



India Reinforces Ties With Africa In Modi Regime

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Abstract

India has a long history of partnership with Africa. It became a leading voice in support of African decolonisation at the United Nations. African countries were the greatest beneficiaries of the ITEC programme launched by India. India-Africa Forum Summits have enabled collaborative exercise to build, skill, plan measures and execute policy decisions. India has promoted African economic development. Information technology (IT) is an important pillar of India's technical cooperation with Africa. India and Africa have held common positions on global platforms and worked together to guard the interests of other developing countries. Prime Minister Modi's Visit to Rwanda, Uganda and South Africa in July 2018 has helped in fine-tuning our Development Partnership Programs.

Keywords-India, Africa, ITEC, Development, Partnership, Modi's Visit.

Introduction

India has a long history of partnership with Africa, with solidarity and political affinity going back to the early 1920s when both regions were fighting against colonial rule and oppression. India's freedom movement had an internationalist outlook; many Indian nationalists viewed the struggle for independence as part of the worldwide movement against imperialism. After India gained independence, it became a leading voice in support of African decolonisation at the United Nations. Independent India, though extremely poor after two centuries of colonial exploitation, strived to share its limited resources with African countries under the banner of South-South cooperation. In 1964, India launched the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme to provide technical assistance through human resource development to other developing countries, with African countries the greatest beneficiaries of it and the Special Commonwealth African Assistance Programme (SCAAP). (Chakrabarty, 2021)

Despite the deepened ties with Africa, spanning across seven decades, India till very recently had hardly developed a clear strategic vision as to how to leverage its relations with these countries. In fact, the goodwill that India had gained during the days of the African liberation struggles and the Non-Aligned Movement has not adequately been capitalised upon either. Nevertheless, with changing times and India's increased presence at the global stage, there is hope that things are changing for the better. With ideological issues and political alignments riding pillion, it is the arena of economic ties

along with the advent of technology that have infused a new vigour into India's relationship with the African countries. Security is another aspect that has come under close consideration, with a special emphasis on the maritime aspect.

Over the last few years, multiple forums like the India-Africa Forum Summit have come into existence. Providing India as well as the African countries a platform to engage constructively, summits like the aforementioned have helped institutionalize and formalise the relations between countries better. Multiple study reports have focused on collaborative mechanisms such as the Export-Import Bank of India highlighting the fact that the relationships are on an upward spiral. These meetings are primarily designed as a participative collaborative exercise to build skill, plan measures and execute policy decisions towards alleviation of poverty and overall development. The areas of focus have been healthcare, agriculture, maritime security, climate change and bringing about a technological revolution in Africa.

India's economic engagement with Africa, on the other hand, only began intensifying in the early 2000s. India's total trade with Africa grew from US\$ 6.8 billion in 2003 to US\$ 76.9 billion in 2018, and India is now Africa's third-largest trade partner. Indian investments in Africa have also grown rapidly in the last decade and the country is currently the seventh-largest investor in Africa. The scale of India's development cooperation with Africa has also grown rapidly. From 2003 onwards, India began to use concessional lines of credit (LoC) as one of its key development partnership instruments to fund the construction of railway lines, electrification and irrigation projects, farm mechanisation projects, among others. The LoCs are demand-driven and extended on the principle of mutual benefit — recipient countries make development gains, while the LoCs help create new markets for Indian companies, foster export growth, build good relations with countries that are important sources of food, energy and resources, and contribute to the country's image abroad. So far, India has sanctioned 182 LoC projects in Africa through the Export Import (EXIM) Bank of India, with a total credit commitment of about US\$ 10.5 billion. Indian LoCs have significant development impacts in Africa. For instance, India's irrigation project in Senegal led to a six-fold increase in rice production and currently over 30 percent of that country's consumption is covered by domestic production, as compared to 12.1 percent prior to the implementation. Similarly India's LoC worth US\$ 640 million to Ethiopia helped the country become self-sufficient in sugar production and had major spill-over benefits. The sugar factory installed a water-purification plant, which benefited nearly 10,000 villagers who previously relied on untreated water, and pastoralists in the region now have access to a stable source of income. (Ministry of External Affairs, 2015)

Promoting African Development

Although India was poor and underdeveloped after two centuries of colonial exploitation, it launched systematic efforts to promote African development soon after its independence. In 1949, India announced 70 scholarships for students from other

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developing countries to pursue studies in the country. The ITEC programme, launched to share India's lessons in development with other developing countries, continues to remain an important pillar of Indian development cooperation programme. Currently, about 98 Indian institutions run training courses in fields such as agriculture, food and fertiliser, engineering and technology, and environment and climate change. In addition to civilian training programmes, ITEC also conducts and oversees defence training programmes, study tours, aid for disaster relief, the deputation of Indian experts abroad and project-based cooperation. Africa is a key beneficiary of the programme with nearly 50 percent of the ITEC slots reserved for countries from the region.

