development within Africa (Monyae and Ndzendze, 2021). Through initiatives like the African Regional Centre of the New Development Bank (NDB) located in Johannesburg, South Africa ensures that BRICS resources are channeled towards critical infrastructure and development projects across the continent. This center helps allocate funding for essential infrastructure projects such as transportation, energy, and water supply across the continent. By doing so, South Africa ensures that African countries benefit from BRICS investments, promoting economic growth and regional integration (Gu, Shankland and Chenoy, 2016). This strategic move not only boosts South Africa's influence in regional economic affairs but also aligns with the broader goals of the African Union's Agenda 2063, which seeks to transform Africa into a globally competitive, integrated, and prosperous continent. The NDB's funding of renewable energy projects in South Africa, such as the Eskom Renewables Support Project, exemplifies how South Africa leverages BRICS membership to attract investment in key sectors that drive sustainable development (Guo, Sun and Demidov, 2020).

On the trade front, South Africa has been instrumental in promoting intra-BRICS trade and investment, which, in turn, impacts global economic policies by setting examples of successful South-South cooperation (Gathii, 2019). The Department of Trade, Industry, and Competition (DTIC) actively negotiates trade agreements that enhance South African exports, particularly in minerals, manufacturing, and agriculture, to BRICS partners. Organizations such as the BRICS Business Council and the South African Chamber of Commerce and Industry work to foster private-sector collaboration, encouraging investment in key industries like energy, infrastructure, and digital technology (Cynthia, Armijo and Katada, 2017). This intra-BRICS economic engagement also influences global trade policies by demonstrating how South-South cooperation can drive sustainable development and reduce dependence on Western-dominated financial institutions (Crane, 2015). The country's efforts to strengthen economic ties within BRICS are evident through initiatives like the BRICS Business Council, which facilitates dialogue and partnerships among business communities in member countries. By fostering such collaborations, South Africa enhances its trade and investment prospects and showcases the potential of South-South trade as a catalyst for global economic growth (Beausang, 2012).

Moreover, South Africa's influence extends to global economic policy debates on issues such as climate change and sustainable development. As a BRICS member, South Africa plays a critical role in advocating for balanced environmental sustainability approaches that consider emerging economies' developmental needs (Kumar et al., 2022). Through forums like the BRICS Summit and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), South Africa advocates for policies that balance environmental sustainability with economic growth. The country has pushed for climate financing mechanisms, such as the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP), to support developing nations in shifting away from fossil fuels without harming their economic stability. Additionally, South Africa collaborates with BRICS partners to promote renewable energy projects and green industrialization, ensuring that global climate policies do not disproportionately burden emerging economies while still addressing environmental concerns (Chenoy, Alex and Jing, 2021). The country's leadership in the BRICS Plus initiative, which seeks to engage with other emerging and developing economies beyond the BRICS core, further amplifies its impact on global economic policies. By promoting inclusive and sustainable growth models, South Africa not only enhances its stature within BRICS but also contributes to shaping a more equitable and sustainable global economic landscape (Beletskaya, 2022). These examples underscore how South Africa leverages its BRICS membership to influence both regional and global economic policies, driving initiatives that align with its national interests and the broader goals of developing economies.

South Africa's diplomatic strategies and initiatives within BRICS to support AfCFTA

South Africa's diplomatic strategies and initiatives within BRICS are crucial for supporting the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), leveraging its unique position to advocate for policies and projects that enhance regional integration and economic development (Sibanda, 2021). One significant diplomatic strategy is South Africa's consistent effort to align BRICS objectives with Africa's development agendas (Chun, 2016). By doing so, South Africa ensures that BRICS support for infrastructure and trade facilitation projects directly benefits the AfCFTA. For example, South Africa has been instrumental in pushing for the New Development Bank (NDB) to prioritize funding for infrastructure projects that are critical for AfCFTA's success. The NDB's approval of projects such as the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, which aims to improve water security for South Africa and its neighbors, demonstrates how diplomatic efforts within BRICS can lead to tangible support for regional initiatives that underpin the AfCFTA (Lagutina, 2022).

South Africa's diplomatic engagement in BRICS also includes promoting the harmonization of trade policies and standards, which is essential for the effective implementation of AfCFTA. By advocating for common standards and regulatory frameworks within BRICS, South Africa aims to create a more cohesive and integrated African market. This strategy is evident in South Africa's active participation in BRICS working groups and forums that focus on trade and investment (Akinkugbe, 2020). During the BRICS Trade Ministers' meetings, South Africa has consistently highlighted the importance of supporting AfCFTA through capacity building and technical assistance, ensuring that African countries can meet the standards required for seamless trade under the AfCFTA framework. This diplomatic push helps create a more favorable environment for AfCFTA to thrive, facilitating smoother trade relations and greater economic integration across the continent (Ignatov, 2020).

In addition, South Africa's initiatives within BRICS include fostering closer economic ties and partnerships that benefit the AfCFTA (Kumar et al., 2022). By leveraging its BRICS membership, South Africa has successfully attracted investment and trade deals that enhance its role as a gateway to the African market. A notable example is the South Africa-China bilateral agreements facilitated through BRICS, which have led to significant Chinese investment in South African infrastructure and manufacturing sectors (Cynthia, Armijo and Katada, 2017). These investments not only boost South Africa's economy but also contribute to the broader goals of the AfCFTA by improving regional infrastructure and industrial capacity. For instance, Chinese investments in South Africa's automotive industry have strengthened the country's manufacturing base, making it a key player in the regional value chain envisioned by the AfCFTA (Pasti and Ramaprasad, 2017).

