INDUSTRIALISATION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Policies for resolving Africa's economic and development crisis generally focus on the agricultural sector. This Briefing Paper examines another neglected but crucial aspect of Africa's plight, the crisis of industrialisation. Because so little attention has been paid to African industry in public debate, at best the full potential of future development may be underestimated or at worst the gains that have been made — few and patchy though they have been — may be lost.

The record of industrialisation in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) over the past two decades has been profoundly disappointing. The majority of countries continue to have a very poorly developed industrial base without the structural change and diversification experienced by other developing areas. Average manufacturing value added (MVA) per capita was lower in real terms in most countries in 1982 than it had been at the end of the 1960s. The more positive experience of a handful of countries in the region tends to conceal the stagnation that has been the experience of the majority. But even in these 'successful' countries progress has been much slower than was hoped.

But the extent of Africa's industrial crisis is more far-reaching than this. Two questions are a source of controversy. Firstly, why has the level of industrial achievement been so low? More specifically, have the import substitution policies followed by most SSA countries failed or have they simply not been implemented effectively? Secondly, which policies should be adopted in future? For their part, African governments are convinced that industrialisation strategies should form a critical part of their attempts to achieve more rapid and self-reliant development and they are therefore committed to specific policies to accelerate industrial growth. But the World Bank and other influential institutions remain to be convinced of the need for special priority and incentives for industry.

SSA industrialisation in comparative perspective

SSA's contribution to world-wide manufacturing has been and continues to be minimal: it accounts for less than one per cent of global manufacturing output and a negligible 0-36% of global manufactured exports. During the 1970s, Africa's share in global manufacturing increased slightly (from 0-83% in 1970 to 0.97% in 1980). Yet its global impact remains very small and, perhaps more significantly, Africa's share in manufacturing exports declined over the same period.

The gains that have been made in SSA's manufacturing sector have been far less in aggregate than those achieved in other developing areas and this divergence has become more marked over the past ten years. Table I provides three sets of figures indicating recent trends. It shows that compared with other regions, manufacturing makes a smaller contribution to gross domestic product in SSA, that manufactured exports constitute a far smaller proportion of total exports for low-income countries in SSA than in other poor developing countries and that industrial employment, although increasing, is smaller in SSA than elsewhere in the developing world.

It is in the context of these trends that the higher than average growth performance of SSA industry must be located. While it is true that growth rates in SSA countries have equalled or surpassed industrial growth rates in other regions, this is largely a consequence of the smallness of the industrial base of most SSA countries and the results of expansion in a small minority of countries.

Trends within Sub-Saharan Africa

Table 2 reveals marked diversencies in industrial
Table 2: Indicators of African Manufacturing Activity by Country 1963-1981 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Change in MVA*</th>
<th>Share of MVA in GDP*</th>
<th>Contribution to African MVA*</th>
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<tr>
<td>Angola</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>6.94</td>
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<td>Congo</td>
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<td>7.63</td>
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<td>Equatorial Guinea</td>
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<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>10.9</td>
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*at constant 1975 prices.

Performance among countries but certain common features may be discerned. Overall industrial performance since the early 1960s, measured in terms of the growth rate of MVA, falls into three phases. In the period 1963-1973, UNIDO’s data base shows that the region recorded growth of 7-0% at constant prices falling to 5-7% in 1973-1981. More recent estimates from the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) reveal stagnation in MVA in the period 1982-1984. In the first period, 35 countries achieved growth of MVA of over 5% (at constant prices) with only one country (Réunion) recording a fall. In contrast, in 1973-81, 14 countries experienced a decline in manufacturing output. Yet even here, in a shorter time period, 12 countries recorded an increase in MVA in excess of 5% at constant prices. In the period 1970-82, industrial growth rates in SSA exceeded annual growth rates in the agricultural sector (3-1% in industry compared with 2-1% in agriculture).

