

India-Africa Relations

Mains: GS – II – Bilateral relations - Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

Why in news?

In 2015, New Delhi hosted the India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS-III), which was a moment of significance, now India must "connect, build and revive" its partnership with Africa by strengthening finance, digital cooperation, and institutional mechanisms.

What is the historical progress of India-Africa ties?

- Civilizational links India-Africa relations date back millennia, with trade between the *Indus Valley Civilization and African civilizations*.
- During colonial times, Indian indentured laborers (girmitiyas) in Africa strengthened socio-cultural connections.
- **Political relations** It was started when *M.K.Gandhi* started his political career during colonization in South Africa.
- Further shaped through common experiences of colonialism, solidarity in the **Non- Aligned movement** and in forms of developmental diplomacy.
- India supported African liberation movements, especially in Namibia and South Africa, promoting South-South cooperation.
- **Diplomatic Expansion** Now, India has established 17 new missions across Africa, strengthening its diplomatic footprint.

What are the key areas of cooperation between India and Africa?

- **Economic Relations** India-Africa trade touched \$98 billion in FY22–23 which is a positive economic development.
 - \circ Bilateral trade crossed \$100 billion, making India one of Africa's top five trading partners.
 - India is among *Africa's top five investors*, with \$75 billion in cumulative investments.
 - \circ India is Africa's $\underline{\textbf{3}^{rd}\ largest\ export\ destination}}.$
 - \circ Exports to Africa Refined petroleum, pharmaceuticals, automobiles, machinery, textiles.
 - Imports from Africa Crude oil, gold, coal, pulses, cashew, and other raw materials.
- Financial collaboration India's Exim Bank recently extended a \$40 million commercial credit line to the Economic Community of West African States

(ECOWAS) Bank for Investment and Development (EBID).

- Maritime cooperation In April 2025, 1st Africa-India Key Maritime Engagement (AIKEYME) was held, between India and 9 African navies.
- India-Africa Defence Dialogue was held in the sidelines of DefExpo 2022 in Gandhinagar, Gujarat.
- Military exercises includes AFINDEX 2023, anti-piracy patrols, maritime vision via SAGAR and MAHASAGAR initiatives.
- Cultural relations <u>Project 'Mausam'</u> is an initiative of Ministry of Culture, to explore the multi-faceted Indian Ocean 'world' and promote research related to maritime routes.
 - About 39 Indian Ocean countries selected for this project which contains African countries like Egypt, Kenya, Sudan, Somalia etc.,
- Education & Health Africa is one of the beneficiaries of India's flagship capacity building program Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC).
 - As per National Education Policy 2020 guidelines, <u>1st IIT (Madras) Campus at</u> **Zanzibar, Tanzania**.
 - India supplied 'Made in India' COVID vaccines to 42 African countries under "One Earth One Health Mission".
- **Technology** Pan-African e-Network and e-VBAB projects offer tele-education and telemedicine services.
 - Promoting India Stack (UPI, Aadhaar, DigiLocker) in Africa to support financial inclusion and e-governance.
 - Some cities like Kigali (Rwanda), Nairobi (Kenya) and Lagos (Nigeria), African innovation ecosystems are growing, but the competition is global.
- Institutional Frameworks Africa is shaping its own terms through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), aiming for a unified continental market.
 - **IAFS** the key platform for economic diplomacy; last held in 2015, in New Delhi welcomed representatives from all 54 African states.

IAFS is the official platform for the African Indian relations which is held once in every 3 years since 2008, that enhances relations and cooperation between India and African nations.

- Energy Cooperation African nations partner with India under the <u>International</u> <u>Solar Alliance</u>, while collaborations in green hydrogen, EV ecosystems and blue economy corridors gain traction.
 - Indian firms like ONGC Videsh and Oil India invest in Mozambique, Nigeria, Sudan.
- **Push for global representation** Beyond that, India continues to push for African representation in global institutions and contributes to United Nations peacekeeping missions on the continent.
 - Example: India's push for membership for African Union in the *G-20*.

- **Demography** By 2050, one in four people on earth will be in Africa (Africa will host 25% of the global population); India will be the world's 3rd largest economy.
- This creates a potential growth corridor of commerce, demography, and technology.
- **Evolving engagement model** Shift from aid to co-development (Build together) ports, power lines, vaccines, digital tools.
- **Human Capital** India's most enduring export to Africa is not technology, it is human resource.
 - Nearly, 40,000 African students trained in India in the past decade, now lead in policy, innovation, and governance across Africa.
- **Growing consumer base** Africa's rapidly urbanizing population presents a large market for major Indian sectors like IT, banking, financial services, and mobile payment solutions.

What are the challenges in India - Africa relations?

- China's dominance India's trade with Africa is growing, but it still lags behind China.
- **Slow execution of projects** Indian firms face bureaucratic hurdles, limited capital, logistics issue, political unrest, etc.
- Loss of institutional momentum No IAFS meeting since 2015 has diluted institutional continuity.
- **Focus Diversion** India's strategic focus on the Indo-Pacific and strengthening ties with Western powers sometimes diverts attention from Africa.
- **Geopolitical challenges** Political instability and maritime insecurity in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) hinder investment and long-term project viability.

What are the moves India must undertake to sustain its thrust in Africa?

- **Connect finance to outcomes** Ensure every line of credit must lead to delivers visible impact; public finance must de-risk, rather than displacing private capital.
- **Build a digital corridor** This collaboration should leverage not just UPI and India Stack, but also Africa's own digital capabilities, so that we can co-develop platforms for health, education, and payments that serve the Global South.
- **Move up the value chain** Both must co-investing in future-facing sectors green hydrogen, electric mobility and digital infrastructure.
- Revive institutional dialogue Reconvene IAFS to renew diplomatic momentum.

References

- 1. The Hindu | India needs to 'connect, build and revive' with Africa
- 2. Embassy of India | India-Africa Connect