Furthermore, South Africa's diplomatic strategies within BRICS include advocating for the inclusion of Africa-specific issues in the BRICS agenda, ensuring that the unique challenges and opportunities of the African continent are addressed (Chun, 2016). By championing issues such as sustainable development, poverty reduction, and industrialization, South Africa ensures that BRICS policies and initiatives are aligned with the developmental needs of African countries under the AfCFTA. The BRICS Summit in Johannesburg in 2018, where South Africa successfully brought African leaders to engage with BRICS counterparts, exemplifies this approach. This summit facilitated dialogue on how BRICS can support AfCFTA through enhanced cooperation in areas such as technology transfer, infrastructure development, and capacity building, reinforcing South Africa's role as a key advocate for Africa within the BRICS framework (Puppim de Oliveira and Jing., 2020).

These examples demonstrate how South Africa's diplomatic strategies and initiatives within BRICS are intricately linked to the support and success of AfCFTA. By aligning BRICS objectives with Africa's development goals, promoting policy harmonization, fostering economic partnerships, and advocating for Africa-specific issues, South Africa leverages its BRICS membership to drive regional integration and economic growth, thus reinforcing the foundational pillars of the AfCFTA.

2. Impact of BRICS on the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)

BRICS' collective economic and trade policies support the implementation and success of AfCFTA

BRICS' collective economic and trade policies significantly support the implementation and success of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) by promoting infrastructure development, enhancing trade facilitation, and encouraging investment across Africa. The establishment of the New Development Bank (NDB) by BRICS exemplifies a concerted effort to provide financial resources for projects that align with the AfCFTA's objectives. The NDB has funded several infrastructure projects that are critical for improving connectivity and reducing trade barriers within Africa. For instance, the NDB's investment in the Trans-African Highway, which aims to connect major cities across the continent, directly supports AfCFTA by facilitating smoother and more efficient trade routes. This infrastructure development is essential for integrating African markets, thereby enhancing intra-continental trade and economic cooperation (Beletskaya, 2022).

BRICS' focus on enhancing trade facilitation also plays a pivotal role in supporting AfCFTA. By advocating for the reduction of non-tariff barriers and the simplification of customs procedures, BRICS policies align with AfCFTA's goals of creating a seamless and efficient trading environment. During BRICS summits, member countries have discussed and agreed upon various measures to streamline trade processes and improve cross-border trade efficiency. South Africa, leveraging its position within BRICS, has pushed for initiatives that simplify trade regulations and promote the use of technology in customs and trade logistics. These efforts are crucial for AfCFTA, as they help reduce the costs and complexities associated with cross-border trade, making it easier for African businesses to access regional and international markets (Nwankwo and Ajibo, 2020).

Investment promotion is another area where BRICS' collective policies support AfCFTA. BRICS countries have established various platforms and mechanisms to encourage investment in Africa, recognizing the continent's potential for economic growth. The BRICS Business Council, for example, facilitates partnerships and investment opportunities among businesses from BRICS countries and Africa. These investments are vital for the success of AfCFTA, as they help build the necessary industrial and economic infrastructure. The investment by BRICS countries in sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, and technology in African countries not only boosts local economies but also enhances the capacity of African nations to produce and trade goods within the AfCFTA framework. For instance, Chinese investments in Ethiopia's industrial parks have created manufacturing hubs that support the country's participation in AfCFTA by increasing its production capacity and export potential (Xu, 2022).

Furthermore, BRICS' emphasis on capacity building and knowledge sharing supports the implementation of AfCFTA. BRICS countries have initiated various programs and exchanges aimed at transferring knowledge and expertise in areas such as trade policy, economic planning, and industrial development. These initiatives help African countries build the necessary skills and institutional frameworks to effectively participate in AfCFTA. South Africa has been at the forefront of such efforts, facilitating workshops and training programs in collaboration with other BRICS countries to enhance the capabilities of African policymakers and businesses. This capacity-building support is crucial for ensuring that African countries can fully leverage the opportunities presented by AfCFTA.

In addition, BRICS' commitment to multilateralism and south-south cooperation strengthens the political and economic environment necessary for AfCFTA's success. BRICS countries collectively advocate for a more balanced and inclusive global economic order, which aligns with AfCFTA's goals of creating equitable economic opportunities across Africa. By promoting south-south cooperation, BRICS provides a platform for African countries to collaborate more closely with other emerging economies, sharing best practices and resources to support regional integration. The political support from BRICS for AfCFTA enhances the initiative's credibility and encourages broader international engagement and investment in Africa's economic integration efforts. These examples illustrate how BRICS' collective economic and trade policies provide comprehensive support for the implementation and success of AfCFTA. By focusing on infrastructure development, trade facilitation, investment promotion, capacity building, and multilateral cooperation, BRICS helps create the conditions necessary for AfCFTA to achieve its goals of fostering economic growth, reducing trade barriers, and enhancing regional integration in Africa.

How BRICS can facilitate infrastructure development, investment, and trade facilitation in Africa through AfCFTA

BRICS can facilitate infrastructure development, investment, and trade facilitation in Africa through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) by leveraging its collective financial and technical resources to address the continent's infrastructure gaps. One significant avenue is the New Development Bank (NDB), established by BRICS to fund large-scale infrastructure projects. The NDB's investment in projects like the Lesotho Highlands Water Project demonstrates its capacity to support essential infrastructure that improves regional connectivity and resource management. By financing such projects, the NDB helps create a more integrated and accessible market across Africa, which is fundamental for the successful implementation of AfCFTA. Improved infrastructure reduces transportation costs, enhances supply chain efficiency, and facilitates smoother movement of goods and services across borders (Guo, Sun and Demidov, 2020).

BRICS' investment initiatives also play a crucial role in supporting AfCFTA. Through various bilateral and multilateral agreements, BRICS countries have committed significant resources to Africa's development. Chinese investments in Africa are particularly noteworthy, with substantial funding directed towards critical sectors like transportation, energy, and manufacturing. For example, China's involvement in the development of the Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway in Kenya significantly enhances trade logistics by reducing travel time and costs, thereby supporting the objectives of AfCFTA. These investments not only boost local economies but also create the infrastructure necessary for increased trade within the continent, aligning with AfCFTA's goals of fostering intra-African commerce.

