

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.
 - 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.
 - India is Africa's **3rd largest export destination**.
 - 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 - Project 'Mausam'** 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, **1st IIT (Madras) Campus at 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 **International Solar Alliance**, 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**.

What are the opportunities in India - Africa relations?

- **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](#)