**Shaping the Future of Africa Beyond Covid-19**

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Africa is a resource rich poor continent. The resource curse is due largely to African countries failure to add value to their commodities. Africa’s contribution to global manufacturing value added is hardly 2 per cent. It speaks volumes of the region’s to climb the ladder of value addition. The cost of production is high due to infrastructural bottlenecks, and the cost of doing business is high due to a number of non-economic factors related governance, transparency and accountability. In the wake of different forms of ramifications triggered by Covid-19, countries across continents are resetting their economies and embarking on a new course and pattern of development towards the new normal. Africa is no exception to the trend.

The new resetting endeavour cannot afford to ignore strategic development objectives which are yet to be achieved by African countries. The growth and socio-economic transformation of African countries are not proportionate to their potential. Intermittent commodity boom led high growth rate enjoyed by African countries pushed many more millions into the poverty trap, while value-added led growth in developed countries, newly industrializing economies and emerging economies lifted many millions of people from the poverty trap.

Africa’s fundamental challenges are to convert:

* resource-based comparative advantages into competitiveness;
* commodities into products; and
* marginalized urban and rural communities into development catalysts.

To this end, Africa needs to enhance the functional literacy rate, which refers to the percentage of literates imbued with enhanced adaptive capabilities and skills to use modern technology and to commercialize new knowledge. Africa encompasses a huge reservoir of all types of resources needed for fostering growth and prosperity. The continent’s huge reservoir of agricultural, mineral, oil and human resources should be optimally used for the cause of fostering economically efficient, ecologically friendly and socially desirable patterns of development, with a priority accent on spreading the benefits of growth. The task of converting commodities into products is today triggered by the incidence of technical progress making deep inroad processing, design and marketing of products. New industrial realities are being increasingly attuned to disruptive technologies, such as advanced digital production systems, artificial intelligence, augmented reality, additive manufacturing, big data management, cloud computing, 3-D printer, electromobility, internet of things, services and electricity, etc. Fortunately, Africa is not a bystander at the current technological feast. Given the continent’s high internet penetration, ranging from the regional average of 44 per cent to 96 per cent in Nigeria and 84 per cent in Kenya, the continent can be freely at ease in making optimal use of the technological marvels to the advantage of the fostering a high and healthy pace of economic expansion. The formidable task of converting the marginalized segments of the urban and rural societies calls for determined efforts to coin the right policy space and institutional direction. Rendering institutional technical assistance and business support services to urban and rural business stakeholders as free goods is critical to get the urban and rural poor empowered in the development process.

Business aspirants in Africa should endeavour to seize emerging opportunities in the spheres of saving life, creating sustainable sources of livelihoods, new life-style and mode of working, and in leveraging with the virtual world. A shift from mass production to production by the mass is imminent as business stakeholders are increasingly linking and leveraging with the new and dynamic sources of growth in the virtual world and learning new ways of participating in the global value chain.

As evidenced by the development experience of Tata motors, which is was extremely successful in linking, leveraging and learning from external dynamic sources of growth, Africa should endeavour to replicate the same. Tata Motors in India linked with foreign firms, leveraged its resources with foreign firms, and learned to invent products which suit the country-specific contexts. Within a few years, Tata produced a 100 per cent indigenous car of world class thorugh linking, leveraging and learning. This development experience is applicable to a wide range of products produced in Africa, which should try to replicate Tata’s best practice

Given the critical skills to turn out products, complying with the norms of international quality standards, one can easily participate in the global value chain. The household sector initially responded to the growing demand for goods and services before the evolution of 18th century industrial revolution. This was called industrious revolution. Today, neo-industrious revolution is surfacing to participate in the global value chain, paving the way for production by the mass.

Knowledge is a source and innovation is a force. National, sectoral and incremental innovation systems play a key role in rekindling new and dynamic sources of growth. In an ideal innovation system, new knowledge is generated by institutions, exploited by laboratories and commercialized by dynamic firms. Such and ideal innovation systems ushers in a high degree of interactive framework between institutions and dynamic firms. While African countries continue to struggle to convert their resource-based comparative advantages into competitiveness, resource-poor Singapore enhances the global competitiveness of its products, using human ingenuity as the infinite source of wealth creation. Africa will need to focus on sectoral innovation systems with a view to promoting products which make an indelible impact on poverty reduction. Africa should also concentrate on strengthening incremental innovation, which stems from effective transfer of technology. The key ingredients of effective transfer of technology are enhanced capabilities and skills to acquire the right technology, assimilate the technology, adopt it, adapt it and to learn from imported technology to invent products which befit country-specific context.

Given Africa’s high level of internet penetration, Africans are cable of participating effectively in the open innovation and value creation network. There is evidence of an African manufacturing rubber-based nonautomotive component for aircrafts. This is just one example to show that Africans are capable of participating in the global value chain. Collaborate to compete is the new business theology. Collective response to withstand competitive pressures for efficiency gains is critical to survive in an international competitive environment. Selected clusters in Africa lend credence to the benefit of stakeholders networking with each other to achieve efficiency gains. This is already emerging in Africa.

Africa is too big to ignore. The continent’s renewable energy potential can electrify the entire continent and export electricity to Europe. The entire African desert could be converted into a huge renewable energy hub to generate 22 billion gigawatts of power annually. When those endeavours see the light of reality, Africa should not light poverty but eradicate poverty. Poverty can be eradicated only by wealth creation. Prosperity is essentially a matter of policy choice. With apt policy interventions, new and dynamic sources of growth could be rekindled. For example, Africa failed to convert its brain drain into brain gain, while with right policy response, the Republic of Korea very successfully attracted its tacit knowledge. In the early 1970s, Korea offered very attractive incentive systems to attract its technocrats, scientists, engineers, business persons, and doctors to return to Korea, offering very attractive salaries and incentives. The Korean diaspora could not resist their temptation to return to Korea. The return of the country’s tacit knowledge was the key determinant of Korea’s rapid economic growth and prosperity. Africa’s inept policies failed to attract its tacit knowledge. The Chinese have changed the second half of their famous proverb: Instead of giving fish to someone, teach him fishing. Now the second half of the proverb is that teach him better method of fishing.

With a high level of functional literacy rate, enhanced adaptive capabilities and skills, right policy space in terms of right policy interventions, institutional technical assistance and business support services, Africa could leapfrog and edge into a high degree of industrialization. Being a late-comer in the sphere of industrialization is not necessarily a disadvantage. Gone are the traditional factors of production and old stages of development, e.g., pastoral stage, agricultural stage, commercial sage, industrial stage and industrial revolution. There is no need for Africa to pass through those stages of development. The creation of a strong infrastructural base, utility services and critical skills, Africa can conveniently bypass those traditional stages of growthy and leapfrog and emerge as a mighty industrial power. The emergence of Africa as the most attractive business hub will indeed be the new global development reality. And all investment roads will be paved to reach Africa to reap rich dividend.