

The Conflicts Behind Premature Industrialization: Agriculture meets Government

Anthony J. Wenndt
Grinnell College Peace Studies
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The voice of the “grassroots” of a nation is too often neglected, while their extraordinary power is at once exploited and ill-acknowledged. In countries verging on industrialization, governments can place too much emphasis on industrializing rapidly, without realizing that sustainable development of industry cannot occur without a soundly developed agricultural sector. Industrialization efforts that occur without the cooperation of the agricultural sector are therefore premature, and incapable of achieving the level of success often intended by policy makers. Furthermore, the act of tossing agriculture aside to make way for the development of industry is seen by agriculturists as a means of disrespect and exploitation—which occasionally triggers retaliation and further conflict escalation. Such retaliation is effective in that they make known the real influence of agriculture on the welfare of a nation and its respective government. Even so, conflict can be avoided altogether if governments begin realizing that success in agriculture is a prerequisite for sustainable industrialization.

Industrialization is, beyond any reasonable doubt, a goal and a priority of many if not all developing nations. This fact is understandable, because development of industry often allows a country to enter without restraint into the world economic community, and to attain “developed” status—a transition that most often promises a certain degree of desirable autonomy as a result of increased production, resultant decrease in dependence on foreign goods and services, reduced poverty, and a thriving and confident workforce. In brief, it is clear that industrialization is a means for

developing countries to achieving a most desirable end—the betterment of the nation as a whole.

Industrialization is a mammoth endeavor, requiring much investment on the part of the national government and—most importantly—the citizens of the nation at hand, who necessarily will be the most heavily impacted by efforts for development and industrialization. The investment required of each of those parties is unconditionally subjective; however only through the marriage of governmental

authority and human power can development occur successfully and be maintained. In many cases, however, the processes of industrialization are hastened by anxious governments, which neglect to realize this important requirement for sustainable industrial development.

In many developing countries around the world, particularly those in Africa, the vast majority of human power lies in the agricultural sector. Therefore, contrary to some popular belief, agriculturists play a crucial role in industrialization. Indeed, since the economic structure of many developing nations is dominated by agricultural pursuits, it may be argued that the contributions of this sector are the *most* influential not only in the processes of developing industry, but also in the sustainability of this development—which is necessary in order to maintain the fundamentals of development in a society, such as low poverty rates, high life expectancies, and consistently controlled low levels of hunger and poverty.

In order to further analyze this issue, several main questions must be answered. Firstly, we must ask *why does political and economic focus shift from traditional agriculture to industry?* Understanding the answer to this question is critical, and especially relevant at the current state of global development. In many—if not all—cases of development, it is widely believed that agriculturally centered economies are obsolete and “backward,” and those whose focus lies primarily in industry and the deviation in production from raw materials are supposedly ideal. Transitioning

efficiently and successfully from the former to the latter is a common goal of developing nations around the world—a fact proven by the influence of modernization theory in development efforts in many nations around the world.

The second question that must be answered in order to gain a real understanding of the issue is *what causes premature focus shift?* To determine a viable response to this question is a troublesome and in many ways daunting task. Aspects to be weighed in answering include cultural value, societal preference, world view, political and economic situation, among others. In analyzing the items that together form an adequate answer, it is clear that failing to transition successfully is a result of some degree of prematurity in fully activating the industrial sector. Understanding this question, following accordingly in the footpath of the first question, is most valuable in assessing a nation’s preparedness to initiate an industrialization scheme.

Another question, equally important, is *what are the consequences of premature focus shift?* This question is perhaps the most influential, in that it assesses the ideology upon which segue between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ civilization rests. In determining and examining prematurity in developmental and industrial progress political, societal, cultural, and environmental consideration of somewhat formulaic proportion is required.

Only by analyses of these critical questions can we gain a sufficient understanding of the adverse impacts of

industrialization if not initiated sustainably. Societies around the world have taken the first steps toward total development of industry, but, while several have seen great success in their industrialization endeavors, many have experienced only minimal sustainable progress—progress that is profoundly overshadowed by gaping economic inequalities, insatiable hunger, and unsatisfactory social and economic conditions. Successful, sustainable industrialization indeed requires successful, sustainable development of the agricultural sector—a fact that is too rarely realized by developing nations.

I. WHY DOES FOCUS SHIFT?

Industrialization, by definition, is the process of becoming industrial. More practically, in today's rapidly developing world, to industrialize is to undergo a shift in political, economic, and social focus, away from traditional agriculture and toward development of the industrial sector.

