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THE AFRICA-INDIA BLUEPRINT FOR GROWTH

EDITED BY
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The Africa–India Blueprint for Growth

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The AUDA-NEPAD Africa Policy Bridge Tank (APBT) is a continental knowledge-to-policy platform designed to strengthen the interface between African research institutions and decision-makers. It convenes think tanks, academia, policymakers, and practitioners to co-produce evidence-based, policy-relevant insights aligned with Agenda 2063. Anchored in the African Union's development mandate, the APBT advances strategic foresight, systems thinking, and inclusive dialogue to inform national, regional, and continental policy processes. By fostering South–South cooperation and amplifying African perspectives, the Africa Policy Bridge Tank supports Africa's agency in global governance and multilateral decision-making.

Designed by Mukesh Rawat

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Introduction

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The global system is undergoing a profound structural transition. An increasingly fragmented and contested global order is redefining how countries cooperate, compete, and articulate their development pathways. Across the Global South, nations are searching for new frameworks, tools, and narratives to shape an alternative and more equitable paradigm of growth. In this context, the Africa–India partnership stands out as both historic and forward-looking. Rooted in shared political solidarities and deep economic complementarities, these dynamic regions are entering a new era of sustainable and mutually beneficial cooperation. Yet despite the depth and longevity of this relationship, a critical knowledge asymmetry persists: policymakers, private sector actors, and scholars often lack a consolidated body of insights, evidence, and innovative models to guide a fit-for-purpose Africa–India partnership.

To help bridge this gap, in January 2025 the Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP), and the African Union Development Agency-NEPAD (AUDA-NEPAD) Economic Analysis and Foresight Unit launched **The Africa–India Global Dialogue Series**, a monthly webinar designed to convene fresh perspectives from both regions. Across 10 episodes, over 30 African, Indian, and global experts explored themes spanning geopolitics, digital innovation and critical minerals, to health systems, energy transitions, infrastructure, agriculture, and the creative economies shaping a new cultural imagination.

Recognising that the dialogue marked only a starting point, and that the moment demands greater ambition, the initiative expanded into the creation of a comprehensive, idea-rich report: 32 policy briefs authored by leading experts and scholars offering policymakers a coherent suite of actionable options to advance the partnership. The report distils its insights across four interlinked themes: Geopolitics and Security; Green Growth and Just Transitions; Economic Diplomacy and Digital Futures; and Health and Human Capital, highlighting cross-cutting opportunities for collaboration and innovation. Authors were asked to use a “problem → evidence → policy options” approach, writing to advise policymakers. This method anchors each contribution in applied problem-solving rather than abstract analysis, ensuring relevance across diverse policy and institutional contexts. The format is intentionally non-uniform: some pieces cite sources, others draw on experience or specific cases. All, however, aim to deliver actionable, evidence-informed knowledge and insights.

The first section, titled “**Strategic Partnerships in a Changing World,**” examines how India–Africa relations must be strategically recalibrated amid intensifying geopolitical competition and global disorder. Contributors emphasise the need for strategic clarity, normative purpose, and mutual agency. Together, these contributions argue for moving beyond transactional engagement toward a partnership grounded in shared strategic imagination and political intent.

Sanusha Naidu highlights Africa’s constrained but real agency, urging India to treat African partners as co-architects. Jabin T. Jacob stresses a clearer normative purpose to guide India’s engagement, while Constantino Xavier proposes framing ties as an Indo-Atlantic partnership, embedding Africa within India’s oceanic strategic imagination. Rajiv Bhatia underscores that global polycrises have sidelined Africa, calling for renewed political attention and a comprehensive strategy to restore momentum.

Multilateral coordination emerges as a critical source of strategic leverage. Mandira Bagwande and Riaan Dhankhar argue that India and African states should act as a coordinated coalition at the United Nations (UN) to advance meaningful United Nations Security Council (UNSC) reform, while Sarang Shidore extends this logic to Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS), urging focus on delivery in climate resilience, global health, and multilateral reform. The section also stresses operationalising security and maritime cooperation. Abhishek Mishra and Ovigwe Eguegu call for shifting from episodic defence engagement toward sustained capacity building, technology transfer, and co-production. Complementing this, Harsh V. Pant and Samir Bhattacharya advocate transforming maritime cooperation in the Western Indian Ocean into an institutionalised, capability-driven governance framework.

The second section, titled “**Green Growth and Just Transitions,**” examines how Africa–India cooperation can advance a clean-energy future that is both economically transformative and socially inclusive. Africa’s rich endowment of critical minerals, essential for renewable technologies, can complement India’s strengths in manufacturing, finance, and technology, enabling green-industrial value chains, if underpinned by deliberate policy coordination and investment alignment. Scholars such as Lethabo Sithole and Divyam Nagpal with Darryn Allan, argue that coordinated strategies, including infrastructure development, skills transfer, policy exchange, and joint investment, can move both regions beyond raw resource exports toward shared prosperity while advancing the Global South agenda.

Equally critical is ensuring a just and inclusive transition. Mutuso Dhliwayo, Michelle N Chitando and Hillary T Mugota emphasise community-driven energy partnerships that prioritise women and marginalised groups, avoiding top-down approaches that reproduce energy poverty. Rahul Tongia and Prudence Lihabi point to transferable lessons from India’s electrification experience and integrated energy planning to guide locally tailored, financially sustainable, and well-sequenced rollouts. Grace Chileshe adds that decentralised access, smart grids, cross-border power trade, and climate-resilient infrastructure can embed equity and resilience into the transition. Together, these perspectives show that Africa–India cooperation can combine industrial opportunity, governance, and social inclusion to deliver a green-energy transition that is both economically robust and just.

The third section, titled “**Economic Diplomacy and Digital Futures,**” highlights how India–Africa cooperation can advance inclusive, resilient growth by combining infrastructure, investment, finance, and digital innovation. A central theme is leveraging and expanding development engagement. Sushmita Rajwar stresses that India’s infrastructure projects should be intentionally aligned with Africa’s regional integration agenda, using Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to translate connectivity into trade, value chains, and productive assets. Building on this, David Rasquinha argues the next phase of cooperation, should supplement hard infrastructure with soft infrastructure, including institution-building, capacity development, and mechanisms to channel private investment into African economies. On the other hand, Aude Darnal urges African leaders to urgently explore innovative investment models that support local social enterprises, building skills, knowledge, and businesses for homegrown development. Amit Jain and Udaibir S. Das, meanwhile, add that deeper African capital markets and balance-sheet-resilient financing are key to mobilising domestic resources and ensuring inflows strengthen rather than destabilise local economies. Abdoukadre Ado highlights agricultural joint ventures to boost local value chains, while Gurjit Singh advocates an FDI-first strategy with blended finance, Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs), and stronger follow-through aligned with African priorities.

On digital and technology-driven inclusion, Pria Chetty and Scott Timcke stress foundational digital public infrastructure (DPI) and data governance to enable locally relevant artificial intelligence (AI) and digital trade under AfCFTA. Laveesh Bhandari emphasises interoperable, mobile-first ecosystems to expand opportunity and lower transaction costs, while Karthik Sastry cautions that technology must be context-appropriate, advocating homegrown Research and Development (R&D) over imported solutions. Yash Kalash highlights that central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) offer India and Africa a chance to address financial exclusion, reduce reliance on costly systems, and assert a Global South voice in digital finance. Together, these approaches integrate infrastructure, investment, and digital innovation for a new era of Africa–India partnership.

The final section, titled “**Health and Human Capital,**” highlights how India–Africa cooperation can strengthen systems, skills, and institutions to advance human development and sustainable capacity. A key theme is institutionalised knowledge and education cooperation. Lina Benabdallah emphasises that knowledge cooperation must move beyond ad-hoc exchanges toward recurring, co-produced research linking universities, think tanks, and civil society to policymaking. Nivedita Ray and Unami Dube with Kipkirui Langat stress the importance of targeted, scalable education and workforce initiatives, from digital learning and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) to teacher training and employer-linked apprenticeships, adapted to African labour markets, to convert demographic potential into employable skills by 2030.

Another major theme is health systems strengthening and health sovereignty as a strategic capability rather than a purely sectoral goal. Njabulo Mbanda argues for framing India–Africa health cooperation as global health diplomacy, prioritising Universal Health Coverage (UHC) financing, data systems, and local pharmaceutical capacity. Desta Lakew highlights the need to build “health sovereignty” through domestic financing, programmatic ownership, and community-led primary care and integrated mental health models. Sandhya Venkateswaran emphasises institutionalising practical learning, joint R&D and manufacturing, digital health architecture, and coordinated advocacy to amplify a Global South voice in health governance. Collectively, these perspectives underline that durable India–Africa partnerships in health and human capital require systemic, coordinated, and people-centred approaches to education, workforce development, and health systems.

This report reflects the significance of bringing together 39 scholars from around the world to deliberate on Africa–India cooperation. By combining diverse perspectives, disciplines, and experiences, the exercise fosters innovative ideas, cross-pollination, and forward-looking solutions that a single viewpoint could not produce, demonstrating the value of collaborative, policy-oriented scholarship in shaping real-world decision-making. Its objective is clear: turn a shared vision into a sustainable blueprint for impact, strengthening one of the world’s most consequential South–South partnerships at a decisive moment in global affairs.

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Abbreviations

AAGC	Asia–Africa Growth Corridor
ABDM	Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission
ABHA	Ayushman Bharat Health Account
AELP	African Exchanges Linkage Project
AFC	Africa Finance Corporation
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
AfDB	African Development Bank
AfINDEX	Africa–India Field Training Exercise
AFREC	African Energy Commission
Afreximbank	African Export–Import Bank
Africa CDC	Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention
AfSEM	African Single Electricity Market
AGII	Africa Green Industrialisation Initiative
AGMS	African Green Minerals Strategy
AGRA	Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa
AHS	African Health Strategy
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AICMC	Africa–India Critical Minerals Council
AIKEYME	Africa–India Key Maritime Engagement
AMA	Africa Medicines Agency
AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
AMLEP	Africa Maritime Law Enforcement Partnership
AMREC	African Mineral and Energy Resources Classification and Management System
AMU	Arab Maghreb Union
AMV	African Mining Vision
APRA	Accelerated Partnership for Renewables in Africa
APSA	African Peace and Security Architecture
ASCENT	Accelerating Sustainable and Clean Energy Access Transformation
ASF	African Standby Force
ASHA	Accredited Social Health Activist
ATMIS	African Union Transition Mission in Somalia
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
AUDA-NEPAD	African Union Development Agency–New Partnership for Africa’s Development
AUDPF	African Union Data Policy Framework
AUKUS	Australia, United Kingdom, and United States
AURRI	African Union Rice Research Institute
B2B	Business-to-business
BIS	Bank for International Settlements

BIT	Bilateral Investment Treaty
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
BSE	Bombay Stock Exchange
CAADP	Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme
CAWEP	Climate Adaptation Water and Energy Infrastructure Programme
CBDC	Central Bank Digital Currency
CDC	US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CDSCO	Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation
CEN-SAD	Community of Sahel–Saharan States
CGTN	China Global Television Network
CHW	Community Health Worker
CII	Confederation of Indian Industry
CMP	Continental Power System Master Plan
CNY	Chinese Yuan
CO2eq	Carbon Dioxide Equivalent
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
CRI	China Radio International
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CTVET	African Continental TVET Strategy
DES	Decentralised Energy System
DICON	Defence Industries Corporation of Nigeria
DPI	Digital Public Infrastructure
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DRE	Distributed Renewable Energy
DTAA	Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement
EaaS	Energy-as-a-Service
EAC	East African Community
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
e-KYC	Electronic Know Your Customer
Embrapa	Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation
EPC	Engineering, Procurement, and Construction
ESG	Environmental, Social, and Governance
EU	European Union
EV	Electric Vehicle
EXIM Bank	Export–Import Bank of India
FARA	Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FII	Foreign Institutional Investor
FIIA	Finnish Institute of International Affairs
FOCAC	Forum on China–Africa Cooperation

G4	Group of Four
G20	Group of Twenty
G77	Group of 77
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
GOI	Government of India
GSI	Geological Survey of India
GW	Gigawatt
GWh	Gigawatt Hour
HAL	Hindustan Aeronautics Limited
HIMS	Health Information Management Systems
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HMIS	Health Management Information System
HRD	Human Resource Development
HSS	Health Systems Strengthening
IADMC	India–Africa Defence Ministers Conclave
IAFS	India–Africa Forum Summit
IARDF	India–Africa Rice Development Fund
IARF	India–Africa Rice Forum
IBSA	India–Brazil–South Africa
ICAR	Indian Council of Agricultural Research
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICCR	Indian Council for Cultural Relations
ICRA	Investment Information and Credit Rating Agency of India Limited
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ICWA	Indian Council of World Affairs
iDEX	Innovations for Defence Excellence
IDI	India Development Initiative
IEA	International Energy Agency
IEP	Integrated Energy Policy
IFC-IOR	Information Fusion Centre–Indian Ocean Region
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
IGN	Intergovernmental Negotiations
IHIP	Integrated Health Information Platform
IIIT	Indian Institutes of Information Technology
IISS	The International Institute for Strategic Studies
IIT	Indian Institute of Technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMEC	India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor
IMF	International Monetary Fund

IMPRI	Impact and Policy Research Institute
IMT-TRILAT	India–Mozambique–Tanzania Trilateral Exercise
India Exim	Export–Import Bank of India
INEP	Integrated National Energy Planning
INR	Indian Rupee
IOC	Indian Ocean Commission
IOR	Indian Ocean Region
IORA	Indian Ocean Rim Association
IP	Intellectual Property
IPEF	Indo-Pacific Economic Framework
IPOI	Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative
IRENA	International Renewable Energy Agency
ISA	International Solar Alliance
IT	Information Technology
ITEC	Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation
KABIL	Khanij Bidesh India Ltd
KPI	Key Performance Index
kW	Kilowatt
kWh	Kilowatt-hour
KYC	Know Your Customer
LCA	Light Combat Aircraft
LDC	Least Developed Countries
LMIC	Lower- and Middle-Income Countries
LOC	Line of Credit
MAHASAGAR	Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions
MEA	Ministry of External Affairs
MHI	Ministry of Heavy Industries
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MNRE	Ministry of New and Renewable Energy
MPIA	Multi-Party Interim Appeal Arbitration Arrangement
MRO	Maintenance, Research, and Overhaul
MSME	Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises
MSP	Marine Spatial Planning (as in Chapter 9)
MSP	Minerals Security Partnership (as in Chapter 10)
NABARD	National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development
NaBFID	National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development
NAPCC	National Action Plan on Climate Change
NBER	National Bureau of Economic Research
NCD	Non-Communicable Disease
NCMM	National Critical Minerals Mission
NDB	New Development Bank
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution

