

Historicizing the status of Africa in Global Industrialization Equation

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Abstract

The continent of Africa occupies a strategic position in global economy from the pre-colonial through colonial to post colonial periods. This could be linked to its huge human and material resources. However, the puzzling paradox is that these obvious credentials have little positive impact on the continent's march towards industrialization. This paper adopts a historical method of inquiry, using largely secondary sources to interrogate the trends of industrial development in Africa within the context of the global economy. It is contended that all indices of development point to the fact that industrialization has been eluding Africa due to colonial experience, weak political will, poor infrastructure, financial constraints, and corruption as well as mismatch foreign economic prescriptions. However, to avoid undue exoneration of African leaders, and the escapist intellectual discourse, these issues have been analyzed through the middle-of-the-road approach. Finally, the paper examines the prospects for robust industrialization in Africa in an attempt to have a glimpse of the future of the African economy.

Introduction

Africa is the world's second largest and second most-populous continent in the world being behind Asia. It covers 6% of Earth's total surface area. It has a nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of \$2.33 trillion as at 2018.¹ Political leaders of this huge continent have long realized the critical role of industrialization in engendering growth and development. This is further reaffirmed by the fact that in the 1960s, the decade when most African countries attained political independence,

development was seen as synonymous with industrialization; to develop meant to industrialize². More so, at the 10th African Union (AU) Assembly held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in January 2008, African Heads of State and Government affirmed that “No country or region in the world has achieved prosperity and a decent socio-economic life for its citizens without the development of a robust industrial sector”³ It is against the background of this recognition of the relevance of industrialization that this paper embarks on excursion into history to dissect the place of Africa in the World industrialization quest. However, this is preceded by a definition of our basic term – industrialization.

Definition of Term

Industrialization

According to Fairchild, industrialization is the process of technological development by the use of applied sciences, characterized by the expansion of large-scale production with the use of power machinery for a wide range of market for both producers and consumers of goods by means of a specialized work with division of labour, the whole accompanied by accelerated urbanization.⁴ It entails the technological innovations that brought about the shift of production from home and small workshop to the factory system.⁵

The Great Soviet Encyclopedia defines it as the creation of large-scale machine based production in all sectors of the national economy, especially manufacturing. Industrialization assures the predominance of production of manufactured goods in a country’s economy and makes possible the transformation of an agrarian or mostly country into a predominantly industrial country.⁶

At its third session in 1963, the United Nations Committee for industrial development accepted the following as a working definition of industrialization:

Process of economic development in which a growing part of the natural resources is mobilized to develop a technically up-to-date, diversified economic structure characterized by a dynamic manufacturing sector having and producing means of production and consumer goods and capable of assuring a high rate of growth for the economy as a whole and of achieving economic and social progress.⁷

Alkasum et al defines industrialization as:

The process of developing the capacity of a country to master and locate, within its borders, the whole industrial production process: production of raw materials; production of intermediate products for other industries; fabrication of the machines and tools required for the manufacture of the desired products and of other machines; skills to operate, maintain and reconstruct, the machine and tools; skills to manage factories and to organize the production process⁸

From the definitions given so far, it becomes obvious that industrialization connotes a process by which the economic sector (especially the manufacturing sub sector) of a particular society is transformed from the application of simple tools to the use of machines, thus giving room for mass production of goods and services within the country's borders leading to an-improved standard of living for the generality of people. However, within the African context, literal meaning of manufacturing as things made by hand⁹ is critical to understanding the nature of industrialization.

Industrialization is a term that is mostly associated with the development experience of countries in Western Europe and North America during the 19th and early 20th centuries. To the neo-classical and contemporary political economists of the western tradition, the industrialization experience of Western Europe and later North America during the 19th and 20th century can be understood as a unilinear process through which these societies¹⁰ evolved over a series of stages towards the ultimate state of industrialization. One such scholar, Walt W. Rostow presented and supported this line of thought in his analysis of the industrialization experience in western society- this is what has come to be known as the Modernization Approach to development¹¹

Pre-colonial industrialization in Africa

The dominant Eurocentric view suggests that the precolonial African economy was static, subsistent and began to change only with the coming of colonialism. With regard to the industrial sector, the western conception of industrialization as strictly involving the use of sophisticated machines and vertical specialization was imposed on the economic history of the continent. This intellectual chicanery has constructively disengaged industrialization from the discourse on the economy of Africa in the pre-colonial period. However, Ali Mazrui contends that other