Why is this desirable? What prompts entire nations to discard their established, simple agricultural livelihoods in favor of the development of industry? There are several reasons that nations around the world have made (or at least begun) such a transition. The most influential way in which industrialization entices nations is its promise of economic prosperity on the local and national levels, which in turn would result in boosted living standards, higher quality education and health care, crucial infrastructure development, *et cetera*. Because the successful completion of the industrialization process does often result in increases in Gross Domestic Product, higher

incomes and quality of life, and a healthier economy, it is only reasonable that undeveloped nations are prompted to follow in the footsteps of the already 'developed' nations with fully-industrialized economies, such as the United States, Great Britain, much of Europe, and the rest of the nations that comprise the infamous "Western Civilization" that is at once emulated and detested by the so-called Third World, in order that they, too, may have such high standards.

Another influential reason behind the compulsion of nations to transition from agriculturally-based economies to industry-based economies is simply the result of the common world-view that agricultural economies are outdated or obsolete. In modern human civilization, it is not at all difficult to conceive of the fact that a staggering majority (if not the *entirety*) of people on the planet today are to some degree aware of developments and issues that have influence on a global scale. For example, indigenous peoples in an impoverished African village may not have access to television sets. Furthermore, they may have cultural beliefs that even condemn their use (this is a hypothetical example, of course, and whether or not such cultural beliefs actually exist is beyond the point of relevance). Even so, it is totally conceivable that these indigenous peoples may be well aware of their existence, at least vaguely informed as to their function, and capable to some extent of realizing their ability to want or refuse the technology.

Similarly, it is conceivable that members of a primarily agricultural society

may have a basic awareness and some level of understanding as to the conditions of other societies around the world, as compared to their own. Therefore, while it is by no means implied that so-called “Western” ideals—such as industrialization—*should* be adopted by undeveloped countries, it is true that populations (as in the television example above) have at least a capability and a right to either want or refuse such ideals. It is by a cultural standpoint very appropriate to acknowledge a nation’s right to enter into the ‘developed’ and its school of ideals if it so pleases.

II. CAUSES OF PREMATURE FOCUS SHIFT AND CONDITIONS

Human beings have the innate desire both to care for oneself and also for his fellows. This is not at all a problem intrinsically. After all, we as a species pride ourselves on our careful human nature. However, a dilemma arises frequently in the morality of man when these two delicate and instinctive tenets are pitted against one another—a dilemma, accordingly, which forces one to choose between what may be best for himself and what may be best for others.

This dilemma applies to entire human political and societal organisms, as well. A nation intrinsically intends to care both for itself as an entity in the world community and for its inhabitants as social, economic, and cultural players within it. Occasionally, though, these two national desires (or obligations), namely, to do what is best for the nation and its inhabitants

simultaneously, occasionally encounters challenges wherein only one facet can be fully satisfied: the nation, or its population. These challenges, particularly in underdeveloped nations, can result in the stimulation of much stress on society as the dilemma persists.

However, it is indeed sometimes the case that the elite members of a society are forced to make decisions within a nation that choose one tenet over the other, and do not realize that they are doing so. In other words, many decisions are made wherein the integrity of one or both tenets is jeopardized to some degree, when the ruling elite intended for both to reap equal benefits. The processes of industrialization can in many cases be examples of this scenario—many governments around the world and throughout history have been tempted by the allure of the developed world to begin rapid, intensive industrial development with the assumption that from it would sprout the foundations of a national condition fit for activity in the world community. However, though it is hardly debatable that industrialization is both a reasonable national goal and an important milestone marking the potential for a nation to enter into the “first world,” the total development of industry cannot happen sustainably unless a nation and its people—especially those in the lowest classes—are prepared for and willing to transition away from agricultural pursuits and the production of primary goods to a more industrial manufacturing-based economic system.

The primary argument of this paper is simply that agriculture plays a valuable

role in development and industrialization—a fact that is too often overlooked by third-world governmental regimes who are too thoroughly blinded by the glamour of the world's wealthiest nations. Just what is the role that the agricultural sector plays in the processes of development, especially with regard to industry? The claim, indeed, may strike an analyst as counter-intuitive: *why, one might ask, might agriculture be considered at all important in industrialization if the point of industrialization is to de-emphasize agriculture?* This is indeed an understandable critique, but not one that is entirely valid. Indeed, agriculture is very much involved in any nation's efforts to develop industry, for several most profound reasons.

Firstly, the agricultural sector is influential in industrial development because agriculturists often comprise a high percentage of the work force in developing countries. Therefore, it can be stated that any movement of political or economic focus toward industrialization cannot occur successfully without the cooperation of the nation's agriculturists. In certain circumstances, the terms of an industrialization policy can strip agricultural programs of their funding, resources, *et cetera*, and divert it instead to the development of industry. This in turn can often result in major and sometimes violent political and social tension between the agricultural sector and government.

Furthermore, in many developed nations millions of families and communities rely primarily on subsistence

agricultural methods to obtain daily nutrition. In fact, approximately 65% of the population of Sub-Saharan Africa in 2008 relied on subsistence agriculture for their living. It can therefore be assumed that much of the foodstuffs that rural people in the developing world consume had been produced by subsistence agriculturalists.

