



TRADE & INDUSTRIAL POLICY STRATEGIES

NEWSLETTER - JANUARY 2026



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SUPPORTING POLICY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH RESEARCH AND DIALOGUE

FOREWORD

While volatility seems to be the new global norm, South Africa remains surprisingly stable in many respects. These trends are discussed in the Real Economy Bulletin, which notes moderate economic growth over the past year, the consistent trade performance and slow uptick in employment. The volatility in the global geo-political environment, driven by increased global conflict, as well as the new approach to trade by the USA is discussed in the USA trade negotiations tracker. The impact on South Africa's trade is discussed further in our latest Import Tracker. The changing and volatile global context has informed our theme for this year's TIPS Forum, which will focus on "New Directions in Industrial Policy in Africa". It will be held on the 4th and 5th of August 2026.

TIPS work on the implication of the move away from fossil fuels has seen us involved in several projects, including the JUST SA, Just Transition Labour Centre and a series of reports on vulnerability assessments and Sector Jobs Resilience Plans. Various Development Dialogues have been held over the past few months on these topics where our research presented and discussed. In the coming quarter TIPS will host further dialogues on these topics. In mid-January, TIPS launched its Tagging Portal which categorises whether projects are 'Just'. This free to use online portal was launched at an event held at Bowmans', which discussed the complexity of financing for the Just Transition.

On a sad note, TIPS Research Fellow, Professor David Kaplan passed away at the end of 2025. Dave was a long-standing TIPS Research Fellow, a collaborator on research, a colleague and a friend. One of my first projects as a young researcher over 30 years ago was done in collaboration with Dave Kaplan. It was looking at small business, innovation and technological change – an area that he remained passionate about. His last paper with TIPS, published in April 2024, was on "*Growing the start-up economy in South Africa: Accelerating local and foreign investment*". This was the outcome of a workshop he organised at the end of 2023. Dave Kaplan made significant contributions to the economic thinking in South Africa, particularly on the topic of technology and industrial development. It was an honour to have known Dave and worked with him, he will be missed.

Saul Levin
Executive Director
TIPS

TRIBUTE TO DAVID KAPLAN

David Kaplan passed away at the end of 2025. He was a long-standing TIPS Research Fellow, a collaborator on research, a colleague and a friend. He will be missed.

..... Written by
Janet Wilhem



Dave was the Professor of Business Government Relations and Professor of Economics at the University of Cape Town. He worked extensively on industrial policy. From 2002 – 2003 he was chief economist of the Department of Trade and Industry; from 2004 – 2011 he worked part time as chief economist for the Department of Economic Development and Tourism, in the Western Cape Provincial Government. His work included a focus on innovation and industrial policy. He was the coordinator of the task team that produced the Green Paper on Science and Technology (S&T); he worked on the White Paper on S&T; was a panel member for two Five Year Reviews of the CSIR; and a member of the National Advisory Council on Innovation, 1998 – 2004. He also provided input into the Ministerial Committee on Science and Technology (2011- –2012) and was a member of the board of the Technology Innovation Agency.

He undertook work for the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation; and Business Leadership South Africa. He has also co-published, with Mike Morris and Raphie Kaplinsky, a book on commodities and industrialisation in Africa: One Thing Leads to Another. Promoting Industrialisation by Making the Most of the Commodity Boom in Sub-Saharan Africa. His latest paper with TIPS was published in April 2024 on "Growing the start-up economy in South Africa: Accelerating local and foreign investment". This was the outcome of a workshop he organised at the end of 2023. He was from time to time a speaker at the TIPS annual forum, provided inputs to TIPS researchers and mentorship to younger colleagues. Professor Kaplan had a BA BComm (UCT), MA (Kent) and DPhil (Sussex).

LATEST PUBLICATIONS

Development of the cosmetics sector strategy in South Africa

The aims of this study were to review current policies and initiatives in the cosmetics sector, including funding support; developing a cosmetic sector strategy over the short-and long-term; and defining funding and technical models to support the implementation of the strategy.