societies that date back several millennia, were themselves industrialized, modernized and modernizing but somewhere along the way this process was obliterated by historical accidents- natural or manmade. In other words the industrialization experience of the Old Chinese Empire, the Egyptian Kingdoms, and the Persian Kingdoms amongst other civilizations would pass to be modernization and “development” saves for such historical accidents.¹² This Neo-Marxists position believes that the natural industrialization process of Africa (just as the rest of the Third World) was historically destroyed all together through slavery, colonization and neo-colonization.¹³ Because compelling evidences have revealed that prior to the imposition of colonial domination in Africa, there were numerous cottage industries which formed the nucleus of industrialization of the continent. More so, when the meaning of manufacturing as things made by hand as given by Walter Rodney is considered, it becomes obvious that industrial establishments have dotted precolonial Africa. For instance there were iron industries among Venda people of Northern Transvaal, the Mashona people of Zimbabwe, the Iteso of Eastern Uganda, along Kilabo Falls, Futa Djalou, and Meroe among others. In addition to this, there was gold mining among Sabi people living along river Zambezi and copper industries in the Katanga copper belt and Kasese. More so, there were famous spinning and weaving industries among the Yoruba people of West Africa, Sumbawanga in Tanzania, Malawi, Mozambique as well as the people found in Lake Rukwa valley in Tanzania.¹⁴ In fact, the outputs of these industries were sold outside their areas of production. According to Walter Rodney, the Moroccan leather which was used in North Africa was actually ... and dyed by the Hausa and Mandinga specialists.¹⁵

Colonial “Industrialization”

The life blood of colonialism was economic exploitation hence it is difficult, if not impossible to find in one line, the two adjectives: colonial and industrial plus a noun: policy in all the memoranda, reports and other documents relating to colonial domination in Africa. However, when set against the background of the broader colonial economic policies, and the actual colonial experiences of the peoples of the colonized in Africa, some fragmented features could be identified and named colonial industrial policy.

The Ten year plan, 1946-1956 of the colonial administration has been described as pseudo plan given the fact that it was crafted to provide a blueprint for the enforcement of administration of the colonies.¹⁶ The main thrust of the plan was to engender certain degree of development in the colonies after the Second World War. L. J. Butler attempts to refute the claim by dependency theorists that Britain had deliberately saddled its colonies with unbalanced economies that failed after independence. He asserts that while this was true at first, by the end of the 1930s Economic Depression, colonial governors in West Africa and officials of the Colonial Office supported economic diversification, and even colonial industrialization, as a way to increase the political stability of the empire by eliminating economic crises that caused social unrest.¹⁷ However, evidences have shown that, the so-called developments were informed more by the pressure exerted by the Labour Government in Britain and the need to douse the increasing tensions generated by the decolonization movements than of any genuine desire to industrialize the colonies.¹⁸ In fact, doing the latter was antithetical to colonialism.

With regard to the industrial sector, colonial economic policy tilted towards extractive industries and exploitation of raw materials. This sowed the seeds of Africa's industrialization woes because, it left behind structures, institutions and infrastructure design to enhance extraction. The implication of this is that at independence, the structure of African economies was not geared toward transformation and value addition but rather commodity extraction and export.¹⁹ Therefore, if there was anything called colonial industrial policy, then it revolved around labour conscription and saturation of the local markets with European manufactured goods. The spiral effect of this was the transformation of colonial Africa into a dumping ground for all sorts of consumer goods thereby crippling the local industries. However, it is pertinent to note that it was not importation of the so-called cheap European manufactured goods that led to the demise of the local industries but rather the active involvement of the colonial state (through various policies) and the colonial trading companies in blocking access to raw materials by local manufacturers. For instance some of the laws introduced in colonial Kano in Northern Nigeria such as the Industrial Development (Import Duties Relief) Act 1957, Industrial Development (Income Tax Relief) Act 1958, , Custom Duties (Dumped and Subsidized

Goods) Act 1958, Customs (Drawback) Regulations 1958, and Income Tax (Amendment) Act 1958,²⁰ were all geared towards frustrating access to raw materials. Furthermore, Ahmed Modibbo's work titled: "Colonial State and European Trading Companies in Northern Nigeria"²¹ shows how European Trading companies worked hand in gloves with the British colonialists in deindustrializing the economy of the colonial northern Nigeria. It is not contestable that colonialism through the agency of trading companies had prevented the development of a balanced and self-reliant pattern of industrial development in Africa. No wonder; Monday Y. Mangvwat argues that, there is very little to discuss about colonial industrialization except at the level of explanation.²² Because it did not allow for industrialization; it only assigned Africa, the role of production of primary goods or raw materials in the international division of labour.

