

ESSAY SYNOPSIS

Trade protectionism involves government policies that restrict imports to promote domestic production and protect jobs. When poorly executed, these measures can distort markets, raise prices and hinder innovation. In her essay, Annabel focuses on two forms of protection that can be effective when managed carefully: sector-specific tariffs, which shield priority industries; and anti-dumping duties, which counteract imports sold below fair market value.

The “infant industry” argument is central to the case for selective protection: without temporary protection, infant industries risk collapse, and there is continued import dependence and missed opportunities for industrialisation. Africa offers cautionary examples: Nigeria’s once-thriving textile sector collapsed under import surges during liberalisation, while similar failures occurred in Ghana’s tomato and poultry sectors, and Kenya’s sugar industry.

However, sector-specific protection can work when well designed. Beginning in the early 2000s, Malaysia protected its national car manufacturers through high tariffs, allowing them to build capacity, capture the domestic market and employ thousands. Once the industry matured, tariffs for regional partners were reduced, and the sector remained competitive, demonstrating how time-bound tariffs can help developing industries achieve stability. South Africa’s poultry industry illustrates similar outcomes.

Annabel acknowledges criticisms of tariffs, including potential increases in consumer prices, risks of inefficiency and threats of retaliation, but these concerns can be mitigated through careful policy design. However, protection must be temporary, performance-linked and part of a broader development strategy involving skills training, innovation, infrastructure and industrial upgrading.



Annabel Uttley



University of the Witwatersrand



Funding: Parents

More about Annabel

Favourite subjects: Econometrics, Finance and Philosophy of Mathematics.

Interests: Philosophy, photography, fiction novels, film study and evolutionary psychology.

Community activity: Volunteering at the SPCA.

Inspired by: My grandmother, for her grace and poise as well as her courage.

Main achievements: High school academic full colours, photography half colours, captain of photography club, winner of 2019 Canon Student Photography Competition (portraiture).

What I love/hate about South Africa: I love the friendliness and resilience of South Africans; I hate that people who could otherwise be exceptional are often not presented with opportunities.

In 10 years' time I see myself... in a successful position at an institution where I can be an asset, giving back to my community, and looking to start a family.