The small (8%) contribution made by manufacturing to aggregate output across SSA countries masks great variety between countries. In 1981, for six countries, the MVA/gdp ratio was less than 5% and for five countries between 5% and 10%, 12 countries had a ratio of between countries. In 1981, for six countries, the MVA/gdp ratio was less than 5% and for five countries between 5% and 10%, 12 countries had a ratio of between countries. In 1981, for six countries, the MVA/gdp ratio was less than 5% and for five countries between 5% and 10%, 12 countries had a ratio of between countries. In 1981, for six countries, the MVA/gdp ratio was less than 5% and for five countries between 5% and 10%, 12 countries had a ratio of between countries. In 1981, for six countries, the MVA/gdp ratio was less than 5% and for five countries between 5% and 10%, 12 countries had a ratio of between countries. In 1981, for six countries, the MVA/gdp ratio was less than 5% and for five countries between 5% and 10%, 12 countries had a ratio of between countries.
Changes in the aggregate industrial performance of individual countries fail to reveal the structural changes that have occurred within the region as a whole. SSA data are heavily influenced by the performance of Nigeria which experienced a six-fold increase in MVA from 1960 to 1978 and whose contribution to regional MVA increased from 20% to over 32% of the total from 1973 to 1981. In 1981, just seven countries accounted for 67% of total MVA, with nearly half contributed by Nigeria. At the other end of the scale, 17 countries accounted for less than 5% of total MVA.

Another feature of manufacturing in SSA is the generally low degree of product diversification across the majority of countries. For most of SSA, manufacturing is geared to the production of basic consumer products dominated by foodstuffs, beverages, textile, clothing and footwear products. There are, however, exceptions. In a number of countries, attempts to promote import-substitution industrialisation have led to the establishment of factories manufacturing more sophisticated products. In others, although no more than five or six, product diversification has become a significant characteristic of the industrial base. In Zimbabwe, for example, base metals and machinery production account for 35% of MVA while Zimbabwe, Ivory Coast, Kenya and Nigeria all have comparatively large and sophisticated capital goods sectors. Furthermore, in Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Tanzania and Zambia there have been significant shifts over the past fifteen years away from the dominance of foodstuffs and textile production. In general, between 1973 and 1980 the contribution of the capital goods sector to total MVA doubled in SSA.

Africa's low level of industrial development and product diversification is reflected in an analysis of the international trade of SSA countries by industrial products. One element is the extremely high level of industrial product imports into the vast majority of SSA countries. UNIDO has compiled an index of the share of domestic production plus imports less exports (defined as domestic production plus imports less exports) of more than 100 commodities for over 40 African countries. According to UNIDO, this reveals 'a truly alarming picture of the extent of Africa's import dependence as far as manufacturing industry is concerned'. The figures show that only for food products and textiles is the import to consumption ratio below 25% for the majority of countries. 55% of all commodities have import to consumption ratios approaching 100% for almost all countries and for another 20% of commodities the ratio approached 100% for the majority of countries.

These two categories included virtually the whole range of intermediate industrial inputs necessary for establishing a viable industrial base. Of perhaps greater significance is that the change in industrial performance that has occurred reveals little change in import ratios over the past decade and in particular no progress for the vast majority of countries in the capacity of manufacturing to provide basic and intermediate inputs into other key productive areas, particularly to the agricultural sector.

A final characteristic of African industrialisation is the limited quantity and range of manufactured products exported. Manufactured exports for the majority of countries consist almost entirely of food, textile and clothing products and in a few countries processed or semi-processed minerals. Only a very few countries — Kenya, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Zimbabwe and more recently Mauritius — export chemical, basic industrial, machinery and electronic products. In large measure this poor export performance is a result of industrial policies devised primarily to substitute for imports rather than to promote export-oriented industries.

Even for some of Africa's leading manufacturing exporters, such as Kenya and Zimbabwe, exports have frequently been products surplus to domestic market requirements and only competitive on a marginal cost basis.

Causes of Failure

The causes of the failure of industrial policies in SSA to create a viable, efficient and dynamic industrial sector are complex. Low levels of industrial development and a high level of imports of basic consumer goods led to the conviction that industrialisation should be promoted, and encouraged most countries to promote an import-substituting strategy. But their lack of skills, capital, infrastructural support, technology and markets persisted in their drive to industrialise. This tended to encourage inefficiencies in the industries established, exacerbated by a high degree of monopolistic or oligopolistic production. Direct state involvement in manufacturing increased partly in an attempt to speed up the process of industrialisation and partly because of a general desire to increase the domestic share of the productive sectors of the economy. However the underlying constraints remained, and in some cases increased, as the desire to achieve more rapid industrialisation often led to the uncoordinated establishment of unviable and high-cost manufacturing units.