Status of Africa in Contemporary Global Industrialization Equation

The immediate post-independence period in Africa was characterized by the growth in manufacturing industries partly due to committed political leadership. However, by the mid- 1980s, a series of external shocks—including oil price increases, commodity price decreases, real interest rate rises, withering public coffers, and the limitations of domestic markets brought about industrial decline in the continent. Although world manufacturing output increased 24-fold between 1750 and 1953, this growth was concentrated in a small number of developed countries. ²³In 1953, less than a tenth of the world's population in the developed countries accounted for 57 percent of world manufacturing output.²⁴ At the other end, developing countries containing some two-thirds of the world's population, contributed a mere six to seven percent of this output. The per capita gap in manufacturing output between developed and developing countries in 1953 was of the order of 27 to 1. Although this gap has narrowed since then, it was still 20 to 1 in 1980²⁵ United Nations Industrial Development Organization's Competitive Industrial Performance (CIP) index ranks 93 core countries. Of these, thirty-four are African countries, most of which are concentrated in the lower echelons of the rankings, underlying the region's relative industrial backwardness²⁶ In terms of two other indicators of industrial development—manufacturing value added

(MVA) and manufacturing exports—Africa lags far behind the rest of the world, even among developing countries. In 2017, sub-Saharan Africa's MVA was only about \$145 billion dollars. In contrast, developing countries in East Asia are far ahead and nearing OECD members. In 2017, manufacturing's share of sub-Saharan Africa's total GDP was just under 10 percent²⁷.

Between 1965 and 1986 industry's share of GDP grew from 19% to 25%, mostly from petroleum expansion, while the more significant manufacturing sector grew only from 9% to 10% of GDP.²⁸ No wonder the nationalist school of thought argued that:

Structural Adjustment Plans “deindustrialized” Africa further by deflating urban incomes, closing parastatal industries, and thus lowering per capita rates of industrialization, for currency devaluation made imported raw materials and inputs too expensive, liberalization tariffs increased competition when demand from urban income groups was falling, and privatization policies eliminated state industries or raised the cost of subsidized inputs like petroleum or electricity²⁹

Furthermore, the developed countries of the North via the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) arrangement and the World Trade Organization (WTO), which was formed in 1994 to replace the GATT, have generally failed to treat African countries as equal players in the international trading system. International market shocks, as well as an international trade regime beyond Africa's control have continued to act as a major setback to Africa's industrialization process³⁰ such that by 2006 the share of manufacturing in GDP had declined to roughly 10 percent—the same as it had been in the mid-1960s.³¹

Investment in manufacturing has also been uneven, with almost 70 percent of the continent's manufacturing activities now concentrated in just four countries: South Africa, Egypt, Nigeria and Morocco.³² In fact, most of Africa's total MVA is driven by the higher level of industrial development in North and South Africa. South African companies have traditionally been the largest source of intra-African investment, with \$4.8 billion and nearly 7,000 new manufacturing jobs created in 2014. Morocco is the fastest-growing investment investor, but it remains seventh overall among African countries³³ unlike foreign investors, African manufacturers more often target their operations toward production for the African market. For example, South African Seemhale

Telecoms has plans to produce cheap and durable mobile phones, while Kenya's Mobius Motors is doing the same with cars.³⁴ This trend is further shown in the fact that intra-African trade in manufactured goods has already increased from 10 percent of total trade in 2000 to about 16 percent in 2014³⁵

Furthermore, the contribution of manufacturing output to total national income in Africa is also low, with the share of manufacturing value added (MVA) in GDP in 2004 ranging from a high of about 20% in Mauritius to as low as 0.5% in Djibouti and an average of only about 9%.³⁶ In addition to this, diverse sources have revealed that primary products still dominate exports from most African countries although, generally, manufacturing exports from Africa have seen significant growth from 1990 to 2004 with a few countries (Kenya, Cameroon, Egypt, Madagascar, Morocco, Seychelles, Zambia and Mauritius) standing out as exceptional performers in this regard. Industry's contribution to employment, even in South Africa, where the industrial sector is more advanced, is negligible at 3.5%, and less than 0.5% in most countries³⁷

Another indicator of Africa's weak position in the industrialization equation could be gleaned from the decline in the continent's share of world manufacturing output which reduced slightly from 0.9% to 0.8% over the two decades spanning 1980-2001. More so, the distribution of manufacturing activity within Africa is also highly skewed as only South Africa corner about 27.3% of total Manufacturing Value Added (MVA) in Sub-Saharan Africa.³⁸ The 1990's were a decade of rapid globalization during which there was a shift of production from industrialized to developing country locations. As a result, developing countries as a whole increased their share of global MVA from 16.9 to 24%. Nevertheless, African countries actually lost their share in all branches except textiles and apparel, leather and footwear, and basic metals.³⁹ Added to these challenges include the phenomenon of dumping⁴⁰

, poor infrastructure, financial constraints, policy mismatch and policy somersault and above all weak political will.