NDTV	New Delhi Television
NEET	Not in Employment, Education, or Training
NeHA	National eHealth Authority
NEP	National Education Policy (as in Chapter 30)
NEP	National Energy Policy (as in Chapter 12)
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NFC	Near-Field Communication
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NHIS	National Health Insurance Scheme
NIIF	National Investment and Infrastructure Fund
NISHTHA	National Initiative for School Heads' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement
NITA	National Industrial Training Authority
NPCI	National Payments Corporation of India
NRDC	Natural Resources Defense Council
NREP	National Renewable Energy Policy
NSB	National Science Board
NSDC	National Skills Development Council
NSE	National Stock Exchange
O&M	Operations and Maintenance
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OEM	Original Equipment Manufacturer
ONDC	Open Network for Digital Commerce
P5	Permanent Five
PAeNP	Pan-African e-Network Project
PAPSS	Pan-African Payment and Settlement System
PARC	Pan-African Resource Reporting Code
PAYG	Pay-As-You-Go
PBoC	People's Bank of China
PEPFAR	US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
PHC	Primary Health Care
PIB	Press Information Bureau
PIDA	Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa
PLI	Production-Linked Incentive
PM	Prime Minister
PMJAY	Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana
PM-KUSUM	Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan
PPA	Power Purchase Agreement
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
PSU	Public Sector Undertaking
PTI	Press Trust of India

PV	Photovoltaic
QUAD	Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
R&D	Research and Development
RBI	Reserve Bank of India
REC	Regional Economic Community
RHIS	Routine Health Information System
RIS	Research and Information System for Developing Countries
RIVATEX	Rivatex East Africa Limited
RMB	Renminbi
RMNCAH	Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAGAR	Security and Growth for All in the Region
SAIS	School of Advanced International Studies
SAUBHAGYA	Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SDG 4	Sustainable Development Goal 4
SDG 7	Sustainable Development Goal 7
SEforALL	Sustainable Energy for All
SEWA	Self-Employed Women's Association
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
SI	Statutory Instrument
SIDBI	Small Industries Development Bank of India
SKD	Semi-Knocked Down
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
SMS	Short Message Service
SPV	Solar Photovoltaic
SSC	South-South Cooperation
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
STYIP	Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan
SWAYAM	Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds
TASL	Tata Advanced Systems Limited
TAZARA	Tanzania-Zambia Railway
TB	Tuberculosis
TDPF	Tanzania People's Defence Force
TICAD	Tokyo International Conference on African Development
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
TVETA	Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority
TW	Terawatt
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UHC	Universal Health Coverage
UK	United Kingdom

UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNISA	University of South Africa
UNPK	United Nations Peacekeeping
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNU-WIDER	United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research
UPI	Unified Payments Interface
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USSD	Unstructured Supplementary Service Data
UX	User Experience
VGF	Viability Gap Funding
VIF	Vivekananda International Foundation
WAME	World Access to Modern Energy
WhAP	Wheeled Armoured Platform
WHO	World Health Organization
WIO	Western Indian Ocean
WIOR	Western Indian Ocean Region
WTO	World Trade Organization
ZELO	Zimbabwe Environmental Law Organisation
ZERA	Zimbabwe Energy Regulatory Authority

Acknowledgements

This report marks both a continuation and a significant expansion of The Africa–India Global Dialogue Series, launched by the Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP) and the African Union Development Agency–New Partnership for Africa’s Development (AUDA-NEPAD) in January 2025, to convene new ideas on a rapidly shifting global order. Bringing a report of this scale to fruition depends on the commitment of many individuals and institutions, and we are grateful to all those who made it possible.

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We hope that the insights and analyses presented in this report not only herald the beginning of a meaningful and enduring collaboration between our institutions but also serve as a valuable resource for policymakers guiding the future of Africa–India partnerships.

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Foreword

The international order is evolving, demanding fresh approaches and renewed partnerships. The certainties that once underpinned international cooperation are being reshaped by geopolitical fragmentation, technological disruption, climate stress, and shifting economic power. These changes present both challenges and opportunities, offering Africa a chance to advance its development agenda while deepening collaboration with partners such as India, whose engagement is rooted in shared ambition, mutual respect, and co-creation. It is within this context that *The Africa–India Blueprint for Growth* makes its most timely and valuable contribution.

Africa's ambition is not abstract; it is being realised through continental platforms that reduce fragmentation and harness the power of scale: trade, infrastructure, standards, and institution-building. Initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), regional development corridors, and the African Union's Agenda 2063 all point toward a shared vision: an Africa that competes, manufactures, and innovates. For the continent, the challenge is accelerating growth while maintaining agency and ownership of our development trajectory. India emerges as a critical partner in this journey, bringing both the credibility of large-scale delivery and the practical experience of implementing solutions that are affordable, scalable, and suited to real-world conditions, including digital infrastructure, health, skills development, and frugal innovation.

What makes this partnership valuable is not merely India's presence, but the alignment of our interests. Both Africa and India are committed to a multilateral system that supports development, and both see the potential to move from transactional engagement to transformative collaboration. Together, we can co-produce capabilities, invest in value addition, and build the institutional foundations, payments, logistics, standards, and workforce pathways that ensure our partnerships are sustainable and durable. This is the kind of collaboration that will drive Africa's growth and position the continent as a competitive, innovative force in the global economy.

By convening over thirty leading scholars, practitioners, and policymakers from Africa, India, and beyond, this volume offers actionable pathways for strengthening cooperation across geopolitics and security, green growth and just transitions, economic diplomacy and digital futures, and health and human capital. The emphasis on a *problem–evidence–policy options* approach ensures that ideas are translated into concrete recommendations that can inform decision-making across governments, development institutions, and the private sector.

AUDA-NEPAD is proud to have partnered with the Centre for Social and Economic Progress to advance this collaboration and support *The Africa–India Global Dialogue Series* from which this report emerged. Knowledge platforms such as the Africa Policy Bridge Tank are essential for ensuring that research, dialogue, and policy implementation are meaningfully connected, particularly as Africa and India seek to position themselves as constructive leaders in a changing multilateral system.

This report is not an endpoint. It is an invitation to policymakers, investors, scholars, and citizens to engage more deeply, think more strategically, and act more boldly. The choices made in the coming years will shape not only the trajectory of Africa–India relations but also the broader contours of Global South cooperation in the decades ahead. It is my hope that *The Africa–India Blueprint for Growth* will serve as a trusted guide in that journey, translating shared vision into sustainable impact.

H.E. Mrs Nardos Bekele-Thomas

Chief Executive Officer
African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD)

President's Note: Africa, India, and the Global South Moment

This report arrives at a moment when the Global South is no longer a rhetorical category: it is a negotiating bloc, a market-maker, and, increasingly, a rule-shaper. Relationships once framed through assistance are increasingly being renegotiated as partnerships. The central question is no longer who helps whom, but who helps shape the terms on which growth, technology, finance, and climate action will be organised in the decades ahead. In this emerging landscape, Africa's partnership with India is not merely significant, it is strategically pivotal.

Africa is the world's largest reservoir of future workers, consumers, and political voice. With the continent projected to reach roughly 2.5 billion people by 2050, Africa will sit closer to the centre of global demand and global legitimacy than today's institutions and investment patterns still assume. For India, whose development strategy depends on scale, skills, manufacturing depth, and digital rails, that trajectory makes Africa the most consequential region for building a durable Global South growth compact.

The case, though, is not only about size; it is about structure. Africa is consolidating through continent-wide platforms like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), designed to convert fragmented markets into a more integrated commercial geography, one able to negotiate, standardise, and attract capital at scale. At the same time, Africa is asserting a more prominent role in global governance, from the AU's participation in the G20 to a growing influence in climate and finance deliberations. Together, these shifts raise the ceiling on what India–Africa cooperation can realistically achieve. This is not just about more trade, but deeper interoperability: rules, standards, and institutions that make partnerships durable, and opportunities for mutual learning.

The highest-stakes arena is the green and digital transition. Africa's critical minerals and India's capabilities in affordable technology, digital public infrastructure, and scaled implementation create a rare complementarity if it is used to build value, not merely extract it. The choice is stark: a new resource cycle that repeats old patterns, or a compact that moves up the value chain, skills, processing, manufacturing, and shared supply security, so African actors keep more value on the continent and India secures resilience through partnership rather than dependence.

This is the spirit in which *The Africa–India Blueprint for Growth* should be read: not as a catalogue of projects, but as an argument about strategic alignment. The volume brings together 32 policy briefs across four themes: geopolitics and security; green growth and just transitions; economic diplomacy and digital futures; and health and human capital, with contributors asked to translate problems into evidence and actionable options. The message is clear: Africa–India ties grow not through goodwill alone, but through practical, implementable ideas that reflect shared priorities and mutual expertise.

And that, ultimately, is why meaningful institutional partnerships matter. CSEP takes pleasure in partnering with AUDA-NEPAD, beginning with *The Africa–India Global Dialogue Series* and now expanding into this report, to create a space where African and Indian voices can co-produce, not merely exchange, ideas that will shape the next chapter of South–South cooperation. We hope this marks the beginning of an enduring collaboration, one that strengthens research-driven solutions, builds shared capacity, and advances inclusive development across Africa, India, and beyond.

This is also an opportune moment to note that the success of this partnership has, in part, inspired CSEP to institutionalise TARA (The Africa Research Alliance), a hub that brings African and Indian scholars together to generate evidence-based research and co-create practical solutions to complex challenges. Through TARA, we invite you to join us in advancing research-driven initiatives that turn insight into action and ideas into impact.

Dr. Laveesh Bhandari

President
Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP)



STRATEGIC
PARTNERSHIPS
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01

Africa's Assertion of Agency and the Reinvigoration of Engagement with India

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Introduction

Africa is no longer marginal in global politics; it has a significant role, even if its influence on rule-making appears less direct. Once viewed as a passive recipient in the post-Cold War landscape, Africa has been transforming itself into a crucial actor over the past two decades, redefining its developmental course, asserting agency in global governance, and reshaping international engagement with the continent. This transition has immense implications for Africa's partnerships within the Global South, particularly with India.

The history of solidarity between India and Africa is long, rooted in the anti-colonial struggle, the Non-Aligned Movement, and calls for a more equitable international system. However, while this shared history is often referenced, institutional frameworks frequently fail to foster momentum. What sets today apart is Africa's emerging new posture as a reliable development partner. The continent is no longer a junior partner; it is becoming a normative and strategic actor whose choices, demands, and innovations are changing how the terms of engagement are conducted.

Based on the aforementioned context, this essay argues that Africa's assertion of agency is pivotal for revitalising ties with India. By leveraging continental institutions, collective bargaining power, and its growing role in global governance, Africa can, through its partnership with India, transform the engagement into one that is reciprocal, future-focused, and strategically grounded. The challenge, and opportunity, lies in reimagining frameworks

like the India–Brazil–South Africa Dialogue Forum (IBSA), the India–Africa Forum Summit (IAFS), and the Asia–Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) to reflect Africa’s priorities and leadership.

Africa's Emerging Agency in Global Affairs

Africa’s growing agency is becoming more visible with interest in the continent’s political, economic, social, and demographic affairs. Inasmuch as the outsider perspective may still see the continent as a passive actor that remains marginal to global affairs, the view from within portrays a more positive outlook. This is characterised by four key developments:

- **Institutional empowerment:** The elevation of the African Union (AU) to permanent membership of the Group of Twenty (G20) in 2023, during India’s presidency of the G20, represents more than symbolic recognition; it marks Africa’s arrival at the decision-making table of global governance.
- **Economic integration:** The development of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) makes a significant stride towards economic integration, opening the continent to wider international trade. This initiative creates the world’s largest free trade zone and enhances Africa’s ability to negotiate with external partners from a position of collective strength.
- **Normative leadership:** This has become evident through the continent’s positioning on climate justice, debt restructuring, and equitable development finance. In this way, Africa is moving from being seen as a “problem region” to a solutions hub. The 2023 Nairobi Declaration, which foregrounded Africa’s role in global climate transitions, signals this shift from vulnerability narratives to proactive agenda-setting.
- **Demographic and economic potential:** With a median age of 19 and a population projected to double by 2050, Africa is the future labour force and consumer market of the world. Combined with its resource

endowment, cobalt, lithium, and rare earths essential to the green transition, Africa holds structural leverage in global supply chains. This potential adds weight to the continent’s agency and helps guarantee the sustainability of its institutions.

The cumulative effect of these developments is a redefinition of Africa’s place in global politics. African agencies are playing key roles in shaping global politics and trade in three dimensions:

- **From Aid Dependency to Strategic Partnerships:** Africa’s own blueprints, particularly Agenda 2063, stress self-reliance and transformative development, thereby demonstrating that externally imposed paradigms are being reconsidered. This positions Africa as a partner of choice rather than a recipient of aid. African Union Development Agency–New Partnership for Africa’s Development (AUDA-NEPAD)’s financial resilience in infrastructure funding highlights this emerging self-assurance.
- **From Fragmentation to a Collective Voice:** Although divisions persist, institutions like the AU and AfCFTA allow Africa to present more unified positions in negotiations with external actors, shifting the balance from fragmented bilateralism to continent-wide bargaining.
- **From Marginality to Centrality in Global Challenges:** Whether in food security, renewable energy, digital innovation, or peacekeeping, Africa has become integral to addressing transnational challenges. Its role is no longer peripheral but central to global solutions.

Therefore, considering how Africa’s global positioning is being redefined also means that engagements with external actors will undergo change, as in the case of Africa’s relations with India.

Revitalisation of Ties with India

India and Africa’s relationship has long

rested on normative solidarity. The Bandung Conference of 1955 and the Non-Aligned Movement gave both regions a shared platform in the Cold War. India supported African decolonisation, while African states consistently backed India in calls for global governance reform.

In recent decades, India has invested heavily in Africa through trade, development cooperation, capacity-building, and security partnerships. The launch of the IAFS in 2008 institutionalised this engagement, providing a platform for concessional finance, scholarships, information technology (IT) training, and healthcare initiatives.

While challenges remain where the relationship has ebbed and flowed or at times drifted, Africa’s newfound assertion of agency provides the opportunity to recalibrate this dynamic—placing Africa at the centre of defining the terms of engagement. This can be realised in the context of the following pivots that underline the continent’s basis for revitalising ties with India in several ways:

- **Negotiating with a Collective Voice:** The AfCFTA enables Africa to engage India as a unified bloc rather than 54 separate markets, opening the door to continent-wide trade and investment frameworks.
- **Co-Creation of Development Models:** India’s experience with digital public goods and pharmaceuticals complements Africa’s priorities. But rather than a one-way transfer, Africa can pursue co-creation that integrates its own innovations in fintech, renewable energy, and mobile health.
- **Shared Leadership in Global Governance:** The AU’s entry into the G20 aligns with India’s push for greater Global South representation. Africa and India can jointly pursue reforms in climate finance and the restructuring of international financial institutions.
- **Strategic Autonomy in Geopolitics:** Africa’s embrace of non-alignment reverberates with India’s tradition of

strategic autonomy. Together, they can advance multipolarity and resist hegemonic pressures from major powers.