Trade facilitation is another key area where BRICS can contribute to the success of AfCFTA. BRICS countries have extensive experience in modernizing trade procedures and implementing efficient customs systems, which can be shared with African nations to enhance their trade facilitation capabilities (Ignatov, 2020). South Africa, as a leading member of BRICS, has been actively involved in promoting trade facilitation measures that benefit AfCFTA. Initiatives such as the adoption of digital trade platforms and the simplification of customs procedures help reduce non-tariff barriers and expedite the clearance of goods at borders. The integration of technology in customs and trade logistics, as advocated by BRICS, is essential for streamlining trade processes and reducing transaction costs, thereby making it easier for African businesses to engage in cross-border trade (Panova, 2020).

Moreover, BRICS' commitment to capacity building and technical assistance supports the implementation of AfCFTA by enhancing the skills and capabilities of African policymakers and trade officials. Through workshops, training programs, and technical exchanges, BRICS countries provide valuable expertise in areas such as trade policy formulation, regulatory harmonization, and economic planning (Mantusov, 2022). For instance, Brazil has shared its experience in agricultural trade and food security with African countries, helping them improve their agricultural productivity and export potential. These capacity-building efforts ensure that African nations are better equipped to meet the standards and requirements of AfCFTA, fostering a more competitive and integrated continental market.

Additionally, BRICS' focus on fostering economic cooperation and partnership among its member countries and Africa provides a robust framework for supporting AfCFTA. The BRICS Business Council and various investment forums facilitate dialogue and collaboration between businesses from BRICS countries and African nations, encouraging joint ventures and partnerships that drive economic growth. South Africa's role in these forums is particularly significant, as it serves as a bridge between BRICS and the rest of Africa, promoting investment opportunities and trade partnerships that align with AfCFTA's objectives. The increased economic cooperation between BRICS and African countries enhances the continent's capacity to participate in global trade, contributing to the broader goals of economic integration and development under AfCFTA.

These examples demonstrate how BRICS can facilitate infrastructure development, investment, and trade facilitation in Africa through AfCFTA. By leveraging financial resources, promoting trade facilitation measures, providing capacity building, and fostering economic cooperation, BRICS supports the creation of a more integrated and efficient African market. This not only aligns with the strategic goals of AfCFTA but also contributes to the overall economic growth and development of the continent.

3. Economic Growth and Trade Liberalization

The potential economic benefits of South Africa's active participation in both BRICS and AfCFTA

South Africa's active participation in both BRICS and AfCFTA presents significant potential economic benefits, stemming from its strategic position as a nexus between emerging global markets and the African continent (Nie, 2023). By engaging actively in BRICS, South Africa can leverage the combined economic strength of its member nations to attract investment, boost trade, and drive infrastructure development, all of which are crucial for maximizing the benefits of AfCFTA. One clear example is the enhanced access to markets that South Africa gains through BRICS, particularly with major economies like China and India. This access allows South Africa to export goods and services more competitively, thus expanding its trade horizons beyond traditional partners. For instance, the increase in exports of South African agricultural products to China highlights how BRICS membership can open new avenues for trade, directly benefiting sectors that are vital for South Africa's economy (Simo, 2020).

Moreover, South Africa's active participation in AfCFTA complements its BRICS engagements by creating a vast continental market that can attract investments from BRICS nations looking to capitalize on Africa's growth potential. The establishment of AfCFTA, which aims to create a single market for goods and services across Africa, offers South Africa an opportunity to position itself as a gateway for BRICS investments into the continent. By leveraging its advanced financial sector, well-developed infrastructure, and strategic geographical location, South Africa can serve as a hub for businesses and investors from BRICS countries. This strategic positioning not only enhances South Africa's economic prospects but also drives broader regional economic growth by facilitating investment and trade flows across the continent (Panova, 2020).

Furthermore, the alignment of South Africa's economic policies with the objectives of both BRICS and AfCFTA fosters an environment conducive to industrialization and economic diversification. By engaging in BRICS, South Africa can benefit from technology transfer, capacity building, and expertise sharing, which are crucial for developing competitive industries (Thussu and Nordenstreng, 2020). The collaboration on research and development, particularly in sectors like renewable energy, technology, and manufacturing, enables South Africa to enhance its industrial base. This industrial growth is essential for creating jobs, increasing productivity, and reducing dependency on primary commodity exports. For example, the BRICS Partnership on New Industrial Revolution (PartNIR) aims to enhance cooperation on digitalization, industrialization, and innovation, providing South Africa with access to cutting-edge technologies and practices that can drive economic transformation.

South Africa's active participation in both BRICS and AfCFTA offers multifaceted economic benefits, including expanded market access, increased investment, infrastructure development, and industrialization (Wolhuter and Chigisheva, 2020). By strategically leveraging its roles in these frameworks, South Africa can enhance its economic growth prospects while contributing to the broader goals of regional integration and development. The synergies between BRICS and AfCFTA provide a unique opportunity for South Africa to position itself as a key player in the global economy, fostering sustainable and inclusive growth both domestically and across the African continent.

The role of trade liberalization in promoting regional economic growth, reducing trade barriers, and enhancing market access for African countries

Trade liberalization plays a crucial role in promoting regional economic growth, reducing trade barriers, and enhancing market access for African countries, driving the continent towards greater economic integration and prosperity (Lagutina, 2022). The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) exemplifies this by aiming to create a single continental market for goods and services, thereby facilitating the free movement of businesspersons and investments. This initiative, by reducing tariffs on 90% of goods, is expected to boost intra-African trade significantly (Ahad Bhat, Jamal and Beg, 2022). For example, the removal of tariffs on agricultural products can lead to increased agricultural exports within the continent, benefiting countries with strong agricultural sectors such as Kenya and Nigeria. This not only increases market access for these countries but also stimulates agricultural production and rural development, contributing to broader economic growth (Zhao and Lesage, 2020).