Implications of the US reciprocal tariffs for the Southern African Customs Union

This policy brief examines the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), its member states, its objectives and trade between the member states. It also looks at the trade relationship between SACU and the United States (US), focusing on the US reciprocal tariffs and SACU's exports to the US. Lastly, the policy brief examines SACU's member states exports to the US through the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA).



TIPS Working Paper How can South Africa engage the EU (and other G20 members) on CBAM and advance a 'Just Transition' in Africa during its G20 Presidency and beyond

Green Industrial Policy (Green IP) aims to advance green industries and transform existing sectors to support the move towards low-carbon economies. Traditionally, industrial policy has focused on enhancing productivity and economic prosperity by supporting specific industries.



TIPS Working Paper Greening Industrial Policy in South Africa: Insights from China, the United States and the European Union

This paper is intended to contribute to the discussion on how to build a broader framework to respond to the EU CBAM and engage in diplomacy with the EU to support South Africa and Africa's "just energy transition".



TRACKERS

TIPS has a list of targeted trackers of international trade and investment flows, including the Export Tracker and Import Tracker that monitor quarterly export and import trends. The FDI Tracker, which records and analyses incoming foreign direct investment projects with policy-relevant insights. The Regional Industrial Tracker extends this analysis to industrial performance across regions, while Imports Localisation examines opportunities for domestic production of imported goods. US trade negotiation summarises key trends in outcomes and the stance of the United States of America. Through these instruments, TIPS provides a rich, evidence-based foundation for understanding structural shifts, diagnosing challenges, and informing industrial and trade policy debates in South Africa

FDI Tracker

In the second quarter of 2025, monitoring added 17 projects to the Tracker, 10 of which reported their value, amounting to R26.9 billion. Projects were registered across mining, manufacturing, services and utilities.

Import Tracker

In constant 2025 Rand, South Africa had a trade surplus of R55 billion in the second quarter of 2025, with exports amounting to R510 billion and imports amounting to R455 billion. However, exports declined by R24 billion in the year to the second quarter of 2025, while imports declined by R23 billion.

Regional Industrial

This paper assesses the economic performance of continental SADC with specific attention to the status quo of industrialisation in the region and the aim of stimulating development of regional value chains. Southern Africa is among the poorest regions in the world, largely due to colonialism and dependence on commodities

Manufacturing Industries and Subsectors

TIPS industry studies provide a comprehensive overview of key trends in leading industries in South Africa. They aim to provide background for policymakers and researchers, and to strengthen our understanding of current challenges and opportunities in each industry as a basis for a more strategic response.

Export Tracker

Over the 10-year period spanning the second quarter of 2015 (Q2 2015) to the second quarter of 2025 (Q2 2025), exports have trended in an overall upward direction, and have outperformed imports in several instances.

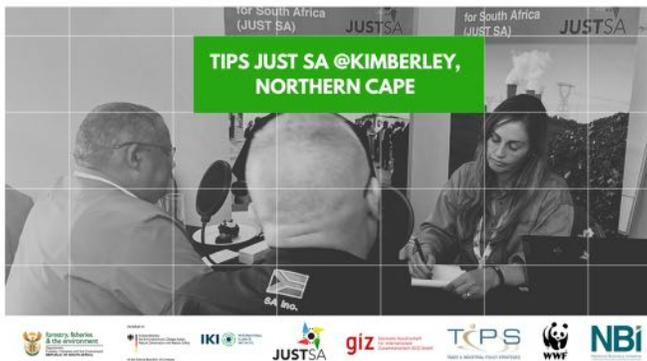
Imports Localisation

The Import Localisation and Supply Chain Disruption study seeks to identify goods from the list of imports identified in the quarterly Import Trackers that South Africa could possibly viably manufacture. Each report focuses on five manufactured items from the list of imports in the corresponding Import Tracker quarterly reports.

US Trade Negotiations

Since the Trump administration came to power, the US has sought fundamental changes in the international tariff regime. To that end, in April it announced both a much higher base rate for all US imports and extraordinarily high and arbitrary "reciprocal" tariffs on countries with which it ran a deficit.

