

## **The impact of tax incentives on foreign direct investment attraction: a literature review for Southern African Development Community (SADC) and beyond.**

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### **Abstract**

*The efficiency of tax incentives in luring foreign direct investment (FDI) to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) area is investigated in this research, which puts its conclusions in a worldwide perspective. It analyses important elements impacting the effectiveness of tax incentive regimes via a thorough literature study, such as investor views, institutional quality, and economic circumstances. While tax incentives may greatly increase foreign direct investment inflows, comparative studies show that their efficacy varies by area, with Southeast Asia and the EU showing more constant performance. Mentioned in this study are best practices for designing tax incentives, focusing on sector targeting, transparency, and conformity to international norms. However, there are still gaps in our knowledge of these incentives' long-term effects, which call for further sector-specific and longitudinal studies in the future. Furthermore, the importance of non-tax considerations in FDI choices is emphasised, supporting a comprehensive strategy that balances tax breaks and revenue requirements. In the end, the analysis offers insightful information to SADC policymakers who want to establish efficient tax incentive schemes that draw in foreign capital and support long-term economic growth.*

**Keywords:** Economic Development, Foreign Direct Investment, Policy Analysis, Race to the bottom, Tax breaks, Tax Incentives.

### **Introduction**

Economic development depends heavily on foreign direct investment (FDI), especially in emerging nations like the Southern African Development Community (SADC). It is a key factor in the development of jobs, technological transfer, and capital influx (Shafiq et al., 2021). Tax

incentives are a common tactic used by governments to entice foreign direct investment. These incentives, which include tax holidays, exemptions, and lower corporate income tax rates, are intended to make a host nation's investment environment more attractive (Silajdzic & Mehic, 2022). However, there is still much disagreement among academics and decision-makers over the efficacy of such incentives.

Examining the effect of tax incentives on FDI attractiveness is made possible by the SADC region, which is distinguished by its varied economic landscapes and differing degrees of institutional ability. According to recent research, tax incentives may be quite successful in luring in foreign capital, but their efficacy is often reliant on other elements, including political stability, governance quality, and the general state of the economy (Camara, 2023; Boly et al., 2020). For example, because of the country's wider political and economic issues, tax breaks in Uganda's oil and gas industry were shown to have little effect on drawing foreign direct investment (FDI) (Dorcas, 2023).

There are still a lot of unanswered questions about tax incentives and foreign direct investment, especially when it comes to the SADC area. According to certain research, tax incentives cannot always provide the intended outcomes. For instance, Bobenič Hintošová et al. (2021) discovered that fiscal incentives had the opposite effect of financial incentives, which had a favourable impact on FDI inflows into Slovakia. This discrepancy emphasises the need to have a sophisticated grasp of how various tax incentive kinds interact with regional institutional frameworks and economic circumstances.

Furthermore, research that looks at how tax incentives directly affect foreign direct investment often overlooks the possible indirect impacts on macroeconomic factors like tax revenue and economic development (Sebele-Mpofu et al., 2022). As an illustration of the intricate link between tax policy and economic consequences, Celani et al. (2022) contend that while foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows may increase tax income, this relationship may not hold in nations with abundant natural resources.

With an emphasis on the SADC area and beyond, this study aims to add to the current conversation by performing a thorough literature analysis on the effect of tax incentives on FDI attractiveness. The study would examine a range of empirical research, theoretical models, and policy ramifications related to foreign direct investment and tax incentives. The purpose of this study is

to identify gaps in the literature and suggest future research areas that might improve our knowledge of how well tax incentives work to draw foreign direct investment (FDI) to developing nations by synthesising the body of current research.

The continued use of tax incentives as a means of luring foreign direct investment raises serious concerns regarding their true efficacy and long-term effects on economic growth. Although these incentives have been widely implemented in SADC countries, the outcomes have been uneven, with several countries having little success in drawing significant foreign direct investment inflows (Kusumaningtyas & Kalimanzila, 2023). Concerns are raised by this discrepancy about the opportunity costs of tax incentives, especially concerning possible government revenue losses and the durability of economic development (Mukhtarov et al., 2020).

Additionally, the intended advantages of tax incentives are undermined by the intricacy of tax regimes and the lack of transparency, which often discourages prospective investors (Davies et al., 2021). The situation is further complicated by differences in the efficiency of tax policies under various political regimes, as noted by Abille et al. (2020), which implies that the political environment has a major impact on how tax incentives affect foreign direct investment. Furthermore, corruption and inefficiency brought on by a weak institutional structure may outweigh the benefits of tax incentives (Hynes et al., 2021).

