

# African countries can't industrialise?

## Yes, they can

**N**arratives are essential. Humans are, after all, "helpless story junkies". Business and economic success depend much more than is commonly acknowledged on getting the narrative right. And if there is a narrative where getting it right or wrong matters hugely, it is the narrative about Africa's industrial development. Africa is the poorest continent. It is likely to be the most affected by climate change. It is the continent where terrorist groups are spreading fast.

Therefore, African industrialisation is essential. Unfortunately, the dominant narrative is that Africa has been de-industrialising, even prematurely. In this narrative, it is also questioned whether Africa can ever industrialise. African countries have even been advised not to try. The World Bank's *Trouble in the Making* report concludes that manufacturing is becoming less relevant for low-income countries.

Fortunately, a very different narrative is possible. In a recent paper, I argue that Africa can industrialise because of three factors. These are brilliant new technologies enabling digitisation, smart materials and 3D-printing; a more vibrant entrepreneurship scene; and Africa's growing middle class (as measured by the share of households that earn between \$11 and \$110 per person per day), which supports the continent's first generation of indigenous tech-entrepreneurs.