Trade liberalization also helps in reducing non-tariff barriers, which are often more restrictive than tariffs themselves. By standardizing regulations and harmonizing trade policies, AfCFTA aims to eliminate the bureaucratic red tape and complex customs procedures that hinder trade (Wolhuter and Chigisheva, 2020). This is particularly important for landlocked countries like Uganda and Rwanda, which face high transportation costs and logistical challenges. Streamlined customs procedures and improved infrastructure facilitated by trade liberalization can significantly reduce these costs, making it easier and more cost-effective for businesses to export and import goods. This not only enhances market access but also encourages cross-border investments and the establishment of regional value chains, further integrating African economies (Lagutina, 2022).

Moreover, trade liberalization under AfCFTA promotes regional economic growth by attracting foreign direct investment (FDI). Investors are more likely to invest in regions where they can easily access a large and integrated market (Gathii, 2019). The promise of a unified African market with over 1.3 billion consumers makes the continent an attractive destination for FDI. For instance, the establishment of the automotive manufacturing hub in Morocco has attracted significant investments from global automotive giants, benefiting from the country's strategic location and access to both African and European markets. Similar investments can be expected across other sectors and regions as AfCFTA progresses, boosting economic growth and industrialization across the continent.

Trade liberalization also enhances competitiveness among African businesses. By exposing local firms to broader markets and increased competition, it encourages innovation, efficiency, and the adoption of new technologies. For example, South Africa's manufacturing sector, when integrated into the larger African market, can benefit from economies of scale, access to cheaper raw materials, and a larger consumer base. This competitiveness not only strengthens domestic industries but also prepares African businesses to compete in global markets, fostering a more dynamic and resilient economy (Cilliers, 2021).

Furthermore, the reduction of trade barriers under AfCFTA helps in diversifying African economies. Many African countries are heavily dependent on a few primary commodities for export revenues. Trade liberalization encourages the development of other sectors by providing new markets for diverse products and services. Ethiopia, for instance, has leveraged its growing textile and apparel industry to expand exports beyond its traditional agricultural products. By tapping into the larger African market, countries can diversify their economic base, reducing vulnerability to commodity price fluctuations and enhancing economic stability (Amadi and Lenaghan, 2020).

Trade liberalization under AfCFTA is instrumental in promoting regional economic growth by reducing trade barriers and enhancing market access for African countries. By fostering a more integrated and competitive market, it attracts investment, boosts industrialization, and encourages economic diversification (Simo, 2020). The success of AfCFTA in achieving these objectives hinges on the effective implementation of its provisions, continued political commitment, and the development of supporting infrastructure and institutions. As these efforts progress, trade liberalization will play a pivotal role in transforming Africa's economic landscape, driving sustainable and inclusive growth across the continent.

4. Geopolitical Influence and Regional Stability

South Africa's influence on regional stability and security within the context of AfCFTA and BRICS

South Africa's influence on regional stability and security within the context of AfCFTA and BRICS is significant, as it plays a pivotal role in promoting peace, economic integration, and collaborative security frameworks (Armel, 2020). As the most industrialized and diversified economy in Africa, South Africa's leadership is crucial for the successful implementation of AfCFTA and for ensuring that the economic benefits of trade liberalization are matched by political stability and security. South Africa's commitment to regional stability is evident in its active participation in peacekeeping missions and conflict resolution initiatives across the continent. For instance, South Africa has been instrumental in mediating conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan, working through platforms such as the African Union and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). These efforts not only contribute to peace and stability but also create a conducive environment for the economic activities envisioned under AfCFTA (Simo, 2020).

South Africa's involvement in BRICS further enhances its capacity to influence regional stability and security (Nwankwo and Ajibo, 2020). Through BRICS, South Africa collaborates with other major emerging economies to address global and regional security challenges. The BRICS forum provides a platform for South Africa to advocate for policies that promote security, economic development, and political stability in Africa. For example, the BRICS Summit in Johannesburg in 2018 emphasized the need for cooperative approaches to peace and security, with South Africa highlighting the importance of addressing the root causes of conflict, such as poverty and inequality. By integrating these security concerns into the broader economic agenda of BRICS, South Africa helps ensure that regional stability is seen as integral to economic development (Lagutina, 2022).

The intersection of South Africa's roles in AfCFTA and BRICS is particularly evident in initiatives that link economic development with security. One such initiative is the promotion of infrastructure projects that enhance connectivity and economic integration while also addressing security challenges (Akinkugbe, 2020). The development of transport corridors, such as the North-South Corridor, aims to facilitate trade across multiple African countries, reducing the economic isolation that often exacerbates regional tensions. By improving infrastructure, South Africa not only boosts economic activity but also helps stabilize regions by fostering economic interdependence and cooperation. This dual focus on development and security is crucial for the sustainability of both AfCFTA and regional stability (Xu, 2022).

Moreover, South Africa's diplomatic strategies often emphasize the importance of inclusive development as a means of preventing conflict (Avdasheva and Radchenko, 2018). Within the framework of AfCFTA, South Africa advocates for policies that ensure the benefits of trade liberalization are equitably distributed, thereby reducing economic disparities that can lead to unrest. South Africa's push for the inclusion of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in AfCFTA's trade agreements is a case in point. By promoting the participation of SMEs, South Africa aims to ensure that economic growth is broad-based and inclusive, which is essential for long-term stability. This approach aligns with the broader objectives of BRICS, which seeks to promote sustainable development and inclusive growth globally (Cynthia, Armijo and Katada, 2017).