- **Green and Digital Transitions:** Africa’s resource wealth and India’s technological expertise create complementarities in renewable energy, climate adaptation, and digital innovation. Initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance highlight the potential for joint leadership in global public goods.
- This repositioning provides the foundation for a new phase of engagement with India, one where Africa is not a junior partner but a co-shaper of the partnership. In addition, for Africa’s agency to translate into meaningful outcomes, institutional frameworks must also be reshaped.
- **Reshaping the IAFS:** The IAFS has been dormant since 2015 and requires renewal. African countries, through the AU, can use their convening power with emerging African private sector stakeholders to reframe the IAFS agenda around continental priorities such as digital innovation, health resilience, renewable energy, and green industrialisation. This will allow the African and Indian private sectors to develop synergies in public–private partnerships. By embedding the AfCFTA into its processes, African stakeholders can ensure they negotiate as a bloc, not a patchwork of states. Crucially, Africa can insist on mechanisms for implementation and accountability, transforming the IAFS from a pledge-based to a results-oriented forum.
 - **Renewing IBSA as a Political and Normative Platform:** The IBSA Dialogue Forum remains valuable as a forum for democratic South–South cooperation. Through South Africa, Africa can reinvigorate IBSA by positioning it as a complement to Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS)—one that foregrounds shared democratic values, inclusivity, and development. IBSA’s trilateral projects can be scaled into Africa–

India co-development initiatives, while its agenda on United Nations (UN) reform and climate finance provides a platform for Africa and India to jointly articulate normative leadership.

- **Reviving the AAGC:** Launched by India and Japan in 2017, the AAGC has languished. Africa can revive it by aligning it with the AfCFTA's infrastructure and connectivity priorities. Ownership must rest with African institutions to avoid perceptions of geopolitical competition with China's Belt and Road Initiative. If reshaped effectively, the AAGC could become a signature Africa-India-Japan platform for connectivity, offering an alternative development model rooted in transparency and sustainability. The recent Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) Summit provides a platform for African agency to restore the AAGC, where African countries can become active partners and not rent-seekers in other actors' trade and development programmes for the continent. Given the current complexities of the global system, a complementary, multi-framework synergetic approach is more feasible than looking towards binary engagements.

Conclusion

Africa's agency is no longer aspirational; it is transformative. From continental institutions to climate leadership, from collective bargaining to demographic weight, Africa has the potential to play a strategic role in shaping the global order in real time. For India, this moment is not simply about reaffirming historic solidarity but about recognising Africa as a co-architect of a new international system.

Revitalising ties means moving beyond symbolism to substance: a results-driven IAFS anchored in Agenda 2063, a renewed IBSA that amplifies democratic values and joint normative leadership, and a revived AAGC aligned with the AfCFTA's connectivity priorities. Together, these frameworks can position Africa-India relations as a cornerstone of South-South cooperation—reciprocal, future-oriented, and strategically grounded.

Ultimately, the lesson is clear: as much as Africa needs India, India needs Africa. Their partnership, if reimagined around agency and co-creation, can drive not just bilateral ties but also the wider push towards a multipolar, equitable, and sustainable global order.

02

Reframing India–Africa Relations as an Indo-Atlantic Partnership

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Introduction

Despite multiple efforts to boost India–Africa relations, the partnership has been under-delivering in recent years, especially if compared with the 2000s. This relative neglect does not seem to have changed significantly even after India's Group of Twenty (G20) presidency (2024), despite its focus on the Global South and bringing in the African Union as a permanent member. Why this stagnation and lack of attention from the Indian side? And how can we reimagine India–Africa relations to ensure continued attention and investment from Indian policymakers?

From India's perspective, there are multiple contending priorities in a more competitive world order marked by rapid realignments. India today is pursuing strategic autonomy and economic development by dealing with a more transactional United States and by testing a re-engagement with China. At the same time, it is also developing alternative partnerships with Europe, Japan, Australia, Russia, Brazil, and other regional powers. This is a world in flux where Indian decision-makers have spoken much about the Global South, including the role of Africa, but in reality their attention remains focused on the Northern Hemisphere's great power politics.

Given these multiple challenges and immediate priorities, Africa naturally does not always figure prominently on the radars of Indian policymakers. In the current times of geopolitical uncertainty and possible disorder, much of India's diplomacy is consequently preoccupied with more immediate and pressing challenges, whether securing a trade deal with Trump or preserving the military balance on the disputed boundary with China.

There are many possible ways to reignite, expand the scope, and accelerate the pace in India-Africa partnerships. We need to return to the past momentum which led to several important outcomes, including three editions of the India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS). This CSEP-AUDA-NEPAD volume (and the excellent webinar series that preceded it in 2025) is one way to do so, serving as a platform for catalytic ideas that may take the India-Africa partnership to the next level.

In this essay, I suggest a less conventional measure to ensure that New Delhi increases its attention span and resources allocated to Africa: the idea of the Indo-Atlantic as a new geopolitical construct with South, Central, East, and West African regions at its heart.

As with the now popular construct of the Indo-Pacific, which accelerated India's engagement to its East, this alternative cartographic framing might help Indian decision-makers to rethink the world to its West. The idea of the Indo-Atlantic could also prioritise the role of Africa as a source of more consequential, expansive, and deeper partnerships. For India, this is not about changing direction: it is about building on the logic and track record of South-South partnership with a focus on Africa and its two oceanic bookends: the Indian and Atlantic oceans.

A Geographic Twin to the Indo-Pacific

India-Africa partnerships cannot be seen in isolation from India's broader role in the world in general and from its Global South engagement in particular: these are relationships anchored in India's historic engagements with what we now call the "Global South."

For India, this is a space that it has been connected with for centuries, through commercial and cultural linkages. There is a long history of joint political struggles, shared visions for sustainable development and a collective quest for a more decentralised

world order, including through reformed multilateralism.

There are therefore not only one, but many Africas in India's imagination. Similarly, there are different Indian stakeholders engaging across different countries and sectors, from the pan-continental to the sub-regional and bilateral. India's Africa policy has been driven by multi-level engagements that go beyond the one-size-fits-all logic. It caters to different realities in a continent with 54 countries and almost 20% of the world population marked by diverse and contrasting realities.

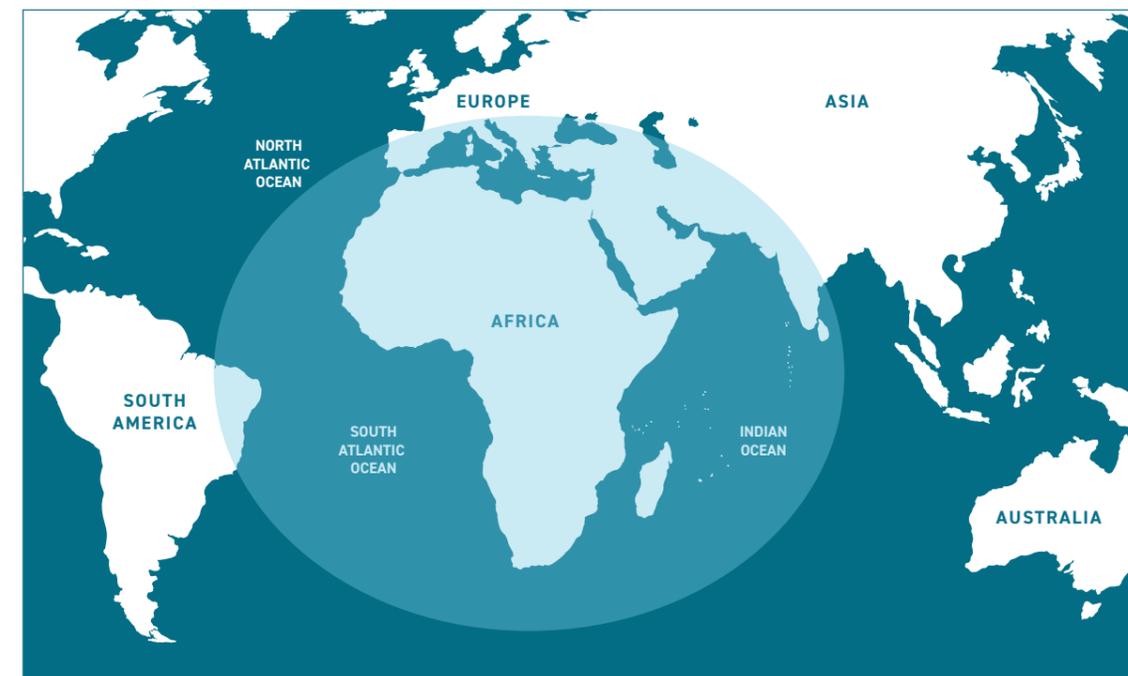
One cannot, however, escape the assessment that India-Africa ties have failed to achieve their promising potential of the 2000s. The last 10 years began with a bang with the third IAFS, held in 2015. There have been, since then, a few positive indicators such as growth in trade volume and new initiatives across the education and health sectors. In the energy sector, India's interest has also been driven by the quest to engage resource-rich African countries for reliable access to critical minerals. But overall, progress appears to have slowed, especially if compared to the growth period of the 2000s and to the rapid advances in India's many other strategic partnerships.

There are many possible reasons for this loss of pace. One cause may be related to India's focus on the "Indo-Pacific" region, which gained traction after 2017. While in some official country definitions the Indo-Pacific includes the East African littoral, in substance India has been more engaged eastwards, towards Southeast and East Asia. This was part of its own rebalance to link the Indian and Pacific oceans as joint economic and security spaces, in tandem with the US, Japan, and Australia, its Quad partners.

However, now that the Indo-Pacific concept is well entrenched in New Delhi's geopolitical imagination, there might be an opportunity for India to adopt a commensurate conceptual twin with a focus to its West: the Indo-Atlantic, a link region between the Western Indian Ocean region and the South Atlantic.

Where is the Indo-Atlantic and Why Does it Matter?

Map 1: The Indo-Atlantic (Expansive and Limited Definition)



Disclaimer: This map is for illustrative purposes and does not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of CSEP concerning the legal status of any country or territory or concerning the delimitation of frontiers or boundaries. The authors or CSEP do not vouch for the accuracy and the correctness of the map.

The term "Indo-Atlantic" has traditionally been used only in scientific literature, in the oceanography and marine science contexts on the ecosystem that connects the Indian and Atlantic waters along the South African coast.

This article seeks to explain the need to develop the Indo-Atlantic as a geopolitical "construct" and strategic guidepost for India's re-engagement with Africa. Geographically, there are two possible definitions to the Indo-Atlantic (see Map 1). One definition is more expansive (and also less useful), including all littoral countries along the entirety of both the Indian and Atlantic oceans. This area stretches from Western Australia's and Indonesia's littoral all the way to Brazil, the East Coast of the United States, and Western Europe, including the entirety of Africa at its heart.

However, a more limited and useful definition of the Indo-Atlantic encompasses only the

Western Indian Ocean (all littoral countries to the West of India, including the Eastern and Southern African coasts) and only the South Atlantic, including the area below the shortest line that connects Brazil and Africa (on the Guinea coast). This would include most of Sub-Saharan Africa, with all coastal countries from Liberia to Somalia.

Spanning the Global South across three continents, this second, narrower and Africa-centric definition of the Indo-Atlantic region has significant weight. Demographically, it accounts for countries with around 2.5 billion people, including India (1.4 billion) and Brazil (210 million). In Africa, this region includes four of the world's ten most populous countries: Nigeria in West Africa (235 million), Tanzania (70) and Kenya (57) in Eastern Africa, and South Africa (63) as the continent's only country with a coastline straddling both the Indian and Atlantic oceans (United Nations Population Fund, n.d.).

From a maritime perspective, the Western Indian Ocean and South Atlantic account for 70 million km², around 20% of the world's water surface (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1996). The region also has significant economic weight: the total GDP of countries in the Indo-Atlantic accounts for US\$ 9–10 trillion, approximately 10% of the world's total. 10–15% of global trade moves through the sea lines around the Cape of Good Hope (The World Bank, n.d.). The region also includes several regional powers, including four top contenders for a permanent seat in the United Nations (UN) Security Council (Brazil, Nigeria, South Africa, and India).

From a geostrategic perspective, a bet on the Indo-Atlantic offers India the opportunity to complement (and extend) the Indo-Pacific's largely Eastern focus with a Southwestern angle. It will centralise India's role in the changing regional order, as a pivot power between the Indo-Pacific and Indo-Atlantic. This means connecting India westwards, starting with the East African littoral, historically part of India's extended neighbourhood and with the most significant economic and security stakes. An Indo-Atlantic lens on Africa will also push New Delhi to adopt a broader perspective and link its Europe and Gulf initiatives (for example, the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor [IMEC]) to its attempts to re-engage with Africa.

Finally, an Indo-Atlantic policy is also timely given India's ambition to build up its economic and geopolitical profile—including the vision of *Viksit Bharat 2047*—in partnership with a more prominent, developed Africa. Two drivers stand out:

- Firstly, on the economic front, after a decade of new growth opportunities at home, Indian industry seems ready to restart its outward journey of the 2000s in Africa. Across the energy, technology, health, education, agriculture and defence sectors, the Indian private sector is showing

indications of growing interest in African consumer markets anchored in new supply chains that are mutually beneficial.

- Secondly, on the political front, there is new space for strategic India–Africa dialogues on the future world order, including the role of multilateral institutions. Anchored in a joint Global South sensibility and common values, the 2000s saw the rise of the India–Brazil–South Africa trilateral (IBSA) as an example of an Indo-Atlantic political framework that is now more relevant than ever, amidst a geopolitical churning and the need to shape a new world order.

Five Types of Indo-Atlantic Partnerships with Africa

What type of partnerships across Africa should India privilege as part of its Indo-Atlantic policy? Here I suggest five levels for different, mutually reinforcing partnerships.

First, at the multilateral and continental level, India must deepen engagement with the African Union: whichever future way the organisation goes, amidst strong headwinds against multilateralism and regionalism, it will remain an indispensable forum and actor to foster cooperation.

Second, at the sub-regional level, India must privilege deeper engagement with three regional economic communities (RECs): East African Community (EAC), Southern African Development Community (SADC), and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). These represent the three focus areas along Africa's Indo-Pacific littoral.

Third, in line with these three RECs, amongst the many bilateral partnerships that constitute its Africa outreach, India should focus on three key countries: Kenya, South Africa, and Nigeria. These are all leading regional powers in their respective sub-regions with important maritime interests and stakes in India's Indo-Pacific policy.

Fourth, there is much potential for triangular “India–Africa + 1” engagements with other partners who are part of the broader Indo-Atlantic region. Four options—all in Africa's extended periphery—stand out: Europe (UK, European Union [EU], France), the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar), the United States and Brazil. There is some ground to build on. India has held formal consultations on Africa with the US (2015, 2024) and the EU (2022). And with Brazil and South Africa, the IBSA initiative continues to offer a unique mechanism for trilateral dialogue based on the principles of South–South cooperation to centralise Africa.