Sustainable industrialization is not possible in regions that depend heavily on subsistence agriculture unless that dependence is lessened, because with the coming of industry comes a decline in agricultural activity. For example, if a small African community ventures into manufacturing and many of the farmers decide to pursue job opportunities in industry and leave their subsistence farms behind, small scale farms that dominate the local agricultural scheme would decrease or cease their activity, and food production would decrease. This would result in the escalation of food insecurity and related illnesses and social malformation.

III. THE CONFLICTS AND CONSEQUENCES BEHIND PREMATURE FOCUS SHIFTS

The premature shifting of economic and political focus in a developing society can have a plethora of consequences, stemming appropriately from the conflicts that arise when the "best interests" of the governing elite and the agricultural sector clash. "Best interests," in this case, are those interests that are believed by the respective factions to be most appropriate in the pursuit of a happier, more stable future state. The agriculturalists of an underdeveloped, agro-centric nation, for example, may regard the

development of agricultural pursuits as the premier economic and political area of concern, while their counterparts with a more thorough conceptualization of industrial development may argue that the ideal path on which society should tread is that of industrialization and the relinquishing of agricultural dominance in governmental affairs.

It is often the case in the process of premature transition from agro-centric policy to total industrialization that those two sets of “best interests” collide and face challenges in the political arena—namely, challenges regarding which faction receives the right to govern the activities of the other. Generally, these challenges result in the exploitation (by means of focus shift) of the grassroots agriculturalists and their produce by governmental elite, whose intent is to establish a place in the industrialized world community as quickly as possible.

From this exploitation necessarily develops conflict between the agricultural sector and the tyrant industry-focused regime—conflict that can put at stake the livelihood and morale of the grassroots majority, the progress of development on all levels (agricultural, industrial, social, *et cetera*), the economic wellbeing of the nation and its residents, and food security on a local, national, and global scale.

One example of this sort of conflict is the 2008 agricultural protests of Argentina. The 101 day protest began because of an increased tax on agricultural exports, which was thought of by the Argentine government as a valid means of accelerating industrialization and alleviating poverty.

However, the tax (which raised export taxes on agricultural goods by 35-40%) was instated entirely for the benefit of the government and the urban population, with a disregard for the interests of the nation’s farmers, who deemed the tax “unconstitutional.” The infuriated farmers protested against the oppression and exploitation by barricading roads, which prevented transport of foodstuffs into the cities—causing panic, economic upset, and ultimately aggressive retaliation by the government and rioters.¹

Another example of conflict in development in the third world is the recent exploitation of villagers in the West African nation of Senegal. In October of 2011, the annexation of 20,000 acres of farm and pastureland for production of biofuels by an Italian-Senegal company resulted in violent clashes, disruption of livelihoods, and the loss of several lives. The biofuels project was initiated to boost Senegal’s economy and catapult the nation into the developed world community by satiating Europe’s demand for biofuel, but it required the displacement of thousands of agriculturists and pastoralists, and resulted in loss of livestock and valuable farmland. The promise of job opportunities and stimulation of local economy were hardly realized, especially in the opinions of those farmers whose livelihoods were disrupted by the policy.²

Of course, to purport that the development of the biofuel industry—and of industry in general, for that matter—is undesirable is not my intent whatsoever. In fact, quite the contrary is true, as was stated above: industrial development is indeed a viable means to the desirable end of

economic prosperity and improved standards of life. However, protests and retaliations such as those in Argentina and Senegal support the idea that conflict arises when governments exploit the agricultural sector during industrialization that precede a nation's preparedness for the processes of industrial development.

To make this assertion is not to suggest that conflict cannot or does not in fact occur in the processes of a sustainable, mature industrialization attempt. Indeed, there is never an instance at any stage of development in *any* society in the world wherein the possibility of conflict does not exist. A distinction thus must be made between conflicts that arise as a result of premature industrialization and those that arise as a result of another source of oppression or distaste during the industrialization process. To make this distinction, one is required to analyze in depth the triggers of conflict on an individual basis, and determine its roots from the knowledge accrued in the analysis.

Preventing such conflicts between the eager-to-develop governmental elite and the agricultural sector requires careful attention to policy and public perspective, so as to avoid instigating developmental policies that precede the interests of the grassroots majority.

By adequately representing and considering the needs and preferences of the agricultural sector in constructing policies for industrialization, the transition from agro-centricity to the developed world may occur with an assured degree of peace and a promise of sustainability.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The development of industry is an important goal for developing nations around the world. Industrialization inspires hope among nations for a brighter future in a world of prosperity. However, any attempt at industrial development that causes conflict among members of an agro-centric society cannot be considered sustainable, and is thus premature. Because to be sustainably developed is a remarkably permanent condition, and one that requires a firm foundation of grassroots citizens to prevent its collapse, its processes must not be shaped in such a way so as to invoke conflict between an oppressed agricultural sector and the elite, industry-minded governmental entity.

REFERENCES

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