To address these important concerns, this study conducts a comprehensive literature review that looks at how tax incentives affect the attractiveness of foreign direct investment (FDI), emphasising actual data, theoretical understandings, and policy suggestions. This research aims to provide policymakers and stakeholders with useful information for promoting sustainable economic development via better FDI strategies by identifying the elements that affect the efficacy of tax incentives in the SADC area and beyond. The paper answers the question: What is the impact of tax incentives on foreign direct investment (FDI) attraction in SADC countries?

## **Methodology**

The research looked at how tax incentives affect the attraction of foreign direct investment (FDI) using a systematic literature review technique. With an emphasis on SADC nations and other developing areas, this strategy included a thorough search for pertinent scholarly publications, reports, and empirical research published in peer-reviewed journals. Databases like Google

Scholar, JSTOR, and specialised publications in finance and economics were used to gather data. Relevance to tax incentives, foreign direct investment, and economic growth was one of the selection criteria, along with methodological soundness and empirical support. Numerous tax incentives, their efficacy, and the contextual elements affecting their results were all explored in the review. The results of the chosen studies were categorised and synthesised using thematic analysis. Finding important themes, patterns, and gaps in the body of research on tax incentives and foreign direct investment was part of this. To identify optimal practices and areas that need further investigation, the analysis also took into account the methodological techniques used in earlier studies. The technique sought to provide policymakers and stakeholders in the SADC region and beyond with a comprehensive knowledge of the link between tax incentives and foreign direct investment by incorporating findings from various research.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in two primary theories that elucidate the relationship between tax incentives and foreign direct investment (FDI) attraction: the Tax Competition Theory and the Institutional Quality Theory.

#### **Tax Competition Theory**

According to the Tax Competition Theory, nations use competitive strategies to entice foreign direct investment (FDI) by providing advantageous tax regimes, including tax incentives like holidays, exemptions, and lower rates. According to this idea, foreign investors who want to optimise their returns on investment are more drawn to jurisdictions with lower tax burdens (Clausing et al., 2021). However, the larger institutional and economic environment often affects how effective tax incentives are. For example, tax incentives may draw foreign direct investment (FDI) at first, but variables like political stability and the calibre of governance affect their long-term viability (Undie et al., 2020). According to this idea, tax incentives might lead to a race to the bottom in which nations keep lowering their tax rates, which could jeopardise public revenue and long-term economic viability (Silajdzic & Mehic, 2022).

## **Institutional Quality Theory**

The efficiency of tax incentives is shaped by institutional frameworks and governance, according to institutional quality theory. Strong institutions, which are defined by openness, the rule of law, and efficient regulatory frameworks, increase the appeal of tax incentives by offering a stable investment environment, claims this idea (Kusumaningtyas & Kalimanzila, 2023). The advantages of tax incentives may be offset by low institutional quality, as investors may believe that corruption and inefficiency provide greater risks (Hynes et al., 2021). This idea emphasises how crucial it is to combine tax breaks with strong institutional changes to foster an atmosphere that attracts foreign direct investment.

## **Literature Review**

### **Global Perspectives on Tax Incentives and FDI**

The link between tax incentives and foreign direct investment (FDI) has been the subject of several studies, with a variety of results highlighting the intricate nature of this relationship. Although tax incentives are often used as a tactic to attract foreign direct investment, their efficacy is frequently dependent on several contextual circumstances.

### **Positive Correlations between Tax Incentives and FDI**

Numerous studies show that tax incentives and foreign direct investment inflows are positively correlated. For example, Appiah-Kubi et al.'s (2021) study, which examined data from 40 African nations, discovered that extended tax breaks and reduced corporate income tax rates greatly increase the appeal of foreign direct investment. Their results highlight how important tax incentives are in influencing investor choices, especially in emerging nations where there is fierce rivalry for foreign direct investment. Similarly, Silajdzic & Mehic (2022) pointed out that lowering corporate income tax may be a useful strategy to encourage foreign direct investment (FDI) in less developed transition countries, particularly when paired with other beneficial economic policies.

### **The Role of Non-Tax Factors**

On the other hand, some research highlights that tax breaks may not be enough to attract foreign direct investment. More important variables are often mentioned, including market size, political stability, and infrastructural quality. Shafiq et al. (2021), for example, pointed out that while tax incentives were important in Pakistan, the overall economic climate, which included GDP growth and trade openness, had a greater impact on FDI inflows. This view is supported by Bobenič Hintošová et al. (2021), who discovered that although fiscal incentives had a negative association with FDI, they had a beneficial influence, indicating that the business climate as a whole is essential for drawing in foreign investment.

### **The Importance of Institutional Quality**

Another important element affecting the efficacy of tax incentives is institutional quality. Siregar & Patunru (2021) contend that by offering a secure and open investment environment, reputable institutions may increase the effect of tax incentives. On the other hand, even in the presence of alluring tax incentives, bad administration may discourage investment. The Institutional Quality Theory, which holds that robust regulatory frameworks are necessary to optimise the advantages of tax incentives, is consistent with this conclusion (Abille & Mumuni, 2023).