Fifth and finally, there is also scope for trilateral partnerships involving other partners invested in Africa and in the Indo-Atlantic region. From India's perspective, Japan offers the most value, building on the old idea of the Asia–Africa Growth Corridor. At Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD)-9 (2025), Tokyo has committed new resources under the Economic Region Initiative of Indian Ocean–Africa which focuses on India as a hub in new supply chains.

Conclusion

For India, Africa should be at the heart of this Indo-Atlantic policy. It will give ballast to its Global South engagements. It will also help centralise India, as a geoeconomic pivot between the Indo-Pacific and Indo-Atlantic constructs. At the same time, the idea of the Indo-Atlantic will empower African actors to claim a more central role in the evolving geopolitical and economic order, in partnership with India. The foundations for an India–Africa partnership are strong and remain relevant: the idea of the Indo-Atlantic will help frame it geopolitically and ensure increased attention and investment from Indian decision-makers.

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03

Africa's Marginalisation: How India Must Respond

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During the first two decades of the 21st century, Africa and the Indo-Pacific region drew huge international attention, as viewed from the Indian capital. International discourse was dominated by the emergence of the Indo-Pacific as a region of great strategic significance, as well as Africa, where a special kind of international competition unfolded among the great and middle powers.

But this began to change dramatically in this century's third decade. Although the pressing challenges of the Indo-Pacific and Africa did not vanish, the mainstream discourse shifted to other geographies, such as Europe and West Asia.

Africa: Then and Now

It could be argued that in the diplomatic and academic discussions on global affairs, Africa has been sidelined by the shifting dynamics of geopolitics during the "Age of Polycrisis," which began to unfold in the third decade of the 21st century.

A rare combination of developments, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the India-China border clash in Galwan, the Ukraine War, the Gaza conflict, the multiple forms of violence across West Asia, the persisting US-China rivalry across the world, many manifestations of Trumpism, and the India-Pakistan and Pakistan-Afghanistan hostilities, has pushed Africa (and the Indo-Pacific) off the global radar. India is no exception.

The first two decades of the present century were qualitatively different. It appeared then that Africa had “arrived” on the global scene. The replacement of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) by the African Union (AU) in July 2002 was a defining moment in the post-Cold War era. The new period was gradually marked by increasing multipolarity. Reform of African institutions and a fundamental shift in Africa’s mindset were brought about by a new generation of African leaders, led by South African President Thabo Mbeki and others. The African Renaissance had begun.

China launched its Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000 for economic diplomacy, which has seen billions of dollars pour into Africa’s economic development. This unleashed a real global competition in which nations, ranging from the EU, US, and Russia to those stretching from Türkiye to Indonesia and Australia, began re-engineering their policies on Africa. Only Japan was present beforehand, having initiated the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) in 1993.

India, content until then with plodding on its bilateral track, joined the fray in a remarkable burst of imagination, energy, and generosity. It organised three unprecedented India–Africa Forum Summits (IAFSs) in 2008, 2011, and 2015, allocating substantial funds for credit, aid, and investments to African partners. The third summit, hosted by the Narendra Modi government in New Delhi, was particularly remarkable as all African states, rather than just a select few, were invited. Their constructive participation in the New Delhi summit and the joint declaration of an ambitious programme of cooperation took optimism about India–Africa relations to a new level. The process has since stalled.

India's Policy Approach

Over the past decade, from 2015 to 2025, India’s policy has continued to be pro-Africa. In the absence of regular summits at the Pan-

African level, New Delhi focused its attention on the bilateral track again. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other leaders have visited various parts of the continent, imparting fresh momentum to relations between the host countries and India. The latest two countries he visited in July 2025 were Ghana and Namibia, where he created a positive impact.

At least five other actions by India need to be considered here.

One, India was at the forefront in extending assistance to Africa to battle COVID-19 through a generous supply of vaccines, medicines, and medical equipment, when many Western countries were found wanting.

Two, during its G20 presidency (2022–2023), India took up the long-pending request by Africa to grant the AU full membership in the G20. Indian leaders pushed it hard to the point where resistance crumbled, resulting in the AU’s welcome entry into the world’s premier economic steering group.

Three, India utilised its G20 presidency creatively to advance the Global South agenda, which was strengthened by the collective endeavours of previous and subsequent presidencies of Indonesia, Brazil, and South Africa.

Four, India supported the expansion of Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (BRICS) to bring in two African countries, Egypt and Ethiopia, as full members. In addition, Nigeria, Algeria, and Uganda were accepted as new dialogue partners, with the active support of New Delhi. Within BRICS, India and South Africa in particular worked together on many issues to ensure internal balance.

Five, regular efforts to promote trade and economic relations between India and African nations continued to gain success. In this context, a brief review of the relevant data may be warranted.

India–Africa trade shows a pattern of fluctuation. From the total value of US\$ 70 billion in 2015–2016, it rose to US\$ 98 billion in 2022–2023, only to decrease to US\$ 82 billion in 2024–2025. It is now estimated to be US\$ 103 billion for the fiscal year 2025. Of this, Indian exports to Africa amounted to US\$ 45 billion and imports to US\$ 58 billion, thus giving Africa the benefit of a favourable trade balance.

Investments from India into Africa are now valued at US\$ 80 billion. Recently, the Indian government has set a target to double bilateral trade, aiming to reach US\$ 200 billion by 2030, within the next five years. The question is: what strategy do the two sides need for attaining this ambitious goal? And beyond trade, what are the other goals the two sides must identify and cooperate on? Perhaps there is justification for India and Africa to consider a slew of ideas and devise a new joint strategy. Some experts feel that the arbitrary tariffs imposed by the US administration create fresh opportunities to increase Africa–India trade exchanges. Besides, there is a massive potential for education, training, and capacity building for African youth by increasing the use of facilities offered by India.

The Way Forward

There is a compelling need to inject fresh political capital into the task of deepening and diversifying the India–Africa partnership. All its critical dimensions—strategic and diplomatic, defence and security, economic and people-to-people—need to be addressed in a comprehensive and integrated manner. Here is this author’s list of actionable recommendations:

- India should accord priority and focus on crafting and adding a regional facet to its Africa policy by connecting with the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in Western–Central and Eastern Africa, which account for a substantial segment of India–Africa trade.
- Roadmap 2030, prepared by the Africa Expert Group of the reputed think tank,

the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), in 2023, remains relevant. Its recommendations should be reconsidered and implemented meticulously. More than ever before, there is a need for the proposed Annual Strategic Dialogue between the chairperson of the EU Commission and India’s external affairs minister. This must start as soon as possible.

- On trade, economic and development cooperation, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) produced a valuable paper entitled “India–Africa Momentum: Purpose-Driven Partnership” in August 2025. It presents a robust picture of Africa’s growth, projecting that the continent’s business capital could grow with AfCFTA, potentially adding US\$ 560 billion in exports and US\$ 450 billion in income by 2035. CII’s recommendations, with their focus on 10 specific sectors including agriculture, healthcare, green economy, digital development, defence and space, and Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), warrant favourable consideration.
- Finally, AUDA-NEPAD should consider establishing a creative platform for regular and in-depth dialogue with India’s top Africanists, to be held annually alternating between Addis Ababa and New Delhi. Without adequate intellectual capital and engagement, the Africa–India partnership will not be able to muster the kind of ballast it needs from the fountain of creative public diplomacy.

Conclusion

India has consistently demonstrated a wealth of goodwill and positive intentions towards Africa. But India needs to invest more in Africa’s development. Africa has consistently demonstrated friendship and respect for the people of India; however, this perception has not been reflected in the AU’s approach lately. This must change.

The lessons from President Donald Trump’s presidency are clear: Africa must look to Asia,

especially India, as a key development partner, while India must urgently diversify its external trade by shifting exports from the US towards Africa and Latin America. However, export growth must be accompanied by increased Indian investments in African nations, as well

as more concessional assistance and grants for development projects that benefit the African people. Finally, India and Africa must unite to refine and promote the implementation of the agenda of the Global South.

04

Deepening Africa–India Collaboration for Global Governance Reform: The United Nations Security Council

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The current structure of the United Nations (UN), especially its Security Council (UNSC), is a relic of the post-World War II era that fails to reflect the geopolitical and economic realities of the 21st century. The concentration of decision-making power among the Permanent Five (P5) members, who possess veto rights, has resulted in institutional paralysis, effectively undermining the UNSC’s mandate to maintain international peace and security. This report suggests that coordinated efforts between African nations and India could exert significant influence within the UN to push for reforms in the UNSC.

Built on a shared anti-colonial history and strengthened by a growing strategic political and economic relationship, the foundation for an Africa–India UN coalition is already in place. At the UN, India has a track record of cooperating with and advocating on behalf of African countries. It consistently used its UN platform to support African liberation movements and was also one of the earliest countries to raise the issue of South Africa’s apartheid at the organisation in 1946 (Ministry of External Affairs [MEA], 2020; Rajya Sabha Secretariat, 1981). Throughout the decades of the anti-apartheid movement, it consistently voted with African nations at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) to pass resolutions condemning the apartheid regime. Furthermore, India and other African nations are founding members of the Group of 77 (G77), advocating for developing countries’ economic interests in the UN, leading to aligned

votes on economic and development-related issues. Even outside of the UN system, for example, at the World Trade Organization (WTO), between 2020 and 2022, India and South Africa collaborated to waive intellectual property rights on COVID-19 vaccinations, a proposal that was widely supported by other African nations (WTO, 2020). Recently, India's role in securing the African Union's (AU) permanent membership in the Group of 20 (G20) in 2023 further demonstrates its commitment to amplifying the voice of the Global South.

Keeping this history in mind, this report presents a strategic framework for forming an Africa-India coalition to advocate for UNSC reform. It highlights the need for UNSC reform, the rationale for an Africa-India coalition, and recommendations for such a coalition to take action.

Reforming the UNSC: Why?

Established in 1945, the UN was designed to prevent future global conflicts by fostering international cooperation. The UNSC was configured to reflect the power dynamics of the victorious Allied powers, granting them permanent seats and absolute veto power over any substantive resolution. While this structure may have served its purpose in a bygone era, it has proven increasingly inadequate in addressing the complex conflicts and crises of the 21st century. The system's central flaw lies in its deeply undemocratic and anachronistic composition, which has led to a significant global governance deficit.

The dysfunction of the UNSC is most evident in its frequent paralysis, where the veto power of a single permanent member can undermine its primary role in maintaining international peace and security. This allows human rights abuses to be “swept under the rug,” ultimately leading to systemic failure that has undermined the UN's credibility as a legitimate forum for global problem-solving (Security Council Report, 2024). For example, in May 2014, Russia and China vetoed a UNSC resolution that would have referred the

situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court (ICC), despite support from the other 13 UNSC members—reinforcing Human Rights Watch's warning that mass atrocities can be “swept under the rug with a veto” (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Recently, on September 18, 2025, the United States vetoed a UNSC resolution calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza, even though the majority of UNSC members supported the measure. This highlights how veto politics can hinder swift crisis responses and further undermine the UNSC's legitimacy.

Essentially, the legitimacy of the UN rests on the perception of procedural justice and fairness in its decision-making processes. The P5's use of the veto, which serves narrow national interests rather than the global good, is seen by many as being at odds with the UN's own core values. This concentration of power and lack of checks and balances undermines the organisation's shared ownership approach to addressing crises, creating a governance deficit that, with the rising influence of the Global South, offers a unique opportunity for change.

Building on a Shared Interest: A Rationale for an Africa-India Coalition Related to UNSC Reform

Rooted in shared historical similarities, notably decolonisation struggles and participation in the Non-Aligned Movement, Africa-India ties are based on mutual respect. Naturally, a point of convergence between India and Africa is their shared demand for comprehensive UN reform, particularly that of the UNSC. Both aim to address the historical injustice of a UN system designed when they were largely under colonial rule, a system that now fails to represent over half of its members.

The AU's position, expressed in the Ezulwini Consensus (2005), is a unified and non-negotiable demand for a more representative and democratic UNSC (AU, 2009). It calls for Africa to be granted at least two permanent seats with veto power and five non-permanent seats on the UNSC. A crucial and unique

element of this position is that the AU itself would be responsible for selecting which African governments receive these seats. However, there are internal disagreements over which country should be assigned these seats. Nigeria, South Africa, and Egypt are the strongest contenders, but rivalries prevent consensus, and smaller African states are concerned that prioritising the “Big Three” would further marginalise them (Inclusive Society Institute, 2025).

India's position, articulated through its membership in the Group of Four (G4) alongside Brazil, Germany, and Japan, is similarly focused on expanding the UNSC's permanent and non-permanent categories. The G4 countries mutually support each other's bids for a permanent seat, arguing that their economic and political weight, as well as their significant contributions to international peace and security, justify their inclusion. Like the AU, India seeks a permanent seat with all the prerogatives and privileges of the current members, including the veto.

The Ezulwini Consensus and G4 position on expanding both permanent and non-permanent UNSC seats are a strong political force; however, the main point of contention is the veto. India and African countries see proposals from P5 members to include new permanent members without veto power as an attempt to create a “second class” of members, which would not in any way address the UNSC's undemocratic nature. Their insistence on veto power for new permanent members is a direct challenge to the antiquated power structures of the P5, who have the ultimate authority to block any charter amendments that would curtail their own privileges.

For India and Africa, the reform debate is not merely about changing seating arrangements; it represents a fundamental power struggle to

create a more equitable international system. While reforming the UN Charter requires a two-thirds majority in the General Assembly and the ratification by all P5 members, sustained and united pressure from a cohesive India-Africa coalition could potentially influence the political calculations of the established powers (UN, 1945).¹

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed to solidify and advance an Africa-India coalition for UNSC reform:

- **Coordinated Diplomatic Advocacy**

Strategic Engagement in the IGN

The Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN) process on UNSC reform, which has been stalled for years, requires renewed political will. African and Indian diplomats can coordinate their positions within the IGN, pushing for continued negotiations and resisting efforts to maintain the status quo. They can jointly propose frameworks for expansion that include both their interests and aspirations.

Joint Statements and Resolutions

African and Indian UN officials can issue joint statements and actively co-sponsor resolutions in the UNGA that call for accelerated IGN on UNSC reform. This would demonstrate a unified front and amplify their collective demand. To operationalise this, the AU Permanent Observer Mission and India's Permanent Mission can collaborate on producing a draft document at each UNGA session explicitly calling for the immediate advancement and intensification of IGN through monthly text-based negotiations, including the submission

¹ Under Article 108 of the UN Charter, amendments require a two-thirds vote of the General Assembly and ratification by two-thirds of UN members, including all five permanent members of the Security Council. Additionally, under Article 109, a General Conference to review the Charter can be convened by a two-thirds vote of the General Assembly and nine members of the Security Council; any amendments proposed by such a conference require ratification by two-thirds of UN members including all permanent members.

of a consolidated negotiating text under the co-chairs, with a view to time-bound, member-driven outcomes.