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India-Africa cooperation has also focused on technoeconomic capacity building. Skill development and capacity building featured prominently in all the India-Africa Forum Summits, and in a speech to the Ugandan parliament in 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi reiterated India's commitment to building African capacity: "Our development partnership will be guided by your priorities. It will be on terms that will be comfortable for you, that will liberate your potential and not constrain your future. We will rely on African talent and skills. We will build as much local capacity and create as many local opportunities as possible." (Chakrabarty, 2021)

Information technology (IT) is an important pillar of India's technical cooperation with Africa, given the role of the information and communication technology (ICT) sector in India's growth story and the importance most African leaders attach to ICT sector development. The Pan African e-Network, launched in 2009, was a ground breaking initiative to extend Indian expertise in IT to provide better healthcare and education facilities in 53 African countries. The second phase of this programme, e-VidyaBharti and e-ArogyaBharti (e-VBAB), was started in 2018, with an aim to provide free tele-education to 4,000 African students each year for five years and continuing medical education for 1000 African doctors, paramedical staff, and nurses. The programme is fully funded by the Indian government and is web-based, so any Indian university qualified to offer online education can do so for African students.

India's scholarship programme also grew rapidly. At the third India-Africa Forum Summit in 2015, India pledged to provide 50,000 scholarships to African students over a five-year period and set up institutions of higher learning in Africa. Over 42,000 scholarship slots have already been utilised in the last five years.

Working Jointly on Global Platforms

India and Africa have often held common positions on global platforms and worked together to guard the interests of other developing countries. They have moved joint

proposals, such as the Agricultural Framework Proposal and Protection of Geographical Indications, at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and World Intellectual Property Organisation, and have worked towards protecting the food and livelihood concerns of farmers at the Doha Development Round of WTO negotiations. The 'Framework for Strategic Cooperation,' the outcome document of the Third India-Africa Forum Summit, also mentions that India and Africa will "enhance cooperation through training and collective negotiations on global trade issues, including at the WTO to protect and promote the legitimate interests of developing countries, especially the LDCs [least developed countries]". India and South Africa are also currently pressing for a waiver of certain provisions of the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights for COVID-19 treatment and vaccines.

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India and Africa have also coordinated responses in climate action negotiations. Nearly half of all member countries in the International Solar Alliance, initiated by India, are from Africa. India has announced an LoC worth US\$ 2 billion to Africa over five years for the implementation of off-grid solar energy projects and is working to develop solar power systems across the Sahel region to provide electricity to approximately half of the 600 million Africans who are currently off-grid.

Prime Minister Modi's Visit to Rwanda, Uganda and South Africa in July 2018

Prime Minister Modi's visit to three African countries in July 2018 should be seen in the larger context of the remarkable outreach to that continent. The importance of these visits cannot be overstated. Today's international diplomacy largely follows a top-down model where the agenda is set at the highest level. A greater understanding of each other's priorities has helped in fine-tuning our Development Partnership Programs. They also provide an opportunity to monitor ongoing projects and to initiate new ones.

Modi's first port of call was Rwanda. It is historic because this is the first ever visit by an Indian Prime Minister. The small East African country has come a long way after the tragic genocide in the mid-1990s. Today, Rwanda is looked upon as a gateway to the East African market. Its business friendly policies have attracted impressive foreign investments. Rwanda has received US\$ 400 million as Lines of Credit (LOCs) in the last few years. Many Rwandans have also benefitted from India's training and scholarship programs. The importance of the bilateral relations is borne out by the fact that in January 2017, the two countries elevated their ties to the level of a Strategic Partnership. During the visit, Modi announced two more LOCs: US\$ 100 million for industrial parks and a similar amount for agriculture and irrigation. Considering the importance of animal husbandry in that country, Modi gifted 200 cows to a farm in Rwanda. This was a contribution to Kagame's Girinka Program (one cow per poor family).

Modi's visit to Uganda in July 2018 was one by an Indian Prime Minister after 21 years. Over the years, defence cooperation, particularly training and capacity building has attained great significance. There is an Indian military training team in Jinja since 2010. This cooperation is to be enhanced further. Two new LOCs were also announced: one for US\$141 million in the power distribution sector and one of US\$ 64 million for agriculture and dairy production. (State Visit of Prime Minister to Rwanda, Uganda and South Africa, 2018)

The visit to South Africa was in the context of the 10th BRICS Summit. PM had an official bilateral visit to that country earlier in 2016 when he also went to Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique. From the very first Summit in Yekaterinburg (Russia) in 2010, India has taken a major role in shaping the group which has evolved into something much bigger and more influential

India has also aided African countries amid crises, including during the COVID-19 pandemic. India has provided 270 metric tonnes of food aid (155 metric tonnes of wheat flour, 65 metric tonnes of rice, and 50 metric tonnes of sugar) to Sudan, South Sudan, Djibouti and Eritrea, and supplied essential medicines (including hydroxychloroquine and paracetamol) to over 25 African countries. The Indian government also organised an e-ITEC training course for healthcare professionals on COVID-19 prevention and management protocols. And even as developed countries have focussed on securing large vaccine supplies for their own populations, India is being hailed for its vaccine diplomacy — it has exported over 1.6 crore doses of vaccines globally, of which about 62.7 lakh doses (or about 37 percent) are as grant assistance. Mauritius and Seychelles have received 1 lakh doses and 50,000 doses, respectively, via the grant route.