Despite these worrying trends, manufacturing in Africa has grown 3.5 percent annually from 2005 to 2014—faster than it has in the rest of the world. Some countries, such as Nigeria and Angola, have experienced an increase in output of over 10 percent per year.⁴¹ The value of production in sub-Saharan Africa has increased, from \$75

billion in 2005 to over \$130 billion in 2016. Moreover, manufacturing exports have increased even more rapidly than total output, at a compound annual growth rate of 9.5 percent, with shipments of heavy manufactures—such as transport vehicles, appliances, electronics, and industrial equipment—expanding by an impressive 14 percent.⁴²

As at 2006, Industry's contribution to employment, even in South Africa where the industrial sector is more advanced, is negligible: South Africa at 3.5%, Tunisia — 3.3%, Mauritius — 1.8%, Zimbabwe — 1.5%, Botswana —1.5%, Algeria —1.0%, Nigeria—1.5%, Kenya — 0.7%, Zambia — 0.6%, Ghana 0.4% and lower. Within this limited employment picture, the most highly employing sub-sectors are food, textiles, clothing and beverage production. Mining is also a contributor, especially in the South African Development Community (SADC) countries, where there are about 2.5 million people employed in formal mining activities and 1.5 million in the small scale sector. Tanzania and Zimbabwe account for 550,000 and 350,000 miners respectively; mainly involved is small-scale mining. It is estimated that overall there are about 3.5 million small scale and traditional miners in Africa. The sector could be providing livelihoods for up to 2 million people and has the capacity to contribute more than 3 billion US\$ to GDP⁴³

Future of Industrialization in Africa

In spite of the accidents of slave trafficking, and colonization on one hand and the Africa's post independent challenges on the other, there is a bright future for industrialization in the continent. In fact, it is even argued here that those accidents only succeeded in killing the physical/the hardware of the African industries not their spiritual/ the software or the potentials. A proper understanding of this argument exposes the weaknesses of some African rulers who often cite slave trafficking and colonization as sole reasons behind the backwardness of the continent downplaying the fact that erstwhile colonies such as Kenya, South Africa, and India have joined the club of industrialized and industrializing nations.

Numerous studies have shown that a number of other African countries will continue to experience rapid industry-driven growth: Angola, Ghana, Tanzania, Zambia, Ethiopia, and Mozambique, among others. Africa's manufacturing sector is also predicted to double in size, with annual output increasing from \$500 billion in 2015 to \$1 trillion

in 2025 and creating an additional 14 million stable, well-paid jobs. Other notable sectors include textiles, pharmaceuticals, furniture, leather goods, and motor vehicles, for which Kenya is the prime supplier to the rapidly urbanizing East African market.⁴⁴

Analysts have also predicted that the fastest growth over the next decade will occur in 65 FDI Intelligence, agro-processing (projected revenue increase of \$122 billion), cement production (\$72 billion), and clothing and footwear (\$27 billion) subsectors. For companies looking to invest in Africa, therefore, consumer-facing and infrastructure-related industries look to be among the most valuable in terms of annual revenue by 2025.⁴⁵ Although a landlocked country, Zambia ranks 3rd on the continent, behind the Seychelles and Ghana, in the competitiveness of its manufactured goods on the world market. Its manufacturing sector grew by roughly 30 percent between 2009 and 2013.

More so, the launch in March, 2018 of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) also provides another ray of hope for industrialization in the continent. Because the initiative will provide a single market for goods and services in Africa that will unlock manufacturing potential and facilitate industrialization, driving sustainable growth, security and jobs among other objectives. Irene Yuan Sun, author and consultant, considers Africa to be “the world’s next great manufacturing center”,⁴⁶ potentially capturing part of the 100 million labor-intensive manufacturing jobs that will leave China by 2030. The African Union has put the sector front and center in its Agenda 2063.⁴⁷ More so, by creating a pan-African market, the Continental Free Trade Agreement (CFTA) could increase intra-Africa trade by about 52 percent, resulting in an increase of African manufacturing exports⁴⁸. As at 2018, on average, manufacturing only represents about 10 percent of total GDP in Africa, lagging behind other developing regions.⁴⁹

Conclusion

Africa has been a natural candidate for industrialization due to its abundant natural and human resources. However, the puzzling paradox is that the continent has been almost conspicuously missing in the global industrialization equation. The two critical indicators of industrial development—Manufacturing Value Added (MVA) and Manufacturing Exports reveal that the continent lags far behind the rest of the world, even among developing countries. However, it has been demonstrated

that even with the colonial onslaught of the 20th century, the continent still stands a chance of becoming a critical player in global industrialization. This ray of hope is informed by huge human and material endowments of the continent. Economic diversification efforts in some African countries, introduction of sound industrial policies, as well as renewed priority to the conception and implementation of the three I's of industrialization- Incentives, Infrastructure and Institution are all steps in the right direction. The future of industrialization in Africa will be determined by genuine power sector reforms, adoption of renewable energy alternative, sound infrastructure and institutions and above all committed political leadership. In fact the latter seems to clip the wings of Africa's industrialization drive more than the magnified disequalizing tendencies emanating from World capitalism.

Endnotes

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