South Africa's influence on regional stability and security is also enhanced by its leadership in promoting good governance and democratic principles within AfCFTA and BRICS. South Africa's transition to democracy and its ongoing efforts to strengthen democratic institutions serve as a model for other African countries. By championing good governance, transparency, and accountability, South Africa helps create a political environment that supports stability and economic growth (Kanayo, 2021). Through BRICS, South Africa advocates for a multipolar world order that respects sovereignty and promotes equitable international relations, which indirectly supports regional stability by reducing external pressures and conflicts.

South Africa's influence on regional stability and security within the context of AfCFTA and BRICS is multifaceted and deeply interconnected with its economic and diplomatic strategies. Economically, South Africa leverages its industrial and financial sectors to support regional trade and investment, as seen in its role in expanding the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS), which facilitates cross-border transactions among AfCFTA member states. Through the BRICS New Development Bank, South Africa also channels funds into infrastructure projects that enhance regional connectivity, such as upgrading transport corridors linking South Africa, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. Diplomatically, South Africa plays a mediation role in regional conflicts, demonstrated by its leadership in peace negotiations in countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan. Additionally, it uses its BRICS membership to advocate for Africa's interests on global platforms, as seen in its push for United Nations Security Council reform to ensure better representation for African nations in global decision-making. These efforts are essential for the success of both AfCFTA and BRICS, highlighting South Africa's pivotal role in shaping the future of regional stability and economic prosperity in Africa (Kumar et al., 2022).

The geopolitical implications of South Africa's leadership in AfCFTA for broader African integration and cooperation

South Africa's leadership in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) carries significant geopolitical implications for broader African integration and cooperation, influencing regional dynamics and global perceptions of the continent. As one of the largest and most advanced economies in Africa, South Africa's role in AfCFTA is pivotal in shaping the trajectory of continental integration and establishing Africa as a cohesive economic bloc. This leadership position allows South Africa to drive key initiatives that enhance regional stability and economic cooperation, ultimately influencing the geopolitical landscape of the continent (Xu, 2022).

South Africa's role in AfCFTA also has profound implications for regional political dynamics and stability. As one of the continent's largest economies, South Africa supports regional stability through investments in infrastructure projects like the North-South Corridor, which improves trade routes between Southern and East Africa. Politically, South Africa plays a leadership role in negotiations within the African Union (AU) to resolve trade disputes and ensure that AfCFTA implementation aligns with regional peace and security objectives. Additionally, South Africa's diplomatic engagement in regional organizations such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) helps to mediate tensions arising from economic competition and border disputes, as seen in its efforts to manage trade-related conflicts between South Africa and Nigeria or Kenya and Tanzania. By strengthening economic ties through AfCFTA, South Africa also contributes to reducing the risk of resource-driven conflicts and enhances regional cooperation, reinforcing political stability across the continent. The integration fostered by AfCFTA encourages cooperation and mutual dependency, which can contribute to greater political stability and reduce the likelihood of conflicts. For example, the increased economic interdependence resulting from AfCFTA's trade agreements can help mitigate conflicts between neighboring countries by creating shared economic interests.

Furthermore, South Africa's leadership in AfCFTA enhances its geopolitical influence by positioning itself as a central hub for continental trade and investment. The successful implementation of AfCFTA, driven by South Africa's strategic investments in infrastructure and its advocacy for trade facilitation measures, solidifies its role as a key economic player in Africa (Kumar et al., 2022). This position allows South Africa to attract foreign investment and trade partners looking to capitalize on the growing African market. For instance, South Africa's participation in major infrastructure projects, such as the development of the North-South Corridor, underscores its commitment to improving regional connectivity and supporting the broader objectives of AfCFTA. This infrastructure development not only benefits South Africa but also strengthens its geopolitical influence by fostering closer economic ties with other African countries.

5. Challenges and Opportunities for South Africa within AfCFTA

Key challenges facing South Africa in maximizing its opportunities within AfCFTA, such as infrastructural deficits, regulatory harmonization, and competition

South Africa faces several key challenges in maximizing its opportunities within the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), notably including infrastructural deficits, regulatory harmonization issues, and increased competition. Addressing these challenges is crucial for South Africa to fully leverage the benefits of AfCFTA and enhance its role as a leading economic player on the continent (Shoba, 2017).

Infrastructural deficits represent a significant challenge for South Africa as it seeks to capitalize on the opportunities presented by AfCFTA. Despite having a relatively advanced infrastructure compared to many other African countries, South Africa still faces gaps in its transportation and logistics networks that could impede its ability to efficiently engage in intra-African trade (Thussu and Nordenstreng, 2020). For instance, while South Africa has made strides in developing its road and rail networks, bottlenecks remain, such as the congestion at the Port of Durban, which is a major gateway for trade. This congestion affects the timeliness and cost-effectiveness of exports, potentially undermining South Africa's competitive advantage. To fully benefit from AfCFTA, South Africa needs to invest in expanding and modernizing its infrastructure, including enhancing port facilities, upgrading rail networks, and improving road connectivity to facilitate smoother and faster movement of goods across borders (Marino, 2014).

Regulatory harmonization is another critical challenge for South Africa within the AfCFTA framework. The successful implementation of AfCFTA relies on the alignment of trade policies and regulatory standards across member states to ensure a seamless trading environment. However, differing national regulations and standards can create trade barriers, complicating South Africa's efforts to integrate more deeply into the continental market (Jones, 2012). For example, discrepancies in customs procedures, product standards, and trade documentation between South Africa and its African neighbors can lead to delays and increased costs. South Africa must work collaboratively with other AfCFTA member states to harmonize regulations and streamline customs processes (Davis, 2016). Initiatives such as the development of a single window for trade and the adoption of common standards are essential for overcoming these barriers and ensuring that South Africa can fully participate in and benefit from the AfCFTA market.