PODCAST



JUST SA Northern Cape - Riaan Warie and Hendrik Louw, and Reratile Mathibe
[Click here](#)



Professor Mushtaq Khan on Governance, Corruption and Industrial Policy.
[Click here](#)



Just Transition Labour Centre: Interview with Rudi Dicks.
[Click here](#)



Visual Storytelling with Indrani Pal-Chaudhuri: Civil Society on Industrial Policy and Green Structural Transformation
[Click here](#)

LATEST REB

The Real Economy Bulletin is a TIPS review of quarterly trends, developments and data in the real economy, together with analysis of the main manufacturing industries and key data in Excel format.

This bulletin provides information about quarterly trends in the real economy, that is, agriculture, mining, manufacturing, construction and productive services with an initial focus on manufacturing. We will fill the gaps left by most quarterly bulletins on the economy by analysing growth, investment and employment at the industry level.



[READ THE REB HERE](#)

TIPS IN THE MEDIA

The TIPS industrial and trade mandate also extends into the mass media, where journalists seek newsworthy insights and data across a range of sector-specific topics. In response, TIPS staff contribute informed discourse through op-ed pieces grounded in evidence-based research. Here are a few, more recent examples.

Business Day
Newspaper

[Author] Seutame Maimele

EU's CBAM Just Became Much Tougher

Business Day
Newspaper

[Author] Simbarashe Mhaka

Why Connectivity is Critical for SA's Just Transition

Sunday Times
Newspaper

[Saul Levin Quoted by Khulekani Magubane in...]

SA-US Ties Still Uncertain, Even as Agoa Returns

2025 PAST EVENTS



Polokwane, Limpopo



JUST SA

Over the past 18 months, the JUST SA team has delivered training on the Just Transition and Green Economy, benefiting more than 250 sub-national government officials across eight provinces. As a result, confidence has grown and local Just Transition leaders are emerging, driving policy development to ensure that even small and marginalised municipalities are included in South Africa's transition to a low-carbon, just, and inclusive green economy.

These efforts led to the establishment of the first Just Transition Community of Practice for sub-national government officials, creating a platform for cross-provincial peer learning. The initiative has highlighted that provinces face distinct Just Transition challenges, requiring tailored policies to address sector vulnerabilities and unlock green industrialisation opportunities to diversify local economies.

The next and final stop is at Rustenburg, North West province.

JUST TRANSITION LABOUR CENTRE

The Just Transition Labour Centre (JTLC) conducts evidence-based research to support South Africa's labour movement in addressing climate change and advancing a Just Transition.

In 2025, the JTLC completed four commissioned research projects: the Annual Report, the Quarterly Tracker (Q3), The Future of Sasol, and an analysis of participatory structures shaping the Just Transition for workers and communities.

The JTLC also carried out research on coal workers' attitudes toward the Just Transition, workers' perceptions of climate change, and a critical review of climate policies affecting the working class in South Africa and globally. These reports will be released shortly.



DEVELOPMENT DIALOGUES

In 2025, TIPS hosted a total of nine Development Dialogues (DDs), spanning a range of sectors and engaging participants both online and in person. Among these were a three-part series: the first dialogue examined sustainability challenges in the iron and steel, automotive, and plastics industries; the second explored how digitalisation, automation, and innovation are reshaping South Africa's manufacturing sector; and the third and final dialogue focused on international trade trends and their implications for the country's industrial development. In addition, TIPS hosted a dialogue on coal workers and the just transition.

Videos of these dialogues, along with more content, are available on the TIPS website.



TIPS FORUM 2025

The Trade and Industrial Policy Strategies (TIPS) Annual Forum on The AfCFTA, Regional Integration and Industrial Development was held on 30 – 31 July 2025. Throughout its duration, it brought together over 500 participants (physical and virtual) from 7 countries. The event convened policymakers, academics, researchers, private sector representatives, development partners, and civil society to discuss opportunities and challenges in advancing Africa's industrial development through the AfCFTA.

