



India-Africa Relations

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Why in News?

Recently, President of South Africa Cyril Ramphosa visited India on a two-day visit. He was the chief guest at 70th Republic Day Celebrations in New Delhi.

Historical Ties

- India's relations with Africa date back several centuries. The presence of Indians in East Africa is documented in the 'Periplus of the Erythraean Sea' or Guidebook of the Red Sea by an ancient Greek author written in 60 AD.
- The geographical proximity and easy navigability in Indian Ocean resulted in well-established trade network between India and the Swahili Coast predating European exploration.
- More concrete relation between India and Africa begins to emerge during the Islamic age which is evident through the accounts of Venetian traveller Marco Polo.
- Political connection during the colonial era was linked through M.K Gandhi who began his political career in South Africa, became the leader of colonized and established Indian Natal Congress in 1894.
- After India got independent, it raised voice for African liberation taking their case to all the available international forums. End of racial struggle and decolonization became the rallying point of India–Africa relations.
- India was a forerunner as a champion of the interests of the developing countries from Africa, particularly through the Bandung Declaration of 1955, the Group of 77, and the Non Aligned Movement (NAM).
- India's policy of NAM provided the world with the third front at the time of heightened cold war rivalry between US and USSR, where African nations acted as the strengthening factor.
- A large chunk of Indian diaspora continues to live in African countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Mauritius, and Nigeria.
- It is this sense of solidarity, mutual trust and confidence born in the difficult days of

the Cold War which continues to drive India-Africa cooperation to this day.

Importance of Africa

- Africa is home to over half a dozen of the fastest growing countries of this decade such as Rwanda, Senegal, and Tanzania etc making it **one of the growth pole** of the world.
- Real GDP in Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa in the past decade **has grown by more than twice** the rate in 1980s and 90's.
- African continent has a population of over one billion with a combined GDP of 2.5 trillion dollars making it a **huge potential market**.
- Africa is a **resource rich nation** dominated by commodities like crude oil, gas, pulses and lentils, leather, gold and other metals, all of which India lack in sufficient quantities.
- India is seeking diversification of its oil supplies away from the Middle East and Africa can play an **important role in India's energy matrix**.

India in Africa

- Engagement at all levels with African countries has increased in the last two decades with a large number of public and private sector companies from India investing in Africa.
- India's duty-free tariff preferential scheme for Least Developed Nation (LDCs) launched in 2008 has benefited 33 African states.
- India's engagement with African nations remains at three levels: Bilateral, Regional and Multilateral.
- Multilateral engagement was launched with the first **India Africa Forum Summit (IAFS)** in 2008.

India Africa Forum Summit

- The India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) is the official platform for the **African-Indian relations**.
- It is **held once in every three years beginning from 2008**.
- India by consistently holding India- Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) in places like New Delhi (2008), Addis Ababa (2011) and New Delhi (2015) has already forged ties with the 54 African states through the African Union (AU).
- India is investing in capacity building providing more than \$1 billion in technical assistance and training to personnel under the **Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC)** program.
- As a full member of African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), India has pledged \$1 million towards ACBF's sustainable development, poverty alleviation, and capacity

building initiative.

- India has invested \$100 million in the **Pan-African E-Network** to bridge the digital divide in Africa, leveraging its strengths in information technology.
- Indian military academies offer **training to military officers** from a number of African states.
- India has also unveiled the Vision Document of the **Asian Africa Growth Corridor** which is jointly prepared by Indian and Japanese think tanks.
- The corridor will focus on **Developing Cooperation Projects, Quality Infrastructure and Institutional Connectivity, skill enhancement**, and People-to-People Partnership.
- India postulates that its partnership with Africa is an amalgam of development priorities in keeping with the African Union's long term plan and the Africa Agenda 2063, as well as India's development objectives.

Areas of Cooperation

- **Trade** – Indian-African synergies can be used for expanding sectors like tourism, banking, telecommunications, manufacturing and agriculture.
- **Security** – Being the littoral states in the Indian Ocean, they can work towards establishing mechanisms to deal with threats to regional security including terrorism and piracy.
- **Capacity Building** – Africa's expectation from India in the field of public health goes beyond just the supply of affordable medicine to cover assistance in developing the continent's public health services capacities.
- **Maritime Cooperation** – development of blue economy and renewable energy for the continent's growth can be realized by Indian experience and the expertise to develop and manage the maritime resources.
- **Food Security** – India and Africa face similar challenges in regards to hunger and undernutrition. Importing food grains from African nations will address nation's food security problem.
- It will also provide opportunities to farmers of Africa to increase income, productivity and generate employment.

Challenges

- Ethnic and religious conflicts and governance issues in some countries make foreign contributors averse to venture in the region.
- India's substantive presence in Africa has remained marginal as it focused on its own periphery through much of the Cold War period which limited its capabilities.
- Since the end of the Cold War China's presence has grown in Africa, who has been providing soft loans to African states which has resulted in Chinese growing influence in the continent.

- With government institutions and businesses working in separate silos, India has no coordinated Africa policy nor does there seem to be an avenue where the strengths of both actors can be leveraged.

Way Forward

- New Delhi will need to start delivering on the ground if the India-Africa partnership has to move beyond high level visits.
- Indian investments in Africa need to expand and diversify towards 'broad' range and not remain restricted to traditional sectors of investments.
- In order to keep the momentum of building political and economic ties with this increasingly important region, steps should be taken towards tailoring and funding joint projects for the sustainable development of the Africa.

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