Increased competition from other African countries also poses a significant challenge for South Africa under AfCFTA. As trade barriers are reduced and market access is expanded, South Africa faces competition from both established and emerging economies across the continent. Countries with lower production costs or emerging industrial sectors might offer competitive alternatives to South African goods and services (Mantusov, 2022). For instance, countries like Ethiopia and Kenya are increasingly becoming competitive in sectors such as textiles and agriculture, which were once dominated by South Africa. To maintain its competitive edge, South Africa must focus on enhancing its value-added production, investing in innovation, and improving the quality of its products (Beletskaya, 2022). By fostering a more diversified and sophisticated industrial base, South Africa can better compete with other African nations and capitalize on the opportunities presented by AfCFTA.

Additionally, the challenge of balancing regional and global trade interests requires South Africa to navigate complex trade dynamics. As South Africa seeks to enhance its regional trade under AfCFTA, it must also manage its existing trade relationships with global partners, including those in the European Union and China (Andal and Muratshina, 2022). Ensuring that regional trade agreements complement rather than conflict with global trade obligations is critical. For example, South Africa's trade agreements with the European Union, such as the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), need to be managed in a way that aligns with AfCFTA's objectives while preserving the benefits of these global partnerships.

South Africa's ability to maximize its opportunities within AfCFTA is challenged by infrastructural deficits, the need for regulatory harmonization, and the balancing of regional and global trade interests. Addressing these challenges requires targeted investments in infrastructure, collaborative efforts to align regulatory frameworks, strategies to enhance competitive advantage, and careful management of trade relationships (Sarkar, 2014). By overcoming these obstacles, South Africa can fully leverage the benefits of AfCFTA, strengthening its position as a key player in African economic integration and contributing to the continent's overall growth and development (Panova, 2020).

Opportunities for South Africa to drive sustainable development, enhance intra-African trade, and strengthen its economic position through AfCFTA

South Africa stands at a strategic crossroads where it can leverage the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to drive sustainable development, enhance intra-African trade, and solidify its economic position on the continent (Kotze, 2018). The opportunities presented by AfCFTA offer South Africa a platform to advance its development goals while boosting regional economic integration.

One of the key opportunities for South Africa is to drive sustainable development through AfCFTA by integrating green and sustainable practices into its trade and economic activities. As the largest economy in Africa, South Africa can lead by example in promoting environmental sustainability within the framework of AfCFTA (Wolhuter and Chigisheva, 2020). For instance, South Africa's investment in renewable energy projects, such as the solar power initiatives in the Northern Cape, can set a benchmark for other African nations. By exporting green technologies and practices to other AfCFTA member states, South Africa can help reduce the continent's carbon footprint and support the transition to sustainable energy sources (Zhao and Lesage, 2020). South Africa's leadership in green development is evident through initiatives like the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP), which secures funding for renewable energy projects, such as wind and solar farms in the Western Cape. Additionally, South Africa is hosting the Africa Green Revolution Forum (AGRF), a platform that promotes sustainable agricultural practices across the continent. The country's support for electric vehicles (EVs), through local production by companies like BMW and Nissan, further enhances its reputation as a leader in sustainable technology. These efforts not only align with global sustainability goals but also help South Africa position itself as a competitive player in the international market for green technologies (Sarkar, 2014).

Enhancing intra-African trade is another significant opportunity for South Africa through AfCFTA. By reducing trade barriers and improving market access, AfCFTA provides South Africa with the potential to increase its trade volumes with neighboring and other African countries (Karn and Karn, 2016). South Africa's well-developed manufacturing sector is well-positioned to benefit from increased access to a larger continental market. For example, the automotive industry in South Africa, which is one of the most advanced on the continent, can leverage AfCFTA to export vehicles and automotive parts to other African countries with lower tariffs. This not only boosts South Africa's export revenues but also strengthens regional value chains and stimulates economic growth across the continent. Additionally, South Africa can expand its role as a trade hub by enhancing logistics and trade facilitation services, further integrating its economy with the rest of Africa (Davis, 2016).

Strengthening its economic position through AfCFTA involves leveraging the agreement to attract investment and foster economic diversification (Ahad Bhat, Jamal and Beg, 2022). The promise of a larger, more integrated market under AfCFTA makes South Africa an attractive destination for foreign direct investment (FDI). Investors are drawn to the stability and market access provided by AfCFTA, and South Africa's advanced infrastructure and financial systems offer a conducive environment for investment (Ignatov, 2020) . For example, the growth of financial services and technology sectors in South Africa can be accelerated by increased investment from other African countries seeking to benefit from its sophisticated financial systems. Moreover, South Africa can use its position within AfCFTA to promote economic diversification by developing new industries and sectors, reducing its reliance on traditional sectors like mining and agriculture. This diversification can enhance economic resilience and growth prospects (Mantusov, 2022).

Furthermore, South Africa's active participation in AfCFTA allows it to influence and shape regional economic policies and standards, providing a strategic advantage. By engaging in policy discussions and negotiations, South Africa can advocate for regulatory frameworks that support its economic interests and promote fair trade practices (Beletskaya, 2022). For instance, South Africa can push for policies that facilitate the smooth movement of goods and services across borders, addressing issues such as customs delays and non-tariff barriers. Additionally, South Africa can play a leading role in developing regional standards for quality and safety, which can enhance the competitiveness of its products and services within the continental market (Andal and Muratshina, 2022).