• Joint High-Level Working Group

India and the AU should formalise their collaboration by establishing a high-level joint working group. This group would be responsible for aligning the Ezulwini Consensus with the G4's stance, particularly on contentious issues such as the selection criteria for African permanent members and the use of the veto. A united front would present a clear, non-negotiable demand that cannot be dismissed by piecemeal counterproposals and would prevent any single P5 member from gaining an advantage by pitting one group against another. The group should be co-chaired by the AU Commission and India's MEA, with a small core membership of UN Charter and legal experts, former UN permanent representatives, and select civil society/research partners to sustain technical work and political outreach. Its mandate should be to produce, within 12 months, a joint white paper that reconciles positions on veto use and African representation, alongside a sequenced ratification strategy and outreach map for key regional blocs and P5 capitals.

• Leverage Shared Diplomatic Platforms

An Africa–India coalition must strategically utilise existing multilateral platforms for their UNSC reform agenda. Forums like Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) and India–Brazil–South Africa (IBSA), which already share a commitment to a more just, equitable, and fair international system, are ideal for this purpose. UNSC reform is a standing, high-priority item on the BRICS ministerial agenda and has been for some time. In September 2019, IBSA released a joint ministerial statement calling

for reform of the UN system, including the UNSC (Department of International Relations and Cooperation, 2020). Within the G20, India can cooperate with South Africa and the AU to coalesce more G20 members in support of UNSC reform. A special India–AU workshop/convening session can be held on the margins of the next G20 to formulate an action plan. By consistently issuing joint statements and coordinating their positions within these forums, India and Africa can build and lead a broader coalition with other emerging powers, thereby increasing collective pressure on the established order and demonstrating that the call for UNSC reform is a global mandate.

• Coordinated Public Diplomacy Campaign

India and the AU should initiate a coordinated public diplomacy campaign to emphasise the moral and practical case for a reformed UN. The campaign should showcase the significant contributions of these regions to global peace and security, such as India's leading role in UN peacekeeping missions in Africa and their joint efforts on climate change and counterterrorism. By shifting the narrative from a “power grab” by a few nations to a matter of global public good, the campaign can garner international public support and apply moral pressure on the P5 to pursue meaningful reform. Suggested messaging frames should centre on “representation and legitimacy,” “effectiveness in peacekeeping and crisis response,” and “Global South contribution and burden-sharing.” For monitoring and evaluation purposes, key performance indices (KPIs) could include month-on-month increases in targeted media mentions and op-eds, polling/survey shifts on perceived UNSC legitimacy in priority regions, and a defined number of public endorsements (e.g., joint statements) secured from countries and major non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and think tanks.

Conclusion

Collaboration between African countries and India on global governance reform, especially UNSC reforms, is a strategic necessity in a world shifting towards a more openly multipolar order. To advance the debate from performative negotiations to meaningful change, an Africa–India coalition should pursue a clear, prioritised roadmap. First, align positions and messaging by consolidating the African Common Position with India's reform platform into a single, minimal-demand agenda and a shared campaign narrative. Second, operationalise leverage by coordinating voting, sponsorship, and caucusing across the General Assembly and key regional groupings, while building a broader cross-regional bloc around legitimacy, representation, and veto restraint in mass atrocity contexts. Third, translate momentum into institutional outcomes by pairing UNSC reform advocacy with parallel reform coalitions in the WTO and Bretton Woods institutions, linking representation to concrete reforms on finance, development, and rule-making that reflect Global South priorities.

In that vein, the AU Commission and India's MEA should establish a dedicated working group through key missions in New York and Geneva to create a joint position statement, appoint lead coordinators, and develop a 6–12-month timetable for resolutions, side-events, and coordinated outreach to swing states and P5 capitals. A coordinated, time-bound campaign like this would not only strengthen the Africa–India case for UNSC reform but also demonstrate, through tangible, actionable results, what a more legitimate and effective multilateral system could look like in practice.

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05

Africa–India Partnership for a More Effective BRICS

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Introduction: The Rise of BRICS

The world order is experiencing major volatility. The rapid changes in United States (US) policies and the continuing deadly wars in Europe and the Middle East are among its major drivers. The world faces serious global challenges such as climate change and pandemics, and the world order is failing to find effective solutions. The declining unipolarity in the global order has created instability; however, this has also opened up opportunities for the emerging new order to be more effective and adequately representative of the Global South (Shidore, 2023a).

To address these consistent challenges, new blocs of states are emerging with alternative solutions in innovative coalitions to tackle these challenges. In recent years, the grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) has emerged as the key node in this regard. This forward-looking paper will examine how India and African states, when taken together, represent a substantial fraction of Global South states within the grouping and can better cooperate to evolve a more effective BRICS partnership.

India and Africa in BRICS

BRICS is not a formal international organisation. Rather, it is a loose coalition (Shidore, 2023b) of what I have called the “Global East” (Russia and China) and a set of states from the Global South. It held its first leaders’ summit in 2009 as BRIC (Brazil–Russia–India–China). South Africa joined soon thereafter, making it BRICS.

Five new states have joined as core members in the 2023–2025 period: Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). A set of 10 “partner countries” has also been announced, namely Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Nigeria, Thailand, Uganda, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam (BRICS Brasil, 2025). These 10 countries have a lower level of association than the 10 core members.

The expansion of BRICS has made it more representative, with greater participation of Africa and Latin America and the entry of Southeast Asia and Central Asia (Shidore, 2024). Five African states are now a part of BRICS—Egypt, Ethiopia, and South Africa as core members, and Nigeria and Uganda as partner countries. These five African states have greatly enhanced Africa’s representation in BRICS by bringing in most of its sub-regions.¹ BRICS also provides these new members with a platform to demonstrate their global relevance and amplify their concerns in the international fora. The expansion, coupled with the fact that more than 40 states have indicated their desire to join BRICS, indicates a major demand from the Global South for new approaches to solve growing global challenges.

Limiting Mission Creep

The rapid expansion of BRICS has brought new energy and purpose to the grouping. Expansion brings in multiple actors with different capacities and skills to offer. And enlargement itself is an achievement. But the success of BRICS cannot be measured only by the number of its members and aspirants but must also consider efficiency of delivery and concrete impacts on the ground.

The steady mission creep in agenda items could emerge as a challenge for BRICS. For instance, the leaders’ declaration from the 2025 summit in Rio de Janeiro included trade, finance, climate change, health, artificial intelligence, culture, transnational crime, corruption, nuclear weapons, space, digitisation, education, and many others (Ministry of External Affairs, 2025). An

organisation without a formal secretariat, staffers, and dedicated financing will struggle to take on all these issue areas in a way that generates impact beyond joint statements.

BRICS would benefit from resisting the temptation to “do everything” and focusing on a carefully selected menu for action. Three areas are proposed for the BRICS to focus on for the next few years in which the India–Africa partnership can play a major role, namely in climate change, global health, and multilateralism.

Energising Climate Resilience

Global temperatures continue to rise, and warming is now expected to breach 1.5°C (Bottollier-Depois, 2025). It is projected to hit 2.7°C by the end of the century (Climate Action Tracker, 2025). Climate mitigation tends to get the most attention in the Global North. But as warming becomes more pronounced, action needs to shift more towards adaptation. BRICS can distinguish itself on climate change in a crowded field if it prunes its climate agenda to focus almost exclusively on adaptation and resilience.

India and Africa are well-positioned in BRICS to exercise leadership in this space. Both face severe challenges and have experience in adapting to climate change. Egypt’s Lower Nile Coastal Zone, India’s megacities and water-scarce regions, Ethiopia’s drought-vulnerable lowland regions, and South Africa’s arid western regions are particularly threatened.

While adaptation initiatives operate best when designed and implemented locally, there is plenty of scope for mutual learning between Africa and India in areas as diverse as urban planning, drought-resistant crops, and fisher livelihoods. Africa and India could push for a BRICS adaptation and resilience knowledge bank and a quarterly structured dialogue between experts as an exemplar of Africa–India and South–South cooperation.

Adaptation and resilience are also chronically under-funded (United Nations Environment Programme, 2024) areas in climate finance, principally because projects in this space are rarely profit-making. Moreover, Global South states tend to face investment challenges due to a high cost of capital in their markets.

This is where intra-BRICS lending can step in. China is an obvious lender with deep pockets, but India, South Africa, and the UAE can also play a major role in this regard. The vehicle for such lending already exists with the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) whose mission statement is focused on infrastructure and sustainability (NDB, n.d.). If all African states associated with BRICS join the NDB, and the bank directs its sustainability agenda predominantly towards adaptation and resilience, it would facilitate stronger Indo-African cooperation tackling the worst aspects of climate change.

Rescuing Global Health

The US, until recently a major player in global health, has pulled out of this arena during the second Trump administration. Washington quit the World Health Organization (WHO) in January 2025 (The White House, 2025). The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has been ordered to cease exchanging crucial scientific data with the WHO (Emanuel, 2025). Previously, the pandemic witnessed vaccine-hoarding behaviour in the Global North, even as China, India, and Russia stepped forward to supply COVID-19 vaccines.

The pandemic caused major damage across the developing world, with many lives lost and growth diminished for years. The Global South simply cannot afford a repeat of this experience. Redoubling efforts on health would also make a major contribution to the productivity of citizens, contributing to faster economic growth.

India and Africa are both solution providers and among the most vulnerable in this space.

Both still face the scourge of infectious disease and challenging health indicators. But India is a pharmaceutical power and hosts excellent Research and Development (R&D) centres in this area. South Africa too is a major player and is Africa’s biggest generic drugs manufacturer.

A 2023 review of BRICS health initiatives (Liu et al., 2023) indicated that communicable diseases and access to medicine were clearly the top focus areas. Universal health coverage, traditional medicine, and non-communicable diseases came next. Many of these issues were also reflected in a recent meeting of BRICS health ministers under Brazil’s 2025 chair (Souto, 2025). The most productive areas in terms of Africa–India cooperation are probably communicable and non-communicable diseases, access to medicine, and traditional medicine, which could be BRICS priorities.

Reviving Multilateralism

Multilateralism has recently been under enormous pressure with the turn towards protectionism in Washington, among other things. India and Africa have an opportunity to play the healer, with BRICS as a vehicle. Strengthening multilateralism is a point of wide consensus within BRICS—and between India and Africa. Working together, India and Africa might be able to make significant impacts on two specific areas—defending and reviving the global trading order, led by the World Trade Organization (WTO), and pushing for the widest possible adoption of the High Seas Treaty, a recent landmark pact on global maritime governance.

The WTO has been under stress ever since the logjam at its Appellate Body (Hufbauer, 2011), which made dispute resolution much more difficult. But the recent weakening of the Most Favoured Nation principle (Draper & Gray, 2025) has raised fundamental questions on the WTO’s relevance for the future. On the other hand, India and Africa are continuing the pathway of more trade integration, albeit in qualified ways that protect their core

economic interests (African Union, n.d.; Press Information Bureau, 2025).

A new process initiated by a group of WTO members, the Multi-Party Interim Appeal Arbitration Arrangement (MPIA) (WTO Plurilaterals, n.d.), has raised prospects for the survival of multilateralism in global trade. The MPIA now has 30 members (WorldTradeLaw.net, n.d.), including China, the European Union (EU), the United Kingdom (UK), Malaysia, Peru, the Philippines, and others, which together cover more than 70% of the world trade.² However, of the 20 states associated with BRICS, only Brazil, China, and Malaysia are also members of the MPIA. India and Africa are essentially missing.³

But it is precisely because India and Africa have stayed away from the MPIA that joining the initiative would energise their partnership, strengthen the WTO, and make BRICS a central player in emerging arrangements to preserve multilateralism in trade. There will undoubtedly be domestic barriers to joining the MPIA. A good start can be made by placing MPIA membership in existing India-Africa dialogues as a lead-up to its adoption in BRICS (Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, 2025).

The High Seas Treaty is aimed at governing the large part of the world's oceans that lie outside the Exclusive Economic Zones of any state. It just passed the threshold of 60 votes for ratification and will come into force in January 2026 (Mishra, 2025). Egypt, India, Nigeria, and South Africa have already signed, though not yet ratified, the treaty. If Uganda and Ethiopia join, and all these states ratify it speedily, it could form the nucleus of a BRICS India-Africa coalition for centring maritime law and strengthening the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) at a time when these fundamental building blocks of the international legal order are coming under pressure in the South China Sea and beyond (Center for Preventive Action, 2024).

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06

India in Africa: From Deliverables to Purpose

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Can India's Africa policy do better? The question will obviously be answered in the affirmative whether by Indians or by Africans if nothing else, because India is a rising and ambitious power in global politics. Capacity issues are frequently cited but those are applicable to Indian foreign policy in general and are being addressed, however gradually. Consider, for instance, India's increasing diplomatic presence in the form of embassies and staff in Africa over the past decade (Ministry of External Affairs [MEA], 2025).

However, even leaving capacity issues aside, India's rise and ambitions collide with other powers either long present or much more active in Africa than India has been. What then is the space available to India to make a difference or what must it do to stand out in a crowded field? That is the central problem that not just India's Africa policy but its foreign policy in general faces. This paper argues that while India's focus is now on project implementation in Africa, norm entrepreneurship is necessary too but remains weak. Given this weakness, the paper further argues that an explicit declaration of competition with rival powers in Africa might allow for better articulation of both norms and policy, and in turn, better policymaking and implementation.

How the Normative was Constrained

Unlike in the past when India promoted the idea of non-alignment, it lacks a credible or widely acceptable vision for global engagement that allows it to be seen as a legitimate actor in Africa or to craft policy approaches that are acceptable alternatives to those being promoted by other countries.

In the early years of its foreign policy, India helped create concepts like non-alignment and looked to mediate global crises far from its shores from the Korean peninsula to the Suez crisis as well as committed troops to UN peacekeeping operations in Africa and the Middle East, marrying norm entrepreneurship with action. Today, India is a major economic player in Africa and it continues its UN peacekeeping role on the continent but for a country that was one of the leading lights of the Afro-Asian Conference in 1955, India seems to have underperformed when it comes to involvement in the big questions of Africa, namely those of economic development, human resources development, climate change, regional security, and models of political development.

Several reasons suggest themselves that are not just the result of changes in the global political system but also of India's domestic dynamics.

India's domestic developmental challenges compounded the pressures of a global economic system in the midst of the Cold War. Further challenges arrived in the form of multiple armed conflicts with near neighbours. Together, these trials diverted attention and resources and constrained over time not just India's development achievements but also its foreign policy ambitions. It was not until well into the 21st century that India's economic reforms that began in the 1990s started showing results enough for India to be counted as something of a model worth emulating.

However, the narrowing of the scope of India's ambitions because of the constraints of the Cold War era and of the immediate post-Cold War era has not been entirely shaken off. Despite non-alignment being an idea that India had actively championed, the Non-Alignment Movement itself did not always win the greatest attention or support from Indian policymakers. Besides lack of diplomatic and economic capacity, this was also in part because of the perception that non-alignment failed India during the 1962 conflict with China, showing clearly that norms were one thing, interests quite another.