Inappropriate project selection

One source of failure concerns the type of industrial project selected for implementation. In many countries resources have been channelled disproportionately into large and often capital-intensive projects, frequently little related to the resource base of African countries: e.g. — the building of a loss-making automated bakery in Tanzania with a higher capital intensity than the oil refinery using imported machinery, replacing traditional bakers and leading to high transport costs for both raw material inputs and distribution of the final product; — the establishment of a textile factory in the Sudan to produce high quality products in excess of domestic demand and prevented from exporting by a high cost structure caused by high raw material costs and inadequate power and transport facilities; — the setting up of six highly protected and subsidised vehicle assembly plants in Nigeria, using largely imported materials to produce a wide range of models and operating at levels of capacity so low that in some cases the economic costs of production vastly exceeded the costs of imported vehicles.

Many plants established have proved to be economically unviable for various reasons. One reason is that the physical infrastructure has often been inadequate to ensure economic efficiency: factories have been built without sufficient regard for transport facilities, energy inputs, inputs required for manufacture or close access to final markets. Another is that the management skills available to maintain efficiency have been lacking; scarce management skills have often been provided by

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expatriates who have not stayed long enough either to raise production levels or to train local personnel. This problem was particularly acute, for example, in Uganda. There has also been a shortage of technical skills to operate and maintain sophisticated machinery as, for example, has occurred in the Ivory Coast. Plant and equipment has become damaged and in some cases lies idle due to inadequate repair and maintenance facilities, contributing to capital wastage. Recent evidence from Zimbabwe, where these problems have been less severe than in most other SSA countries, indicates losses amounting to some $20 million a year.

The State and Industry

One feature of industrialisation in SSA has been extensive direct state involvement. In some instances foreign companies were taken over directly by the state, in others new projects were set-up and operated by industrial parastatals. Many state enterprises were forced to operate with mutually conflicting objectives in which profitability was often a low priority, e.g. in Tanzania. Although many parastatal firms have operated profitably, their contribution has often been offset by those that run chronically at a loss. In some cases politicians interfered directly in the running of state manufacturing enterprises, holding down managerial salaries, and exacerbating inefficiencies. The resultant losses were a serious drain on the national exchequer in a number of countries e.g. Ghana and Zambia.

Broader policy measures also tended to further inefficiencies. Rising inflation and shortages of products led to increasing pressures to introduce price controls, so squeezing profitability and often eliminating the ability of these enterprises to become profitable. Price control measures also affected private manufacturing enterprises and resulted in sharply curtailing their dynamic potential by cutting into profit levels and reducing the incentive to expand and invest. The fewer controls exerted over commercial rather than industrial undertakings encouraged local entrepreneurs to move into trading rather than manufacturing thereby reducing even further indigenous entrepreneurial skills within the manufacturing sector. Additionally, in a number of countries, obstacles were placed in the way of small-scale industries including informal sector operators in their attempts to establish themselves or expand their operations as, for example, described in a 1972 ILO Report on Kenya.

Ironically, while the promotion of new manufacturing projects was undertaken in an environment of popularity for development planning, one of the key failures lay precisely in the absence of rigorous planning and national co-ordination. Industrial planning tended to consist largely of granting licenses to manufacture a range of products, holding down managerial salaries, and exacerbating inefficiencies. The resultant losses were a serious drain on the national exchequer in a number of countries e.g. Ghana and Zambia.

Increasing Foreign Exchange Shortages

It is in the context of these underlying longer term weaknesses of SSA’s attempts at industrialisation that the more recent broader problems facing African economies need to be placed. Increasing and now widespread foreign exchange shortages and currency devaluations have led to cuts in imports and the industrial sectors of SSA countries, still highly dependent upon foreign sourcing for raw materials, intermediate inputs, machinery and spares, have been directly and seriously affected. Foreign exchange shortages have reduced even further capacity utilisation levels of manufacturing units across the continent while domestic deflationary policies have reduced purchasing power, so reducing the internal demand for manufactured products. Today many factories stand idle and average levels of capacity utilisation of around 30% are now commonplace across the entire manufacturing sector in many African countries e.g. Tanzania, Uganda and Somalia.