Conclusion

South Africa's engagement with the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) underscores a pivotal moment in the continent's economic evolution, marked by both substantial opportunities and significant challenges. As a leading economic power in Africa, South Africa's role within AfCFTA extends beyond mere participation; it encompasses the responsibility to drive sustainable development, enhance regional trade, and influence the broader economic integration of the continent. The potential benefits of AfCFTA for South Africa are manifold, offering avenues to bolster economic growth, attract investment, and position itself as a central hub in the emerging continental market.

However, realizing these benefits requires overcoming critical challenges. Infrastructural deficits present a notable obstacle, as South Africa must address bottlenecks and capacity issues in its transport and logistics networks to facilitate efficient trade and investment flows. Additionally, the task of regulatory harmonization is essential for ensuring a seamless trading environment across the continent, yet it remains complex due to varying national standards and practices. Competition from other African nations also demands that South Africa continually innovate and enhance its competitive edge to maintain its position as a leading economic player.

Despite these hurdles, South Africa's proactive leadership in AfCFTA offers a blueprint for addressing these challenges and capitalizing on the growth opportunities. By advancing sustainable development initiatives, South Africa can set a precedent for green economic practices and foster an environmentally conscious approach to trade. The country's efforts to enhance intra-African trade and attract investment will not only strengthen its economic position but also contribute to the broader objectives of regional integration and economic cooperation.

The success of South Africa's involvement in AfCFTA will be measured by its ability to navigate the complexities of trade liberalization while leveraging its strengths to drive positive change across the continent. As South Africa continues to shape the trajectory of AfCFTA, its strategic initiatives and leadership will play a critical role in defining the future of African economic integration. By addressing the infrastructural, regulatory, and competitive challenges head-on, South Africa has the potential to enhance its influence within AfCFTA, contribute to the continent's economic prosperity, and reinforce its position as a key player in the global economic arena.

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Yazar Katkıları	Bu çalışma tek yazarlı olarak hazırlanmıştır.	Author Contributions	This study was prepared with a single author.
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Genişletilmiş Özet

BRICS'in—Brezilya, Rusya, Hindistan, Çin ve Güney Afrika'dan oluşan beş büyük yükselen ekonominin bir araya geldiği bir oluşum—ortaya çıkışı, uluslararası düzenin evriminde kritik bir dönüm noktasını işaret etmektedir. Bu ülkeler yalnızca küresel ekonomik büyümenin merkezi aktörleri hâline gelmekle kalmamış, aynı zamanda Batı merkezli kurumların ve normların geleneksel hâkimiyetine kolektif olarak meydan okumuşlardır. Bu bağlamda, BRICS'in tek Afrika üyesi olan Güney Afrika'nın benzersiz konumu, küresel güç dinamiklerinin yeniden yapılandırılmasını özellikle Afrika'daki bölgesel entegrasyon merceğinden incelemek için önemli bir bakış açısı sunmaktadır. Bu araştırma, BRICS'in çok kutuplu yeni bir dünya düzeninin hatlarını şekillendirmedeki stratejik rolünü, özellikle Güney Afrika'nın liderliği ve Afrika Kıtasal Serbest Ticaret Bölgesi (AfCFTA) kapsamındaki fırsatları üzerinden incelemektedir.

Ocak 2021'de başlatılan AfCFTA, kıta genelinde malların ve hizmetlerin serbest dolaşımını, sermaye ve insanların hareketliliğini kolaylaştırmayı ve nihayetinde sanayileşmeyi, sosyo-ekonomik kalkınmayı ve sürdürülebilir büyümeyi teşvik etmeyi amaçlayan dönüştürücü bir girişimdir. Afrika Birliği'nin Gündem 2063 programının öncü projelerinden biri olan AfCFTA, Afrika pazarlarının tarihsel parçalanmışlığını aşmayı, Afrika içi ticareti artırmayı ve kıtayı küresel ekonomide daha rekabetçi bir aktör hâline getirmeyi hedeflemektedir. Gelişmiş altyapısı, çeşitlendirilmiş sanayileri ve sağlam finansal sistemleriyle bölgesel bir güç merkezi olan Güney Afrika, AfCFTA'nın başarısından büyük ölçüde fayda sağlayabilecek konumdadır. Ayrıca BRICS üyeliği sayesinde Güney Afrika, AfCFTA'nın uygulanmasını destekleyecek kaynakları, ortaklıkları ve yatırımları yönlendirme konusunda benzersiz bir avantaja sahiptir ve bölgesel liderliğini pekiştirme imkânı bulmaktadır.

Bu çalışma, Güney Afrika'nın BRICS'e katılımı ile AfCFTA ile stratejik etkileşimi arasındaki ilişkiyi eleştirel bir biçimde analiz etmek için bir vaka çalışması yaklaşımını benimsemektedir. Diplomatik stratejiler, ticaret politikaları ve dış ekonomik girişimler incelenerek BRICS üyeliğinin Güney Afrika'nın kıtasal hedeflerini nasıl güçlendirdiği ve bölgesel entegrasyondaki rolünü nasıl şekillendirdiği anlaşılmaya çalışılmaktadır. Analiz, uluslararası siyasi ekonomi, Güney-Güney işbirliği ve küresel yönetişim gibi daha geniş teorik çerçeveler içerisinde konumlandırılmış olup, yükselen güçlerin bölgesel ve küresel kurumlarla nasıl etkileşime geçtiğine dair çok boyutlu bir anlayış sunmaktadır.

Çalışmanın temel argümanlarından biri, Güney Afrika'nın BRICS üyeliğini kıtasal ve küresel düzeyde sesini ve etkisini artırmak için kullandığıdır. Ülke, Afrika ile diğer BRICS üyeleri arasında bir köprü işlevi görerek ticaret, yatırım ve politika koordinasyonunu kolaylaştırmaktadır. Yeni Kalkınma Bankası (NDB), Koşullu Rezerv Düzenlemesi (CRA) ve çeşitli sektörel işbirliği platformları gibi BRICS girişimleri, üye devletler için politika alanını genişletmiş ve kalkınma finansmanı ile bilgi paylaşımında alternatif kaynaklar sunmuştur. Güney Afrika bu araçları, AfCFTA hedefleriyle uyumlu bölgesel altyapı, kapasite geliştirme ve sanayi kalkınması projelerini desteklemek amacıyla kullanmıştır.