Thus, international views on tax incentives and foreign direct investment show a complex environment in which incentives are important but need to be combined with a strong institutional framework and advantageous economic circumstances to produce the intended results. To increase the efficacy of their programs, SADC authorities must consider these larger factors when they contemplate tax incentives as a means of luring foreign investment.

### **Tax Incentives in the SADC Region**

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) area provides a unique context for examining how well tax incentives draw in foreign direct investment (FDI). This section examines empirical research with a particular focus on SADC nations, emphasising the many ways in which tax incentive regimes have been implemented and the resulting results.

### **Effectiveness of Tax Incentives**

Although their efficacy varies by nation, empirical research has shown that tax incentives in the SADC area may have a major impact on foreign direct investment inflows. For example, Boly et al. (2020) discovered that lower corporate income tax rates might increase foreign direct investment inflows, especially in countries that are strategically located in the area. According to their study, tax incentives may work as a stimulant to draw in investment, but other elements like macroeconomic stability and institutional quality often mitigate their effects.

However, a study by Edo et al. (2020) highlights that there are considerable differences in the efficiency of tax policies between the region's democratic and military administrations. According to their research, tax factors had a stronger effect on foreign direct investment (FDI) under military rule than under democratic rule, suggesting that political context is a significant factor in determining how well tax incentive programs work.

### **Disparities in Implementation**

There are significant differences in how tax incentives are implemented across SADC nations. To draw in foreign direct investment (FDI), certain nations, including Botswana and Namibia, have implemented extensive tax incentive schemes that provide a range of special rates and exemptions (Dang & Nguyen, 2021). On the other hand, countries like Zimbabwe have had trouble attracting foreign investors due to uneven policy implementation and a lack of transparency (Camara, 2023). Potential investors may become unsure as a result of this inconsistent policy execution, which would undermine the intended advantages of tax incentives.

### **Challenges and Considerations**

In the SADC area, governance problems and general economic circumstances can undermine the efficacy of tax incentives. According to research by Sebele-Mpofu et al. (2022), tax incentives are meant to boost economic development, but if they are not used carefully, they may also make problems like inequality and revenue loss worse. The report highlights the need for a well-rounded strategy that includes tax incentives as a component of a larger economic plan that also includes governance enhancements and institutional changes.

As a result, the SADC region offers a challenging environment for attracting FDI and tax advantages. Disparities in implementation and efficacy highlight the need for comprehensive plans that take into account the larger economic and political settings in which these incentives work, even if they may be quite successful in luring foreign investment.

### **Comparative Analysis with Other Regions**

A comparative study across several locations is necessary to comprehend how well tax incentives draw in foreign direct investment (FDI). This section contextualises the results from the SADC area by discussing how investor views, regulatory frameworks, and economic circumstances all affect how successful tax incentives are internationally.

### **Variability in Effectiveness across Regions**

According to research, there may be significant regional variations in how well tax incentives attract foreign direct investment. For example, research from Southeast Asia has shown that nations like Vietnam and Malaysia successfully use tax breaks to attract significant foreign direct investment, using their advantageous locations and expanding markets (Shafiq et al., 2021). These countries provide customised incentives that fit their unique economic objectives, which have led to large international capital inflows.

On the other hand, research on the EU paints a more nuanced picture. According to Bobenič Hintošová et al. (2021), fiscal incentives sometimes had the opposite effect from the beneficial impact they had on FDI inflows in Slovakia. This suggests that the interaction of tax incentives with other elements, such as infrastructure quality and regulatory stability, may have a significant impact on investment choices in more developed areas. The disparity in these locations' tax incentive efficacy emphasises the need for a supportive environment that goes beyond simple financial incentives.

### **Role of Regulatory Environments**

The effectiveness of tax incentives is significantly influenced by the regulatory environment. According to Obafemi et al. (2021), nations with robust institutional frameworks—which are defined by openness and efficient administration—generally see greater results from their tax incentive initiatives. For instance, compared to areas with poorer governance systems, East Asia's

strong regulatory frameworks have increased the efficacy of tax incentives and encouraged bigger FDI inflows.

On the other hand, in the SADC area, issues with institutional quality and governance may compromise the potential advantages of tax incentives (Camara, 2023). This discrepancy emphasises how SADC nations must fix institutional flaws to maximise the efficacy of their tax incentive programs.

### **Investor Perceptions**

The effect of tax incentives is also greatly influenced by investor views. According to research by Muthitacharoen (2020), tax incentives are often weighed alongside the stability and predictability of the economic climate by international investors. Potential investors may be scared off by alluring tax offers in areas known for their political unpredictability or uneven implementation of policies, like certain portions of Africa (Kyari, 2020).