As Indian efforts at multilateralism slowed and its project implementation slackened over the decades relative to its early activism, Chinese interest in multilateralism and project implementation picked up. About a decade after the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013, Beijing has also begun to match project implementation more clearly and substantially with norm entrepreneurship as evident from its four new Global Initiatives on Development, Security, Civilisation and Governance. Non-alignment did not build bridges between Indian and African civil society and elites nor make Africa a part of the Indian imagination through daily news coverage or student mobility, for example, as much as China's latest initiatives have in the Chinese imagination and Chinese cities. To take just two reference points—student numbers and trade volume—as of 2020, there were over 80,000 African students studying in China versus just under 11,000 in India (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2023) and while trade between China and Africa stood at nearly US\$ 300 billion in 2024 (China Africa Research Initiative, n.d.) that between India and Africa amounted to below US\$ 100 billion in 2022–2023 (Confederation of Indian Industry, 2024).

The reference to China is deliberate. It is the country that Indians, or at least, the Indian strategic elite, increasingly compare their own country with, in terms of achievements and global influence.

Action Without a Driving Philosophy

Diplomatic activism and attempts at norm entrepreneurship have, however, begun to return to Indian foreign policy particularly after a Central Government with a strong parliamentary majority took power in New Delhi in 2014. The Indian government has since launched a series of initiatives in Africa's vicinity or encompassing parts or all of Africa. Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) aims at fostering cooperation among countries in the Indian Ocean region (Press Information Bureau [PIB], 2015)

and its upgrade, the Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions (MAHASAGAR) takes in the Global South as a whole (Prime Minister's Office, Government of India, 2025). The Indian Prime Minister chose Mauritius both times to launch these initiatives.

Non-alignment itself has been replaced variously by “multi-alignment” and “strategic autonomy,” both of which represent apparently more positive, active versions of non-alignment as well as articulations of India's interests (MEA, 2024).

However, while large, all-encompassing ideas like “multi-alignment” or *vasudaiva kutumbakam* (“the world is one family”) have entered India's diplomatic lexicon, this is not exactly norm entrepreneurship as “multi-alignment” or “strategic autonomy” are expressions of hard material interests while *vasudaiva kutumbakam* even if it represents a normative position such as Third World solidarity, remains too diffuse or abstract because India's capacity is insufficient compared to other powers.

Further, while a general sense of comparison or achievement (fourth-largest economy in the world, for example) is increasingly entrenched in Indian imaginations, this is not the same as saying Indians have a detailed idea of the world beyond their immediate neighbours. Even the rest of Asia, let alone Africa, often does not feature in everyday Indian thinking. This is in contrast to China. Consider its China Global Television Network (CGTN) or China Radio International (CRI) which feature programming in African languages and extensively report from the continent; neither India's state nor private media houses are remotely comparable in scale or activity.

For all its internal upheaval, and China has seen long years of it such as during the Cultural Revolution, the Party-state has managed to educate or instil in its citizens a sense of “manifest destiny” about China's place in the world. It has built up a strong foreign

policy establishment backed by expertise in the form of universities, think tanks, Party bodies, enterprises, and the military with personnel possessing academic knowledge, field expertise, and language competence. In India, the number of institutions that study Africa can be counted on the fingers of one hand while those in China are easily into the high double digits (China-Africa Institute, 2024).

While the Indian Ministry of External Affairs' annual reports are full of details of economic development and security cooperation as they should be, they also lack clear articulation for domestic audiences of why India is engaged in Africa, what its ambitions are, and what the trajectory is going to be. Complicating matters are frequent denials within (New Delhi Television [NDTV], 2024) and outside (The Hindu, 2021) government that New Delhi is in competition with China in Africa. This makes it more difficult for the Indian government to make a strong case to its own citizens for greater activism in Africa. In the absence of a normative scaffolding for India–Africa ties, a clear articulation of interests is imperative. And competition with China is an idea, however crude, that can draw greater attention and support from India's citizens—officials, scholars, and entrepreneurs—and fill the gap while a normative framework is being shaped or given greater substance.

The issue here is not about African agency but about the possibilities that open up for Africa if India were to be clearer about its competition with China. The Chinese are, after all, increasingly open and articulate about their opposition to the US across multiple fronts, ideological, economic, security, and global governance (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2025). And it cannot be denied that while such open competition puts pressure on host countries to choose sides, it also affords them opportunities to play one side against the other or to exercise leverage.

In other words, a clearer articulation by New Delhi of competition with China would also allow it to acknowledge the ability of African

capitals to read international politics and India's interests. Such clear understanding of hard security interests on both sides comes with costs but it would also push New Delhi to find better ways of articulating its normative positions and its differences with the Chinese and/or other major external actors in Africa. Over the long run, it is only a normative framework that appeals to both African partners and Indian citizens, that can sustain Indian projects and policy implementation.

The fact that China has had space in the current international order to come up with its own norms in competition with existing international norms suggests that there is space also for India to pick up from where it left off in the early post-colonial period, to tailor what are usually understood as Western-dominated international norms for the Global South and to thus move beyond the false narrative of a binary between economic development and political well-being, of a contest between Western values and Asian or African values.

Imperatives for the Future

What then must India be doing?

Certainly, India must continue to criticise the Chinese development model. It has done so, if infrequently, one of the clearest articulations came as early as 2017 when it highlighted the various shortcomings of China's BRI—the lack of good governance, rule of law, openness, transparency, and equality—and predicted challenges of an “unsustainable debt burden for communities,” over technology transfer, and of equitable and balanced development (MEA, 2017).

But India must match criticism with greater action. So far, India has tended to concentrate on skills and capacity development programmes, “the heart of its development partnerships in Africa” (Delhi Policy Group, 2025). However, it needs to do so not just in areas where it is strong but substantively and explicitly also in areas that address iniquities and problems created by Chinese projects,

digital infrastructure, technology transfer, local value addition, and infrastructure development. Indeed, India has already begun doing some of this (Delhi Policy Group, 2025).

While large-scale parliamentary visits, exchanges, or training programmes are all good initiatives, Indian diplomacy needs greater political savvy in the form of closer relations with African political parties, interest groups, media, and economic interests. A related point is India's increased cultivation of its diaspora after long years of neglecting them. The problem may be that India is going too far in the opposite direction (MEA, 2025). These diaspora interactions of Indian political leaders have more to do with Indian domestic politics, the validation or valorisation of a particular civilisational approach that might not necessarily sit well with everything else that India is preaching about democratic norms and values. The Chinese too, have a civilisational approach in their foreign policy that is now beginning to take on hues of extra-territoriality. More importantly, such an Indian approach is a distraction for its still limited diplomatic capacity when energies should be spent on more urgent tasks.

India has a lot to do, for example, in scaling up several-fold student exchanges as opposed to just training programmes for officials, not just the number of African students and scholars in India but of Indian students and scholars in Africa. Cooperation between universities and think tanks on both sides is another weak link that leaves New Delhi unable to understand or anticipate trends in Africa and to engage over the long-term with the intellectual elite on the continent.

From a governance and administrative perspective as well as from a people-to-people ties perspective, the centralisation of Indian engagement with Africa is a drag on project implementation and creativity. Para-diplomacy, allowing and pushing Indian sub-national entities, the regional states and cities, to increase their Africa focus and to engage with their counterparts, is critical at a time of demographic and economic growth on both sides.

It can be argued that the Indian model of economic and political development is evident every day in an open, free democracy that it is. Even so, there is something to be said for stating things explicitly for global and regional audiences. There is also something to be said about explicitly acknowledging the Chinese challenge to Indian and African interests.

Talk of Indian alternatives or an Indian development model must also, however, be accompanied by self-reflection and by transparent debate and discussion in India. A white paper on Indian policies in Africa for example, in Parliament, that would acknowledge shortcomings and deficits in India's Africa policy, or a national security strategy document, would go a long way in giving greater legitimacy to India's claims and wings to its policy implementation on the continent.

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07

India's Defence Push in Africa

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Introduction

The global order is currently undergoing major churns characterised by great-power realignment and recalibration of relations among major middle powers. Being two important growth poles of the “Global South,” any development in India and Africa’s ties always tends to pique the interest of policymakers.

Over the last decade, India has consistently attempted to cultivate closer ties with African countries in the domain of defence and security. What was primarily limited to joint patrolling of African waters to ensure the safety of Indian ships and seafarers and the participation of Indian forces in various United Nations Peacekeeping (UNPK) missions in Africa, has now diversified and become more broad-based. While these relations are neither definitive nor well-entrenched, they are indeed progressing.

New Delhi’s traditional focus on training and capacity building is now complemented by collaboration with African nations on issues like counterterrorism, extremism, prevention of money laundering, transnational crimes, and working for free and open oceans (Mishra, 2023).

Additionally, India is cognisant of China’s extensive presence in Africa. Many African countries use Chinese weapons and military equipment, which Beijing provides on attractive terms such as below-market prices and favourable financing. Around 70 per cent of African armies now operate Chinese armoured vehicles (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2024). To a large extent, China has been able to carve out its own segment in the African market,

particularly when it comes to promoting its own weapons systems and drones as possible alternatives to some Western countries' systems.

These shifts make clear why India is stepping up its engagement. Despite geographical proximity, political support, and a rich tradition of military training and engagement, India and Africa's journey can be categorised as one of "missed opportunities"—meaning that while potential abounds, a comprehensive whole-of-government strategy, including the private sector, continues to remain missing.

Moreover, the terror attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir on April 22, 2025, and India's strong response through "Operation Sindoor" and the subsequent ceasefire agreement with Pakistan drew mixed reactions across Africa. These ranged from unequivocal support for India to cautious diplomatic messaging, and in some instances, complete silence.

A focused emphasis on defence diplomacy would engender positive strategic outcomes for both India and African nations. Defence diplomacy could fill the gap where traditional methods have not yielded desired results by addressing the strategic concerns of both partners. The practice of defence diplomacy backed by political conviction and support from all of India's national agencies and ministries could become an important tool of statecraft for furthering India-Africa defence engagement.

Current State of Defence Engagement

While India and Africa's defence and security relations are neither definitive nor well-entrenched, they are indeed progressing. Presently, around 10 per cent of Indian defence exports go to Africa. India has deployed new defence attachés in countries like Ethiopia, Mozambique, Ivory Coast, and Djibouti.

It is encouraging to note that many thematic focus areas within the African Union's (AU)

Agenda 2063 (AU, 2025) long-term strategic vision align with key Indian foreign policy priorities. India and Africa's military traditions, strategic doctrines, command structures, and training protocols are compatible. Further, India has supported the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and the deployment of AU's African Standby Force (ASF). In the last decade, India has provided financial support to the AU and UN Trust Fund for the erstwhile African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), which in 2022 transitioned into the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) to which New Delhi provided US\$2 million (Prime Minister of India, New York, n.d.). In addition to establishing defence academies and colleges in Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Tanzania, New Delhi has also established a defence and naval war college in Nigeria; air force facilities in Ghana; and a military war game centre in Uganda.

Peacekeeping and conflict prevention are hallmarks of India's outreach to Africa. India has encouraged greater involvement of regional actors in Africa's peacekeeping efforts and has demonstrated commitment to peacekeeping despite the hazardous nature of operations in the region. This has helped consolidate India's image as a responsible global power and leveraged this image to claim African support for India's permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

New Initiatives

The Indian Government and Indian Navy have also undertaken several new initiatives like the Africa-India Field Training Exercise (AfINDEX), the India-Africa Defence Ministers Conclave (IADMC), and the India-Mozambique-Tanzania Trilateral Exercise (IMT-TRILAT). India's Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) vision for the Indian Ocean, enunciated by Prime Minister Modi in 2015 in Mauritius, has now evolved into the Maritime Heads for Active Security and Growth for All in the Region (MAHASAGAR) framework which reflects a strategic recalibration to extend

New Delhi's ambitions beyond its immediate neighbourhood (Ministry of External Affairs, 2015). MAHASAGAR today encompasses East African littorals and the wider Indo-Pacific. It signifies India's recognition of Africa as central to its maritime strategic calculus. By collaborating under frameworks like SAGAR, MAHASAGAR, Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), and Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), India and African nations, particularly the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) littorals, can promote a prosperous and stable Indo-Pacific, enhance regional stability, and build the capacity to address maritime challenges in the WIO region.

Under the MAHASAGAR framework, two landmark initiatives have been launched. The first is the Africa-India Key Maritime Engagement (AIKEYME) initiative, a naval wargame designed to increase interoperability with African navies and maritime agencies (Press Information Bureau, 2025). AIKEYME was co-hosted by the Indian Navy and the Tanzania People's Defence Force (TDPF) in April 2025. Additionally, the Indian Ocean Ship-SAGAR initiative (Indian Navy, n.d.) was undertaken under which Indian patrol vessel Sunayna successfully completed a month-long deployment in the south-west Indian Ocean with 44 international crew members from nine African nations who jointly manned the Indian ship. Such exercises provide an opportunity to exchange best practices, undertake coordinated patrols, and enhance mutual understanding.

Challenges and Future Considerations

India is positioning itself as a major player in Africa's defence and security market by offering greater lines of credit to procure "Made in India" defence equipment that is reliable and affordable. However, major internal and inherent limitations persist like low capital allocation, gap between promise and delivery, and weak coordination in various military and maritime aspects. While various African nations have shown interest in procuring Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas,

Nigeria, and Botswana backed out of the deal with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) citing concerns over production capability and timely delivery (Gupta, 2025).

In September 2023, a landmark deal worth US\$1 billion was signed between India and the Defence Industries Corporation of Nigeria (DICON) (Lionel, 2023), which was stated to help Nigeria become self-sufficient in local production and manufacturing of defence equipment. Despite this agreement, no sale of Indian defence equipment has yet taken place. Similarly, Egypt has shown interest in acquiring Tejas, Dhruv helicopter, and Akash Air Missile Defence System, and in establishing a possible maintenance, research, and overhaul (MRO) facility in the future.

In Morocco, the Tata Advanced Systems Limited (TASL), the defence arm of Tata Group, set up a defence manufacturing plant in Berrechid, Casablanca during Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's visit from September 22-23, 2025 (Pubby, 2024). Earlier, India had exported 92 tactical military transport trucks known as the Wheeled Armoured Platform (WhAP) to Morocco. This model of setting up a greenfield defence plant by Indian defence companies overseas offers New Delhi a chance to set up similar assembly plants in other African countries. The fact that TASL managed to set up the assembly plant without any terms of reference or prior experience is a testament to India's positive image, historical legacy, and general acceptance on the African continent. It is hoped that this development will usher in a snowball effect through which more Indian defence companies would be interested in exploring a similar model across growing African markets.