Ayrıca, Güney Afrika'nın BRICS'teki rolü, küresel çok taraflı platformlarda kalkınma odaklı bir anlatı geliştirmesine olanak tanımaktadır. Küresel ticaret, finans ve güvenlik yönetişiminde reformlar savunarak Afrika'nın tarihsel olarak dışlanan çıkarlarını temsil etmektedir. Bu savunuculuk, AfCFTA'nın amaçlarıyla da örtüşmektedir; çünkü bu yapı, kıtanın küresel ticaret müzakerelerinde pazarlık gücünü artırmayı ve dış pazarlara olan bağımlılığı azaltmayı hedeflemektedir.

Bölgesel düzeyde ise Güney Afrika, AfCFTA'nın hayata geçirilmesinde öncü bir rol üstlenmiştir. Önemli toplantılara ev sahipliği yapmakta, teknik yardım sağlamakta ve politika uyumunu desteklemektedir. Ticaret, Sanayi ve Rekabet Bakanlığı (DTIC) aracılığıyla, ticaret ve sanayi politikalarını AfCFTA protokolleriyle uyumlu hâle getirmek için ulusal stratejiler geliştirmiştir. Bu stratejiler arasında ihracatın teşviki, gümrük tarifelerinin rasyonalizasyonu ve özel sektörün entegrasyonu yer almakta olup, Afrika ekonomileri arasında değer zinciri entegrasyonunu artırmayı hedeflemektedir. Ayrıca Güney Afrika, tarifedışı engelleri ele almak ve düzenleyici uyumu artırmak amacıyla bazı Afrika ülkeleriyle ikili ve üçlü ticaret diyalogları başlatmıştır.

Bu stratejik avantajlara rağmen, araştırma Güney Afrika'nın BRICS ve AfCFTA ile eşzamanlı etkileşiminde bazı zorluklara ve çelişkilere de dikkat çekmektedir. İçeride yüksek işsizlik, eşitsizlik ve enerji istikrarsızlığı gibi yapısal sorunlar, Güney Afrika'nın bölgesel fırsatlardan tam anlamıyla yararlanmasını sınırlamaktadır. Dışarıda ise BRICS üyeleri arasındaki jeopolitik gerilimler ve özellikle Çin'in blok içindeki baskın rolü, Güney Afrika'nın özerkliğini ve pazarlık gücünü kısıtlayabilir. Çalışma ayrıca, BRICS'in alternatif kalkınma modelleri sunsa da Afrika'nın kalkınma önceliklerine yönelik tutarlı ve birleşik bir gündem sunmadığını da belirtmektedir.

Ayrıca, yeterli sanayi hazırlığı veya politika güvenlikleri olmadan AfCFTA aracılığıyla ticaret entegrasyonunun derinleştirilmesinin potansiyel riskleri de araştırmada ele alınmaktadır. Daha güçlü ekonomilerin—aralarında Güney Afrika'nın da bulunduğu—daha az gelişmiş ülkeler pahasına orantısız şekilde fayda sağlamasından endişe edilmektedir. Bu bağlamda, çalışmada AfCFTA protokollerinin kapsayıcı ve adil bir şekilde uygulanması, En Az Gelişmiş Ülkeler'in (LDC) desteklenmesi ve adil rekabetin teşvik edilmesi çağrısında bulunulmaktadır.

Politika önerileri açısından araştırma, Güney Afrika'nın BRICS diplomasisi ile AfCFTA katılımı arasında daha stratejik bir uyum geliştirmesini önermektedir. Dijital ticaret, lojistik altyapı ve iklim dostu sanayileşme gibi alanlardaki uygulama boşluklarını gidermek için BRICS'in teknik uzmanlığı, finansal araçları ve politika diyaloglarının kullanılmasını tavsiye etmektedir. Ayrıca Güney Afrika'nın Afrika Birliği kurumları ve bölgesel ekonomik topluluklarla (REC'ler) daha derin koordinasyon kurması gerektiği vurgulanmaktadır; böylece BRICS-Afrika etkileşimi kıta genelindeki hedefleri daha güçlü şekilde destekleyebilir.

Sonuç olarak bu araştırma, küresel yönetişimin geleceği ve yükselen güçlerin daha kapsayıcı ve çok kutuplu bir dünya düzeninin şekillendirilmesindeki rolü üzerine süregelen tartışmalara katkıda bulunmaktadır. Güney Afrika'nın BRICS ve AfCFTA içindeki ikili konumu hem fırsatlar hem de sorumluluklar sunmaktadır. Küresel Güney ortakları ile Afrika'daki paydaşlar arasında bir köprü işlevi gören Güney Afrika, dönüştürücü bir değişimin katalizörü olabilir—tabii ki tutarlı politikalar benimsenmesi, diplomatik çeviklik gösterilmesi ve kalkınma sonuçlarının önceliklendirilmesi şartıyla.

Sonuç olarak bu çalışma, Afrika'nın ekonomik ve jeopolitik çıkarlarının hızla değişen uluslararası ortamda ilerletilmesi için bölgesel ve küresel stratejilerin bütünleştirilmesinin önemine dikkat çekmektedir. Güney Afrika'nın AfCFTA üzerindeki etkisini BRICS merceğinden inceleyen bu araştırma, yükselen koalisyonların daha temsil edici, dayanıklı ve adil bir yeni dünya düzeninin hatlarını nasıl şekillendirebileceğine dair değerli içgörüler sunmaktadır.