As a result, a comparison of tax incentives in various geographical areas shows that a mix of investor attitudes, legal frameworks, and economic situations significantly affects how successful they are. The SADC region's results, which highlight notable governance and implementation issues, highlight the need for an all-encompassing strategy that incorporates tax incentives within a larger plan to increase overall investment appeal.

### **Investor motivation**

For some investors, the primary factors influencing their choice of FDI destination may be their own goals rather than the tax breaks provided by the host government. The "OLI" (Ownership, Location, and Internalisation) framework, which was suggested by Dunning in 1979, is based on three key broad factors: internalisation (I) advantages, host market internal locational advantages (L), and organisational particular ownership advantage (O).

Dunning (1993) also develops the four strategic reasons that multinational enterprises (MNEs) take into account while establishing their foreign businesses based on this eclectic theory. The motivations are divided into four categories: market-seeking, efficiency-seeking, resource-seeking, and strategic-asset or capability-seeking foreign direct investment.

Therefore, this theory makes it abundantly evident that a government has little to do in the areas of resource-seeking FDI, market-seeking FDI, and strategic-asset or capability-seeking FDI because, if a country has any of the aforementioned FDI, investors would naturally invest there, whether or not tax incentives are provided. In order to attract efficiency-seeking foreign direct investment, the host country only needs to supply the necessary administrative efficiency, not tax breaks.

## **Policy Implications**

### **Best Practices for Tax Incentive Design**

For tax incentives to be successful in luring foreign direct investment (FDI), they must be designed and implemented according to best practices. According to the research, openness, focused incentives, and conformity to global standards are important factors. Governments must clearly explain the requirements and advantages of tax incentives as transparent procedures boost investor trust, according to Mosquera Valderrama (2020). Additionally, the effect of these incentives might be maximised by focusing on certain industries with strong development potential. For example, because of their potential to spur economic growth, industries like technology and renewable energy are often given priority (Güzel, 2020). Additionally, following global guidelines like those established by the OECD may assist in guaranteeing competitive tax incentives while lowering the possibility of detrimental tax competition.

### **Balancing Incentives with Revenue Needs**

Governments have to strike a careful balance between guaranteeing sufficient revenue collection and offering tax benefits. Over-reliance on tax breaks may result in large revenue losses, which would jeopardise the development of infrastructure and public services (Danzman & Slaski, 2022). A comprehensive approach to economic policy that incorporates tax incentives with more comprehensive fiscal solutions is crucial, as Kumar (2020) emphasises. To ensure that tax policies support sustained economic development without jeopardising public finances, this entails weighing the long-term economic advantages of luring foreign direct investment against the state's immediate income demands (Coulibaly & Camara, 2022). In the end, a well-rounded strategy will promote national development objectives and increase the efficacy of tax incentives.

### **Gaps in the Literature and Future Research Directions**

Even while the amount of study on tax incentives and foreign direct investment (FDI) is increasing, there are still a lot of unanswered questions, especially about their long-term effects. The majority of research focuses on transient FDI inflows, raising concerns about the long-term viability and efficacy of these incentives. To evaluate how tax incentives affect FDI choices throughout several economic cycles and provide insights into their long-term consequences, longitudinal research is required (Ugwu et al., 2020).

Furthermore, a lot of current research takes a one-size-fits-all approach, ignoring the particular dynamics of certain industries. To learn more about how tax incentives work in other sectors, including manufacturing, technology, and agriculture, future research should focus on sector-specific analysis. According to Akanbi (2020), this focused approach could provide subtle insights that help guide the creation of more successful policies.

Finally, more research should be done on the influence of non-tax elements, including institutional frameworks, infrastructural quality, and political stability. According to research by Casella & Souillard (2022), these variables often have a greater impact on FDI choices than tax incentives. Knowing how they interact with tax laws can provide policymakers with a more complete picture of the investment environment and help them create all-encompassing plans to draw in foreign capital.

### **Conclusion**

The intricate connection between tax incentives and foreign direct investment (FDI), especially in the SADC area, is highlighted in this paper. Although tax incentives may be very important in luring foreign direct investment (FDI), several variables, such as investor views, institutional quality, and economic circumstances, affect how successful they are. Successful tax incentive programs are often defined by openness, focused strategies, and conformity to international norms, according to the comparison study with other locations.

There are still a lot of unanswered questions in the literature, however, especially about the long-term effects of tax incentives and the part non-tax variables play in investment choices. To understand the complex impacts of tax incentives across many businesses, future research should concentrate on sector-specific analysis and longitudinal studies. To ensure sustainable economic

development without jeopardising public resources, a comprehensive strategy is also required to strike a balance between the requirement to generate income and the supply of tax incentives.

In the end, SADC officials need to take these findings into account when creating tax incentive schemes that not only draw in foreign capital but also support more general objectives for economic growth. SADC nations may become more competitive in the international investment market by combining sound institutional frameworks with tax policies.

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