It is also important to highlight that the types of military equipment and defence training programmes are not unilaterally determined by India. These programmes are based on the demands of respective African nations in accordance with their context-specific requirements.

However, both the African side and their Indian counterparts should do a lot more in bridging the current knowledge asymmetry regarding each other's markets and defence-industrial constraints.

The sale of arms depends not only on bureaucratic processes but also on regulatory approvals, negotiations, and after-sales support. While the task of remaining competitive in Africa's defence market, which is dominated by China, Russia, and the US is tough, India can, with the right strategies in place, meet the specific requirements and deliver high-quality equipment, thereby making New Delhi an attractive partner for African militaries.

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08

From Make-in-India to Make-with-India: Towards an India-Africa Defence Industry Partnership

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India's defence industry has made significant leaps in recent years in terms of defence production value. In March 2025, the Ministry of Defence reported (Press Information Bureau, 2025) that in the 2023-2024 fiscal year, defence production reached a record US\$ 14 billion; then, in August 2025, the production value reached (India Today, 2025) an all-time high of US\$ 17 billion. These successes, according to the Defence Ministry, are attributed to local initiatives (Press Information Bureau, 2025) like "Make in India", Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX), and SAMARTHYA (a defence indigenisation programme). The Defence Minister, Rajnath Singh, also pointed out (India Today, 2025) the combined efforts of the private sector, the defence production sector, and the Aatmanirbhar Bharat initiative, which is aimed at reducing reliance on imports while boosting defence exports.

Africa, on the other hand, is a net importer of arms; this means India could join top suppliers like Russia, the US, and China as a major defence equipment supplier to African countries. However, New Delhi's push into Africa faces key challenges. Major importers like Morocco, South Africa, and Nigeria are keen to address defence industry deficits through local manufacturing. In addition, there is steep competition from established suppliers like Russia, China, the US, and France. Therefore, transitioning from a "Make in India" approach to a "Make with India" strategy could serve as the key to India achieving significant success in Africa.

Opportunities and Challenges

Although India is making inroads into defence cooperation with African countries, relations have so far been limited to the training of personnel and joint military exercises. In recent years, many African countries have adopted two approaches to addressing security challenges through defence partnerships. Firstly, there is a push to boost local production and manufacture of defence capabilities; secondly, there is a short-term plan of sourcing cheap and reliable equipment. These are situations where India can make inroads. The Africa Defence Forum reports (Africa Defense Forum, 2025) that Mauritius, Mozambique, and Seychelles are already among the top purchasers of Indian matériel such as armoured vehicles, combat helicopters, and offshore patrol craft.

Currently, China, Russia, and the US have an outsized role in the provision of defence equipment, albeit concentrated in certain regions like the Sahel, the Horn, and Central Africa. India thus faces steep competition from these entrenched defence partners. Moreover, it is not evident that India would consistently provide lines of credit for cash-strapped countries interested in acquiring military products as compared to the major entities in defence production. This means that India will have to make an extra effort to present itself as a unique and effective alternative for African countries. In the short term, African countries can engage India for its maintenance, upgrading, and servicing expertise in Soviet-era equipment, of which African countries have many in service, and in which India has extensive expertise, given its own vast experience. On the other hand, India could be a suitable partner for countries with long-term strategies that involve co-production programmes, since these are more complex endeavours requiring more time and commitment than frameworks of supply and training.

On the African side, the issue revolves around the overreliance on importing equipment and the low transfer of technical knowledge. It is

a vulnerability if African countries continue importing equipment without developing internal capabilities to manage said imports. In this vein, potential partners with India will want to have defence preparedness provided at appropriate costs compared to existing deals with Russia or China. Furthermore, requirements from African countries revolve around small arms, ammunition, patrol vehicles, and, increasingly, drones and surveillance systems. This is a gap where India is yet to have a clear presence, and even though countries like Nigeria have shown interest (Gateway House, 2024) in high-end platforms like India's fourth-generation combat aircraft, the Tejas, there is still a leaning towards Chinese and Russian equipment.

The glaring challenges that the India-Africa partnership faces in this context are the steep competition posed by established providers and new entrants such as Türkiye and, eventually, South Korea, in addition to the African ambition to establish local defence production in the long run. India has some opportunities to leverage here, and they revolve around sharpening its defence cooperation initiative and presenting its own cooperation framework as beneficial and appropriate, or possibly less cumbersome, when compared to established players in the sector. An adjustment of India's "Make in India" policy to "Make with India" is necessary and possible if African countries with the ambition and vision take the initiative. This approach will not just reduce the import bill, but will also increase self-reliance and have a positive knock-on effect on industrialisation. Interestingly, there is already a clear example of this shift as a proof of concept. In 2024, India's TATA Group and the Royal Moroccan Armed Forces entered into an agreement (Yabiladi, 2025) to establish a defence manufacturing hub focused on producing Wheeled Armoured Platform (WhAP) 8x8 combat vehicles, essentially boosting the military-industrial complex in the Kingdom.

Another issue is the funding of these deals and procurements. In 2021, Mauritius made use of the US\$ 100 million credit line

(Gateway House, 2024) for defence exports from India, and while other African countries expressed interest in light helicopters from Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), there was reluctance to engage the Indian credit lines. The point here is that certain African countries could face similar funding challenges but may not be afforded the same leeway that is given by larger economic partners like China. It is important to observe that while African countries are willing to acquire Indian equipment at appropriate price points and quality, India's relatively weaker financial and production pedigree compared to China and Russia remains a challenge. However, this is another realm where the switch from "Make in India" to "Make with India" can yield much benefit. This is because, on one hand, India is still engaging in defence manufacturing, and on the other, the African partners are also developing local capacity through increased transfer of technology and technical knowledge as well as boosting critical infrastructure for long-term industrial viability.

Zooming out, African countries with the intent to boost defence industrial capacity must balance diplomatic tightropes as they navigate the interests of other major powers with which they are in concert. In this regard, India's foreign policy tradition of non-alignment and how it is implemented are highly relevant. For instance, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, India has been a major buyer of Russian energy and continues to do so despite intense pressure and coercion by the US, as Washington seeks to cut off Russian crude from the world oil market. Conversely, India is a key partner (Asia Times, 2025) in the US's Asia-Pacific "deterrence" strategy, which is in practice a China containment strategy. Whether India is still non-aligned or now multi-aligned is up for debate; what is clear is that New Delhi is staunchly aligned with its own interests and shows foreign policy autonomy. This is a crucial factor African countries must consider when it comes to building defence partnerships in a world where it is typical for a third party to attempt to block legitimate commercial exchanges, including

the sale of arms, components, parts, and after-sale services, because of their disagreement with one of the parties. Russia and China have been so successful on the continent partly because African importers do not have to worry about orders not being fulfilled because of the concerns of third parties. It remains to be seen if India is capable of such autonomy in defence partnerships, given that New Delhi itself is still a major importer of arms and components.

Way Forward

There are several areas where effort can be applied to increase the chances of success, considering the identified challenges. African countries can focus on the transfer of technical knowledge, not just the reception of foreign matériel. Furthermore, as India has stepped up strategic diplomacy by sending (India TV News, 2024) defence attachés, more effort should be made to cooperate and synergise strategies. African countries can engage these officials to help clarify India's defence policy and geopolitical risk assessments. Since the convergence for India-Africa defence cooperation is in manufacturing and production, it is important that African countries also prioritise honing their technical skills, as well as research and development (R&D); co-production should not be limited to weapons that already exist but should extend to developing innovative solutions for the African battlefield.

There should be more support for initiatives that boost local defence production. Bilateral initiatives that support these positions are also welcome. The Ninth Joint Defence Committee meeting that took place (PSU Watch, 2025) in June 2025 between India and South Africa is an example, because it was a high-level dialogue focused on enhancing strategic cooperation across defence policy, military collaboration, defence production, and R&D. This contrasts with arrangements that are solely focused on the sale of matériel without discussions about knowledge transfer or the development of local defence production.

Should African countries successfully boost local defence production through effective security partnerships, this will feed into the wider narrative of productive Global South cooperation. This, in turn, gives further credence to the viability of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS), which is a priority for Global South countries.

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09

India–Africa Maritime Cooperation: Building a New Architecture for Oceanic Governance

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In a world increasingly defined by shifting alliances and emerging powers, the structure of global governance is undergoing a profound transformation. As the international order moves steadily towards multipolarity, it is reshaping the economic, strategic, and geopolitical frameworks. This evolving reality represents both promising opportunities and complex challenges, as nations navigate the uncertainties of a new global equilibrium.

Against the backdrop of this evolving global governance discourse, maritime governance has moved from the margins to the centre stage. The transboundary nature of maritime challenges, such as climate change and piracy, has underscored the urgent need for cooperative mechanisms among regional actors. For India, with its expansive coastline and geo-strategic location at the heart of the Indian Ocean, the imperative to lead and shape the maritime future of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has never been greater.

Historically, India's engagement with the ocean has been profound, and its connection with Africa, especially its eastern littoral states, predates colonial encounters. Indian traders used monsoon winds to sail across the ocean to East Africa, establishing trade routes and deep social and cultural ties. Even today, cities along the Swahili Coast continue to bear linguistic and cultural imprints of the Indian presence.

Coastal African countries benefitted significantly from India through the influence of Indian political thought, which played a key role in shaping several political organisations across the region. Notably, this impact was evident in the establishment of the Mombasa Indian Association in 1900 and the founding of the East African Indian National Congress in 1919, both of which drew inspiration from Indian ideas of nationalism, self-governance, and anti-colonial struggle. This long-standing historical affinity provides India and Africa with a unique opportunity to revitalise their strategic partnership towards enhanced governance of Africa's Western Indian Ocean Region (WIOR).

Despite its strategic significance, the WIOR has received relatively less attention from global policymakers, who have largely focused their efforts and resources on the more prominent Eastern Indian Ocean. Yet, the WIOR, comprising 10 countries—Comoros, France (Réunion), Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Somalia, South Africa, and Tanzania—is home to some of the world's busiest maritime routes. These shipping lanes are vital for international commerce and energy transport, and the region itself is resource-rich, with marine ecosystems valued at over US\$ 330 billion. Clearly, the region is vital to global trade, natural resource management, and climate resilience.

Recognising this potential and the growing strategic importance of the WIOR, India has recalibrated its foreign policy to include these countries in its extended neighbourhood strategy. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visits to Seychelles and Mauritius in 2015, and subsequent visits to Mozambique, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, and Madagascar, marked the beginning of a new chapter in India's maritime diplomacy with Africa. The inclusion of these countries under India's Maritime Security Strategy and the establishment of the Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) doctrine are a testament to New Delhi's commitment

to reshaping the Indian Ocean narrative. SAGAR emphasises cooperative security, inclusive economic growth, and adherence to international law. These principles are well aligned with the aspirations of African coastal states, as seen in Goal Six of the African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063 and the US-led Africa Maritime Law Enforcement Partnership (AMLEP) programme.

In recent years, India has taken several institutional steps to build capacity and deepen engagement with the region. In 2018, India established the Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) in Gurugram, India. Functioning as a hub for maritime domain awareness, the centre enables real-time information exchange on issues such as smuggling, illegal fishing, piracy, and maritime safety. In 2023 alone, IFC-IOR analysed nearly 4,000 incidents, reflecting the region's maritime volatility and the need for coordinated governance mechanisms. The deployment of liaison officers from African partner countries, namely Mauritius and Seychelles, to the centre helps foster mutual trust and ensures that the response to maritime challenges is collaborative and inclusive. In addition, Comoros, Kenya, Madagascar, Nigeria, South Africa, and Tanzania are also partners of IFC-IOR.

In parallel, although conceptualised as a domestic undertaking, initiatives like the Sagarmala Project also have strong external implications. Designed to modernise India's maritime infrastructure, enhance port capacity, and catalyse port-led industrial development, Sagarmala complements the AU's aspirations for a thriving blue economy. During his address to the Ugandan Parliament, Prime Minister Modi explicitly linked India's blue economy vision to Africa's development goals, underscoring India's willingness to co-develop rather than dominate. This model of partnership, rooted in mutual benefit and sustainable development, is distinct from the exploitative tendencies often associated with extra-regional powers.

Moreover, to devote greater attention to the region, India's Ministry of External Affairs in 2019 created a separate Asia Pacific Division, which now covers Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar, and Comoros. The move reflects the prioritisation of these countries in its policy framework and bureaucratic institutionalisation of India's maritime focus. It also signals New Delhi's shift towards effective maritime governance through consistent engagement, policy attention, and on-ground implementation. India's membership in the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) since 2020 further anchors its position within regional maritime institutional frameworks and strengthens its legitimacy as a partner of choice in the WIOR.

India's humanitarian and disaster response in the region further enhances its reputation as a responsible maritime actor. From cyclone relief operations in Mozambique and Madagascar to medical aid during the COVID-19 pandemic, India has demonstrated its willingness to act as a first responder in times of crisis. Such actions resonate deeply in a region where states often struggle with capacity limitations and are vulnerable to climate-induced disasters. The Indian Navy's proactive role in hydrographic surveys, search and rescue missions, and exclusive economic zone surveillance has also been widely appreciated by African nations. For example, in response to invitations from the Mozambique government, the Indian Navy deployed ships off Maputo to provide maritime security during the 2003 AU summit and the 2004 World Economic Forum meeting, culminating in a significant maritime security agreement between India and Mozambique in 2011.

Despite these successes, the road ahead is not without challenges. With its deep investments in African ports and expanding naval footprint, China's presence creates a complex competitive environment. In contrast to the Eastern Indian Ocean, where India has successfully engaged through mechanisms like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD)

and Australia, United Kingdom, and United States (AUKUS), the WIOR lacks robust multilateral platforms. This gap highlights the need for a more coherent and structured strategy for the Western Indian Ocean that India and Africa should anchor.

To address this, in March 2025, during his visit to Mauritius, Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled India's Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions (MAHASAGAR) vision. Now, India must accelerate the operationalisation of the MAHASAGAR initiative, a comprehensive vision that seeks to bind India and African littoral states in a shared maritime future.

MAHASAGAR should not merely remain a policy label but must transform into an actionable framework that institutionalises cooperation across various issues. It should serve as a platform for the structured exchange of technical expertise, indigenous knowledge, and best practices in maritime security, hydrography, fisheries management, and climate adaptation with the Global South, particularly Africa.

Most African coastal countries lack skills essential for maritime governance, such as maritime law, oceanography, and disaster resilience, and therefore are forced to depend on Western nations and increasingly China. These countries should collaborate with India to develop centres of excellence specialising in these domains. This would also be in sync with India's MAHASAGAR vision, fulfilling the objective of knowledge-sharing and capacity-building initiatives. Going forward, these centres can serve as nodes of collaboration and innovation hubs, providing a platform for Indian and African experts to co-create solutions to shared maritime challenges.

India, on the other hand, should collaborate more with African countries and push for a more active role within existing regional organisations such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). To assist Africa in its maritime governance, India should reinforce

its image as a reliable partner by championing projects that align with African priorities like fisheries protection, climate resilience, and maritime training. These also align well with the AU policy frameworks.

