Redefining India-Africa Relations

What is the issue?

- There is growing potential for India-Africa relations and growing threat given the Chinese increasing engagement in Africa.
- In this light, the future of India-Africa cooperation in agriculture is important, even as there is increasing Chinese presence.

Why is India-Africa relations gaining significance?

- The India-Africa relations gains more significance in the post-pandemic world.
- It is now vital to prioritise and channel resources into augmenting partnership in agriculture.
- This is crucial given the unexplored potential, centrality to global food security, and business prospects in the sector.
- Above all, it will provide credible alternatives to the increasing involvement of Chinese stakeholders.

How is China's engagement in Africa evolving?

- Today, China is among Africa's largest trading partners and is also the single biggest creditor.
- Chinese corporations dominate the region's infrastructure market.
- Chinese-built industrial parks and economic zones in Africa are attracting low-cost, labour-intensive manufacturing units.
- These are relocating there from China.
- They are willing to overlook short-term profits in order to build 'brand China.'
- In the long term, they also want to dominate the market which includes pushing Chinese standards in host countries.

How about Chinese presence in the agriculture sector?

- The nature and form of Chinese entities that were active in Africa's agricultural landscape for decades now have undergone substantial change.
- The Chinese corporations are now entering the agri-infra sector.
- Chinese firms have set up over 20 Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centers (ATDCS) in Africa.

- Here, the Chinese agronomists work on developing new crop varieties and increasing crop yields.
- Furthermore, African agriculture experts, officials and farmers are provided opportunities to augment skills and be trained in China.
- With all these, China's engagement in African agriculture is now taking on a strategic quality.

What are the shortfalls though?

- The Chinese and African experts working in ATDCs seemingly operate in silos.
- On occasion, there seems to be a gap between skills transferred in China and the ground realities in Africa.
- In some cases, the technology taught in China is not available locally.
- Larger commercial farms run by Mandarin-speaking managers and the presence of small-scale Chinese farmers in local markets aggravates socio-cultural stresses.

How is India's engagement at present?

- New Delhi's engagement with the African continent has been multifaceted.
- They include projects implemented under Indian lines of credit, capacity-building initiatives, and cooperation in a range of sectors.
- With import of fruits, nuts, grains and pulses from Africa, Indian congruence with African countries in the agriculture sector is expanding.
- India-Africa agricultural cooperation currently includes institutional and individual capacity-building initiatives such as -
    i. the India-Africa Institute of Agriculture and Rural development in Malawi
    ii. extension of soft loans, supply of machinery, acquisition of farmlands
    iii. presence of Indian entrepreneurs in the African agricultural ecosystem
- At sub-national level, Kerala government is trying to meet its raw cashew nuts requirement with imports from Africa to complement its production capacity.
- There are also proposals to create a jointly-owned brand of Africa-Kollam cashews.

What lies ahead for India?

- Beijing is emerging as an alternate to traditional western powers in Africa.
- This calls for a renewed approach by other nations.
- India cannot ignore the socio-political, economic and environmental impact of Chinese engagement in Africa.

- Ideas similar to Kerala's engagement could encourage State governments and civil society organisations to identify opportunities and invest directly.
- Indian industries can be incentivised to tap into African agri-business value chains.
- A thorough impact assessment needs to be conducted of the existing capacity-building initiatives in agriculture.
- Country-specific and localised curriculum can be drawn up, making skill development demand-led.
- In all, it is pertinent to craft a unique modern partnership with Africa.

Source: The Hindu

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