Market Size Constraints

High cost production also arose because the markets for many of the goods manufactured were too small for the costs of production to be re-coupled, e.g. in Ghana and Sudan. While problems of small market size were recognised early on, efforts to overcome this problem through regional integration or rationalisation of industrial projects across national boundaries have been a notable failure in Central and East Africa. However some success has been achieved in West Africa. Where it has occurred, failure has been caused in part because perceived immediate national gain over-ride agreed longer term mutual benefits and in part because the arrangements launched led to perceived and often real gains for countries at a more advanced stage of industrialisation — e.g. Kenya in the East African Economic Community and, earlier, Southern Rhodesia in the days of Federation.

Some success has been achieved

But despite the industrial failures that have beset many SSA countries at different periods of time, some specific successes can be noted.

Perhaps the most significant achievement has been in Nigeria which achieved a rapid increase in MVA in the 1960s and 1970s although two particular circumstances have been exceptionally favourable: a large internal market and over a long period an abundant supply of foreign exchange. Kenya, Ivory Coast, Cameroon and Zimbabwe are all countries that have achieved significant gains in promoting import substituting industries and in the few studies that have been carried out on international competitiveness, Ivory Coast and more especially Zimbabwe scored positively in a number of different industrial sub-sectors. For example for chemicals, non-metallic minerals and light metal products. Efficient processing industries have also been established in the agricultural sector. Thus after 25 years of post-independence industrialisation only a handful of countries in SSA manufacture the inputs required by the agricultural sector; most requirements are still imported.

Inefficiencies were further encouraged, in both State-run and private or joint-venture enterprises, as a direct result of protectionist policies. Import-substituting industries were set up behind over-valued exchange rates, high tariffs or import restrictions. These measures, together with foreign exchange shortages, encouraged high-cost industrialisation as a permanent feature in many countries, reinforced by monopoly or near-monopoly production of a high proportion of manufactured products.
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points to areas in which change needs to take place. There
those countries.
Important though these achievements have been, even
those countries that on different indicators could be
classified as successes have experienced major problems in
the last few years. In particular none has escaped foreign
exchange difficulties and most are burdened with
increasing debt and the need to implement stabilisation
policies which have led, over the period they have been in
place, to industrial contraction. Additionally, in spite of
the achievements on the export front, no country within
SSA has achieved significant export-led competitive
industrialisation comparable to the Newly Industrialising
countries (NICs) of Asia and Latin America, or even to
India and Thailand.

The Outlook
The record of industrialisation in SSA over the past 20
years, together with more immediate problems for African
economies brought about by the deteriorating
performance of Africa agriculture, rising debt, inadequate
external finance and the poor prospects for exports of
primary commodities from Africa, provide the context for
assessing future prospects.
There is agreement across Africa, among donor
agencies, financial institutions and many academic
analysts that past strategies for African industrialisation
have failed and that a new, and for many countries,
radically different set of policies is needed. There is
agreement, too, that many of the problems highlighted
above are likely to persist for some considerable time.

Given these constraints there is little optimism that a
major expansion in Africa's industrial base will occur,
whatever new policies are adopted over the short term.
This pessimism, however, by no means excludes the
possibility of particular economies achieving significant
results, although the successful record of the early 1960s
and early 1970s is unlikely to be repeated even among
these countries.
Analysis of the past failures of industrialisation also
points to areas in which change needs to take place. There
is widespread agreement in the mid-1980s that co­
ordination of industrial projects should be planned in
conjunction with parallel infrastructural development
covering transport facilities and energy supply. There is, as
well, acknowledgement that persistent industrial
inefficiencies are a drain on national resources and thus
that priority should be given to reduce inefficiencies and
raise levels of capacity utilisation.
The small size of many individual country markets has
brought increasing recognition that, in spite of
considerable difficulties, a regional approach to
industrialisation provides the only viable method for most
SSA countries to establish a range of industries. The more
cautious approach to regional co-operation within the
nine-member Southern African Development Co­
nordination Conference (SADCC) countries holds out
realistic prospects for significant success. A regional
tractor assembly plant and an integrated weaving plant for
polyester-blend fibre for SADCC countries are being
implemented, with cross-country agreement.
In many countries, though not in all, it is accepted that
the state's direct involvement in industrial projects should
be reduced, that private entrepreneurs should be given
more encouragement to participate in industry and that
further incentives should be given to foreign companies to
enter or return to Africa. Finally there is widespread
agreement that indigenous management skills training
should be encouraged far more vigorously to improve the
quality of decision-making both in governments and
individual industrial enterprises. But this is little more
than a start. Considerable divergence of opinion persists
about which overall general strategies should be adopted
for future industrialisation in SSA.

