India-Africa: Reinforcing partnerships

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Discussing a partnership between India, a country, and Africa, a continent of 54 countries, may sound asymmetrical. Still, two factors justify doing so: empathy and support for Africa in India are matched by admiration and respect that most Africans feel for India's success as the world's largest democracy and the fastest-growing large economy. Each, home to 1.4 billion people, can help the other secure its vision of good governance and prosperity. Hence, the evolution of the partnership between India and Africa in the 2020s is a subject of global interest.

India-Africa partnership needs to be assessed in its four vital dimensions: multilateral, continental, regional, and bilateral.

First, the multilateral dimension begins with the UN, where, for decades, India and Africa have collaborated fruitfully to pursue shared goals, including decolonization, economic development, peacekeeping, and UN reform. Even today, India participates in the UN's peacekeeping operations in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), South Sudan, the Central African Republic (CAR), and Western Sahara. In an age when multilateralism is under severe stress, the two sides continue to coordinate to keep UN reform, particularly of the Security Council, on the agenda. Global issues such as assistance to Africa for development, debt relief, a just energy transition, and inclusive growth are supported through proactive Indian diplomacy.

A significant contribution by India was its firm leadership, as the G20 president in 2022–23, in ensuring that Africa's long-pending request for full G20 membership for the African Union (AU) was accepted. In addition, when BRICS undertook its first expansion, India had the privilege of supporting the entry of Egypt and Ethiopia into this influential forum.

Second, the continental dimension assumed greater substance with the launch of the India-Africa Forum Summit in 2008. Two more summits were held in 2011 and 2015. It was decided that the fourth summit would take place in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic and other factors prevented this, but now official indications suggest that the next summit may be held sometime during 2026. It is about time, because geopolitics has been changing rapidly to the detriment of the interests of the Global

South. India, as 'the voice' of the Global South and Africa, as the heart of the Global South, must create an opportunity for a candid and comprehensive dialogue with a view to developing a mutually acceptable strategy for their shared goals.

Third, the regional dimension of India-Africa partnership refers to India's past efforts to cultivate cooperative ties with select Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to diversify and deepen economic cooperation. These were pushed by apex Indian business chambers, such as the CII and FICCI, through their periodic interactions with EAC, COMESA, and SADC. Fresh momentum needs to be created by providing political leadership to such business initiatives. Experts believe that selected RECs remain useful platforms for increasing trade, investment, and collaboration in critical minerals and for introducing digital technologies into Africa.

Fourth, the bilateral channel for consolidating relations between India and African countries remains the most important. Keeping this in view, the vastness of the continent, and the substantial number of countries involved, India opened 18 new Embassies on the continent in recent years. They are now operational, connecting Indian authorities, businesses, think tanks, and others with their counterparts in Africa.

Political and diplomatic dialogue has been conducted through an ongoing exchange of high-level visits. This was resumed after a three-year hiatus caused by COVID-19. A total of 12 VVIP visits were arranged by the Indian side during 2022–25, during which the country's President, Vice President, or Prime Minister held discussions with leaders of 17 African countries. The list demonstrated that India's interests extended to the West, North, and the Horn of Africa, even as it maintained its traditional diplomatic outreach in Eastern and Southern Africa.

In addition, when it came to helping cope with the Covid pandemic, India was found at the forefront, supplying vaccines, medicines, and medical equipment to nations in all parts of Africa. This contrasted with the regrettable practice of certain Western countries, which saw their surplus vaccine stocks lying idle, rather than being shared with African people when they needed them most.

Two areas of this partnership require particular attention. One, trade and economic cooperation are the top priority for both sides. India's trade with Africa was estimated at $103 billion in FY2025. New Delhi has set the target to raise it to $200 billion by 2030. India's cumulative investment of $80 billion in Africa also needs to

be increased and diversified. For this purpose, a practical roadmap is required from business leaders and governments.

The other area is of soft power – culture, education, skill development, and thought leadership provided by universities, think tanks, media, and NGOs. A concerted plan must be devised to enhance interactions at the level of the people. A total of 2.8 billion people deserve to know and relate to each other far better than they do today.

The multi-dimensional India-Africa partnership has a promising future. Still, the leading actors in both regions need to devote more time, attention, and financial resources to advancing it to the next level.

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