African countries, with their long coastlines along the Indian Ocean, do have a significant role to play when it comes to the Indo-Pacific region as well as augmenting India's strategy with respect to maritime security. These African nations form a critical part of India's Indo-Pacific strategy with the country having signed multiple defence, trade and shipping agreements over the last few years. With the growing Chinese interferences in the Indo Pacific waters, popularly known as the 'Necklace of Diamonds strategy', it becomes imperative for India to develop close coordination with coastal African nations loosely based on the coordination mechanism that it has employed with Australia and Japan as well.

In the past 15 years, India has managed to up the ante by extending concessional lines of credit, grants, loans and developing other capacity-building initiatives in the African region. However, unlike similar lines of credit that are offered by the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank, the ones that India offers are not subject to any conditionalities. Further, these are not opaque or full of secret clauses aimed at trapping countries in a debt loop like the concessional loans offered by China. Essentially, these are by far the most transparent, consultative, non-conditional, demand-driven lines of credit that can be offered by one country to another. In fact, through this mechanism, in

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the past two decades, India has managed to successfully extend around \$10 billion in concessions to the region as well as contribute \$300 million in university scholarships granted to African students.

In addition to the above, there is the ever-growing trade and investment relationship that India shares with the region. From a decent \$52 billion, the trade has grown at a rapid pace of 29.5% to reach \$68 billion in the last one decade alone. In the same period between the years 2010-11 and 2019-20, African exports to India have increased by around \$5 billion signalling the establishment of a new market for African goods in the country. In a short period of time, every 1 in 10 goods reaching Africa from outside has begun to come from India. Therefore, despite the snail paced start, India has managed to become the eighth-largest investor in Africa through its public and private sector ventures.

Further, multiple successful digital tech-driven companies have managed to gain a strong foothold in the region as well. Recently, after the Nigerian government banned Twitter, an Indian micro blogging network start-up – Koo – managed to gain significant following and an active user base in that nation. In fact, the Nigerian government officially joined the network with local African languages being added to the platform. Spreading its wings beyond India, this sudden surge in Koo's user base also led to marquee investors joining the firm leading to a five-fold jump in its valuation to \$100 million in just a few months of its existence.

Against this background, it is pertinent to mention that India is still only one among the long list of development partners that are looking to engage constructively with Africa. By far, China has emerged as the leading trade and investment partner for the African countries. With Africa's Agenda 2063, India's alignment is strongly focused on developmental goals and setting the growth agenda for the next five decades of the century. Essentially, India's focus has been on human resource development, education, healthcare and information technology. However, China's focus has been on expanding the manufacturing capacity and extracting natural resources from the African nations to suit its own interests.

In a classic case of neo-imperialism, the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative being pursued by China is driven to connect itself with the trade markets of Europe. But gradually, it has taken the shape of a debt trap mechanism by virtue of which China takes control of the infrastructure that it has helped develop and then turn it into a military base.

It is suspected that with the huge economic resources it has pumped into Africa, the region could easily be China's next target for vested interests. Most Chinese firms in Africa are often accused of predominantly employing Chinese workers and offering little or no training /skill development programmes for their African employees. While large-scale infrastructure projects may well be the future, they cannot have the desired effects if no locally-sourced talents are trained or if local production is not suitably encouraged.

Therefore, most of these projects run the risk of turning into unviable, debt inducing projects, sooner than later just like the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka.

Interestingly, though the politico-economic model that China offers seems attractive to Africans, public support for democracy and community-driven partnerships that India offers is rated much higher by African nationals in most psephologically-driven studies. From the outset, Indian firms have relied more upon local talent and not just local raw materials. In fact, India could gain a lot more from projecting its own model as being vastly different from the one that China has to offer. Unlike China, India also possesses the additional advantage of having a shared history of colonial subjugation as well as cultural proximity that has emerged out of centuries of imperialism. Further, India is blessed with a thriving 3 million-strong Indian Diaspora in Africa that has the power to bridge the gap between distant geographies. (Kurzydowski, 2020)

It is certain that the guiding principles for India would be to engage in partnerships which are inclusive, people-centric, sustainable, transparent and driven by African needs and priorities as elaborated by the Prime Minister of India in his address to the Ugandan Parliament in July 2018. With this vision, it is hoped that an enriching partnership model is sustained that would prove beneficial to both partners with gains meant for the common citizens.

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