Export-Oriented Approach
Since the 1980s, the World Bank has produced a series of
documents detailing new initiatives to promote
industrialisation in Africa.2 In general, its view is that
industrialisation in Africa is 'crucial' but that it should play
a secondary supporting role to an agriculturally-centred
development strategy. It recommends an export-oriented
approach which seeks to exploit Africa's revealed
comparative advantage in world markets. According to
the World Bank, market-oriented price incentives should
be the main instrument for achieving industrial
restructuring and increased efficiency within the
manufacturing sector. Protection levels and quantitative
exchange controls should be reduced, if not eliminated
entirely, and international prices should be the criterion
for accepting or rejecting industrial projects. Under this
scenario a number of currently inefficient industries
should be abandoned altogether or if state-run, sold off to
the highest private sector bidder.
However, it is argued that whatever merits the export­
oriented strategy has in theory it is unlikely to be
successful in practice because the prospects for African
exports in general or for a significant expansion of
manufactured exports in particular are extremely poor.
Additionally it is feared that basing future industrialisation
on revealed comparative advantage would be a
retrogressive step because it would lead to the expansion
of basic consumer goods manufacturing and the export of
a narrow range of products, thereby increasing
vulnerability to world market forces while failing to reduce
Africa's still high import dependence within either the
agricultural or industrial sectors. Most importantly, it is
feared that the consequences of such a strategy could lead
to the wiping out of significant parts of manufacturing
activity in many African countries.

Alternative Proposals
These fears, together with a conviction that
industrialisation should become the centre-piece of a
comprehensive recovery and development programme for

2. Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa (1981);
SSA, have led African governments, through the Lagos Plan of Action and more recently through the Organisation of African Unity and the Economic Commission for Africa, and UNIDO to put forward different proposals. While agreeing that a radically new approach is needed and that overall efficiency and international comparative advantage criteria are important, this perspective is more domestically-oriented and more cautious about a wholesale exposure of fragile African economies to world competitive forces. Two elements of restructuring are highlighted. Firstly, industry needs to become more resource-based and far more integrated within national and regional economies than within the wider world economy. Emphasis is placed on the objective of reducing the high proportion of total inputs currently imported and the encouragement of small-scale industries supplying agriculture’s needs. Secondly, major incentives should be given to the domestic private sector to break down the present rigid structure of industry, dominated on the one hand by state enterprises and on the other by foreign controlled and managed enterprises. The overall objective is to reduce Africa’s vulnerability to external shocks and its dependence upon imported technology, raw materials and finance.

But the feasibility of these proposals may be questioned. Their success would demand a significant injection of new funds, both external and domestic, and a higher level of expertise, management and planning skills. There are strong grounds for doubting that these will be available to the extent required over the next decade.

Conclusion
Whatever paths to future industrialisation are adopted by particular countries in SSA, two things are clear. The future prospects for rapid industrialisation in the region are far from bright and significant structural changes will occur over the coming five to ten years. It is also important that to raise the prospects for sustained industrialisation and to ease the adjustments that need to be made, external assistance will have a vital role to play. The crucial, and as yet unresolved, question remains which strategy different countries will choose or be forced to develop.

Notes
3. The Lagos Plan of Action was adopted by African governments in 1980 as the basis for future national and regional development to the year 2000. For industry the agreed objectives are to lay the foundations for the development of basic industry through the promotion of self-sustaining industrialisation through resource-based and engineering core industries.

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