Across two days of parallel sessions and a closing high-level panel, the conference highlighted the importance of coordinated regional strategies, trade facilitation, technology adoption, gender and youth inclusion, and green industrialisation in driving sustainable growth. The conference successfully met its objectives of stimulating dialogue, sharing research, and generating actionable insights for policymakers and stakeholders committed to leveraging the AfCFTA for Africa's industrial transformation.





APORDE / IPPM

Aporde brings together leading international and African economists to lead discussions on economic development and industrialisation, engaging a diverse, application-approved group of participants. IPPM targets senior government officials from across Africa and is delivered in partnership with Aporde, JUST SA, SARChI, and TIPS. The programme is an intensive five-day training comprising lectures and seminars by distinguished African and international economists.

Throughout the Aporde/IPPm programme, we hosted side lectures and events, including Gender, Work, and Digitalisation: The Case of E-Hailing Drivers in Nairobi, chaired by Prof. Mwangi wa Githinji and presented by Ruth Castel-Branco and Siviwe Mhlana. We also held the annual Alice Amsden Memorial Lecture, delivered by Prof. Ha-Joon Chang on A New New International Economic Order. IPPM participants also took refreshing and enlightening trips to industrial sites like Mintek, to see their mineral processing.

This year marks Aporde's 20th anniversary, and we have many exciting initiatives ahead in celebrating two decades of advancing the scholarship of heterodox development economics in Africa.



GLOBAL CONVENING EVENT

TIPS in partnership with the TIDE Centre of the University of Oxford, and TNI (Transnational Institute) hosted a successful convening event in Johannesburg, August 2025. The theme of the event was *Reclaiming Industrial Policy for the People: civil society's role in green structural transformation*.

The Johannesburg convening brought together over 45 participants from 22 countries including researchers, trade unionists, environmental activists, community organisers, and policymakers, to ask a pressing question: how can civil society play a more central role in shaping GIP and reimagining it as a vehicle for justice, local agency, and systemic change?

Participants made clear that green transitions cannot be imposed from above. From community-owned energy projects to subnational mineral funds, they showcased bottom-up models rooted in equity, resilience, and local ownership. Participants called for a broader understanding of value, one that recognises care work, informal labour, and Indigenous stewardship as central to sustainable economies. At the same time, representatives of think tanks pushed to democratise knowledge production, advocating South-South collaboration and inclusive methodologies that elevate marginalised voices. The convening also surfaced demands for a shift from donor-led, debt-based finance to redistributive, democratic systems that give developing countries financial sovereignty and meaningful control over their green transitions.

More than a critique, the event marked the beginning of a global network of civil society actors working to co-produce just, participatory approaches to GIP. The foundation has been laid. What's needed now is to build on this momentum and create a lasting platform for reimagining GIP as a vehicle for people-centred socio-economic transformation.



UP-COMING EVENTS

JUST SA
2026

[Event - Training] Date: 17 & 18 February 2026

Just Transition to a Decarbonised Economy for South Africa (JUST SA)

Training
2026

[Training Workshop] Date: 17 & 18 February 2026

Technological Change and Innovation System with Dr Shawn Cunningham

DEVELOPMENT
DIALOGUES
2026

[Event] Date: 26 February 2026

South Africa's Investment Climate: progress, challenges and opportunities.

Seminar
2026

[Learning Event - Hybrid] Date: 5 March 2026

Just Transition Learning Event - Presentations on tourism sector value chain, lessons from Komati and UK-Pact on agriculture and technological diffusion.

Aporde
2026

[Virtual Conference] Date: 17 March 2026

African Programme on Rethinking Development Economics Alumni Conference

TIPS Forum
2026

[Call for Papers] Deadline: 20 March 2026

New Directions in Industrialisation and Industrial Policy in Africa | 4-5 August 2026

Aporde
IPPM
2026

[Event] Date: 30 August - 11 September 2026

African Programme on Rethinking Development Economics. Applications will open soon!



Just
Transition
Labour
Centre
2026

[Event] Date: 29 September 2026

Just Transition Labour Centre Annual Conference

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