By engaging at both the bilateral and multilateral levels, India should ensure that maritime governance remains a central agenda point in all its engagements with the region and does not get enmeshed with other geopolitical agendas.

Lastly, India should think beyond marine spatial planning (MSP) and may lead the creation of a South–South maritime technology consortium that includes African coastal states. Such a platform can facilitate affordable technologies in vessel tracking, marine pollution control, coastal zone mapping, and deep-sea exploration. This would

catalyse innovation and entrepreneurship and boost economic development. The resultant self-reliance would be critical in reducing dependence on non-regional actors for critical maritime infrastructure.

In conclusion, India–Africa cooperation in maritime governance holds transformative potential. It is a partnership grounded in history, driven by shared interests, and capable of shaping a just and sustainable maritime order. The Indian Ocean is not merely a conduit for commerce; it is a canvas where India and Africa can co-create a future based on equality, mutual respect, and shared benefits. With political will, strategic clarity, and institutional coordination, the India–Africa maritime cooperation can emerge as a model for South-led global governance in this rapidly changing world.



GREEN GROWTH AND JUST TRANSITIONS

10

India–Africa Cooperation on Critical Minerals, Green Industrialisation, and Infrastructure Development

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Context and Strategic Alignment

The global clean-energy transition is reshaping industrial production and trade architectures. Demand for critical minerals such as lithium, cobalt, nickel, manganese, graphite, and rare earth elements is expected to rise by up to sixfold by 2040 (International Energy Agency [IEA], 2021). These minerals underpin electric vehicles (EVs), renewable-energy storage, and digital infrastructure. Sub-Saharan Africa possesses nearly 30% of global reserves, yet over 75% of its mineral exports leave the continent unprocessed, forfeiting up to 80% of potential value-added (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD], 2023). In 2022, the region exported more than USD 80 billion in raw minerals but captured less than 10% of the refined market value, entrenching what UNCTAD (2023) calls the “raw-material trap.”

Conversely, India is rapidly scaling its clean-tech manufacturing base. Its domestic battery demand is projected to reach 260 GWh by 2030, requiring critical-mineral inputs worth over USD 15 billion annually (NITI Aayog, 2022). Yet India has limited domestic reserves of lithium, cobalt, and nickel, exposing it to external supply shocks as China dominates refining of rare earth elements, around 90% of global capacity, and substantial portions of lithium and cobalt processing (Finnish Institute of International Affairs [FIIA], 2024).

The structural complementarity between Africa’s resource endowment and India’s manufacturing demand presents a strategic opening for South–South

co-development. If approached through co-investment and technology partnership, both regions could leverage the green transition for shared industrialisation. The alternative, extractive, one-way trade would replicate the colonial logic of exporting raw resources and importing finished goods. This paper, therefore, argues for an Africa-India green-industrial alliance grounded in beneficiation, infrastructure co-financing, and institutionalised technology exchange.

Africa's Position in the Critical Minerals Economy

Africa already anchors several global critical-mineral supply chains. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) accounts for over 70% of the world's mined cobalt, vital for lithium-ion batteries (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2023). South Africa, Gabon, and Ghana collectively supply more than 60% of global manganese ore, while Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Mali host some of the world's fastest-growing lithium projects (IMF, 2023). Madagascar and Mozambique together contribute roughly 12% of global graphite output. However, Africa captures only a fraction of the downstream value. For example, bauxite from Guinea trades at USD 60 per tonne, while refined aluminium exceeds USD 2,300 per tonne (IMF, 2023). Cobalt concentrate exported from the DRC sells for a tenth of the price of battery-grade cobalt sulphate refined in Asia. This imbalance keeps African economies vulnerable to commodity volatility and hinders structural diversification.

A policy shift is underway. Countries such as Namibia and Zimbabwe have banned exports of unprocessed lithium; Ghana has vowed not to export raw lithium ore; and Zambia and the DRC have launched a Battery Value Chain Initiative to process copper and cobalt domestically (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa [UNECA], 2024). These measures align with the African Mining Vision (AMV) of 2009, which anchors mineral extraction within industrial policy, and the African Green Minerals Strategy (AGMS)

adopted in 2025, which reframes critical minerals as drivers of green industrialisation rather than mere export commodities (African Union, 2025).

Continental institutions are reinforcing this re-orientation. The African Development Bank (AfDB) has championed beneficiation corridors and value-chain integration; the African Mineral and Energy Resources Classification and Management System (AMREC) and the Pan-African Resource Reporting Code (PARC) promote harmonised standards and transparency (AfDB, 2024). Together, these initiatives express a continental commitment to move “from extraction to transformation.” Yet realising this vision requires not only national regulation but also investment, technology, and markets—gaps that an India-Africa partnership could fill.

India's Industrial Pivot and Policy Levers

India's economic transformation rests on securing resilient critical-mineral supply chains. To meet its EV and renewable-energy targets, India's lithium demand could rise by up to 50 times by 2040 (IEA, 2021). Recognising this, the government launched the National Critical Minerals Mission (NCMM) in 2025, combining domestic exploration with strategic overseas partnerships (Government of India, 2025). The Geological Survey of India (GSI) has initiated over 1,200 new exploration projects, while amendments to the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act have fast-tracked licensing for 24 priority minerals (GSI, 2025). Domestically, India has established an INR 18,100 crore Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme to support gigafactories and reduce import dependency (NITI Aayog, 2021).

Externally, India has shifted from passive procurement to active acquisition. Khanij Bidesh India Ltd (KABIL), a state-backed joint venture, signed a USD 24 million agreement in 2024 with Argentina's state mining firm to develop lithium blocks in Catamarca, marking

India's first overseas lithium investment (FIIA, 2024). Discussions with Chile, Australia, and African producers are advancing, while India joined the Minerals Security Partnership (MSP) alongside the US, the EU, and Japan to coordinate diversified supply (Ministry of External Affairs [MEA], 2024).

Africa is increasingly pivotal to this strategy. Recent high-level visits by the Indian Prime Minister to Namibia and Ghana in 2025 placed critical minerals at the centre of bilateral agendas. Yet analysts note that India's Africa engagement remains fragmented compared with China's coordinated approach (Economic Times, 2025). Indian think tanks such as the Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP) have therefore proposed a Critical Minerals Compact with Africa, establishing inter-governmental coordination, targeted lines of credit, and joint Special Economic Zones (SEZs) for mineral processing (CSEP, 2025).

India's policy shift also aligns with broader geopolitical positioning. At G20 forums, Indian officials have argued that global clean-energy supply chains must be “reliable, diversified, sustainable, and responsible” (MEA, 2024). This reflects India's ambition to build supply security without reproducing extractive dynamics. By partnering with Africa on beneficiation, green infrastructure, and human-capital development, India can both secure resources and contribute to a more equitable global green economy.

Pathways for a South-South Green Industrial Partnership

Joint Beneficiation and Industrial Zones

Africa-India cooperation should prioritise joint mineral-processing ventures located within SEZs or industrial parks along key corridors. African governments can offer fiscal incentives and processing quotas; India can contribute technology and concessional finance through the EXIM Bank and the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund

(NIIF). By leveraging African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)'s rules of origin, these zones could form regional value chains, for example, lithium mined in Zimbabwe, refined in Mozambique, assembled into batteries in South Africa, and exported tariff-free within Africa or to India.

Such initiatives align with successful precedents. The LifeZone-BHP refinery in Tanzania demonstrates that in-country refining of nickel and cobalt is viable (UNCTAD, 2023). Scaling similar models with Indian firms would deepen Africa's industrial base while securing India's midstream supplies.

Battery Manufacturing and Green Mobility

Downstream collaboration can extend to battery and EV component manufacturing. The DRC-Zambia Battery Metals SEZ, supported by Afreximbank and UNECA, provides a template. India, a global leader in two- and three-wheeler EVs, could invest in such African gigafactories to assemble low-cost electric mobility solutions for both African and South Asian markets. Morocco's USD 6.4 billion gigafactory deal with Gotion High-Tech in 2025 proves Africa's viability as a manufacturing base (Argus Media, 2025). By linking African mineral supply with Indian manufacturing expertise, both regions could anchor competitive South-South value chains in the EV sector.

Skills and Technology Transfer

A Skills and Technology Compact should form a cornerstone of this partnership. Joint Centres of Excellence connecting Indian Institutes of Technology with African universities could drive research in mineral processing, battery chemistry, and recycling. Scholarships and apprenticeships in Indian mining and manufacturing firms would build Africa's technical workforce. Indian participation in pilot plants, such as small-scale lithium refining or recycling facilities, could ensure hands-on technology transfer. These measures

would embed industrial know-how locally and advance a just transition by creating skilled green jobs across Africa (UNECA, 2024).

Infrastructure and Blended Finance

Mineral-based industrialisation depends on efficient, low-carbon logistics. Africa's emerging corridors, such as the Lobito Corridor linking the Copperbelt to Angola's Atlantic port and the revitalised Tanzania–Zambia Railway (TAZARA), are pivotal. Electrified, renewable-powered transport networks could drastically reduce the carbon footprint of mineral exports while opening inland regions to investment. The Africa Finance Corporation (AFC)'s USD 320 million Lobito expansion, co-financed by Italy in 2025, exemplifies blended-finance models that align development and climate objectives (AFC, 2025).

India's infrastructure diplomacy honed through port and rail projects in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka can complement African efforts. An Africa–India Blended Finance Facility, co-anchored by Afreximbank, AFC, and India's NIIF, could pool public and private capital for corridors, renewable-energy supply, and SEZ infrastructure. This would de-risk early-stage projects, attract institutional investors, and demonstrate that climate-aligned industrialisation can be profitable.

Policy and Institutional Coordination

To sustain momentum, both sides should establish an Africa–India Critical Minerals Council (AICMC) to coordinate policy, monitor Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) compliance, and maintain a pipeline of projects. The Council could harmonise standards across beneficiation, infrastructure, and skills initiatives while ensuring alignment with AfCFTA, the AGMS, and India's NCMM.

Complementary regulatory reforms are also necessary. African governments should replace blanket export bans with calibrated local-processing requirements backed by fiscal incentives (UNCTAD, 2023). India, for its part, should embed co-investment and technology-transfer clauses within any mineral offtake or exploration agreements. Such mechanisms ensure that both resource development and industrial capacity are shared.

Conclusion

The convergence of Africa's resource abundance and India's industrial dynamism offers a rare window for mutually beneficial cooperation. By combining African mineral wealth with Indian technology, finance, and market access, the two regions can redefine South–South collaboration in the age of green industrialisation. For Africa, the partnership offers a route out of the raw-commodity trap and towards inclusive, value-added growth; for India, it secures diversified critical-mineral inputs essential to its clean-energy transition.

If anchored in beneficiation, capacity-building, and sustainable infrastructure, an Africa–India green-industrial alliance could reshape the geography of global value chains. It would illustrate that the clean-energy transition can be a platform for equality, not extraction, where the Global South co-creates its industrial future. Success will depend on political will, effective institutions such as the AICMC, and the mobilisation of blended finance to turn commitments into projects. In an era when critical minerals are the new oils, Africa and India have an opportunity to ensure the story is different this time, one of partnership, prosperity, and shared progress.

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11

Collaborating for Shared Ambition: Africa–India Partnership on Energy Transition Technology Value Chains

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Introduction

Africa and India, both engines of rising energy demand, are key to shaping the global pace of climate action. The shift to renewables and electric mobility is transforming manufacturing, trade, and global geopolitics, moving influence from fossil resource holders to countries active in technology manufacturing and mineral supply chains. For Global South nations, this transition offers an opportunity to unlock new economic pathways to advance industrialisation and socio-economic development.

Many African countries hold abundant mineral reserves and aim to benefit equitably—rather than fall into the resource curse—while both regions prioritise industrialisation to create jobs and reduce import dependence. This shared ambition creates a unique opportunity for deeper collaboration in energy-transition technology value chains, spanning mineral extraction to manufacturing. This paper addresses how such Global South collaboration can be shaped and fostered, engaging different stakeholders within the policy, industry, and investment ecosystems in both contexts.

Economic Complementarity and Evolving Trade

Africa-India trade continues to rise, reaching US\$ 73 billion in 2024, with energy and non-energy minerals forming the bulk of African exports to India, and petroleum products, agro-goods, pharmaceuticals, and motor vehicles dominating India's exports to Africa (Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 2025). A major partnership objective is value addition and a shift from raw material exports to locally processed products for global markets, with India aiming to double bilateral trade by 2030 and prioritise local capacity-building and demand-driven cooperation models (Press Information Bureau [PIB], 2025).

Opportunities are rapidly expanding in energy transition value chains. While Indian solar photovoltaic (PV) module exports have primarily been destined for the United States, exports to Africa experienced an increase of over 60% between 2022 and 2023, highlighting the potential for the scale-up of exports to Africa, with major partners in both Southern and Eastern Africa (Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 2025). Automotive exports, including electric vehicles (EVs), in 2024 comprised approximately 8% of India's total value of exports to Africa, while machine and electric machinery exports surpassed US\$ 640 million in 2024 (Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 2025).

Africa holds significant reserves of minerals necessary to produce energy transition technologies, including platinum, cobalt, lithium, and rare earths. The resource base is diverse and geographically spread—South Africa is a global leader in manganese and platinum-group metals production, while the Democratic Republic of the Congo represents over 65% of the world's copper production (Ngundu & Baum, 2025). India's demand for such minerals—projected to soar by 2030 due to ambitions to localise the solar PV, battery, and EV value chains—relies on imports,

driving the government's focus on supply diversification.

This reveals clear complementarity: Africa's push for value addition and to secure technology access for its own energy ambitions aligns with India's pursuit of diversified mineral supply and expansion of clean-energy manufacturing. Joint efforts to advance renewable energy and electric mobility manufacturing, mineral supply chains, and local value addition can drive mutual growth and strengthen both regions' positions in the global energy transition and related supply chains.

Partnering for Impact: A Call to Action

Building on the experience of the Sustainable Energy for All (SEforALL) Green Industrialisation Hub,¹ the following proposed set of actions can advance the Africa-India partnership across energy transition technology value chains:

Institutionalise Exchange on Industrial Policy Design and Implementation

There is significant potential to establish scalable platforms for collaboration between India, African countries, and regional bodies like the African Union (AU), focused on industrial policy design and implementation. India's experience and learning derived from deploying industrial policy tools represent a valuable knowledge resource. This includes the design of demand- and supply-side measures (e.g., production-linked incentives), building firm-level capabilities, and demand-creating regulations (e.g., local procurement).

SEforALL's 2024 Nigeria-India electric bus exchange, conducted with the Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet, provides an example of targeted peer learning. By mobilising Nigerian decision-

makers to learn from India's scalable electric mobility deployment, specifically on public procurement design, the role of State and federal stakeholders, and financing structures, the collaboration directly enabled the first electric buses to reach Abuja in early 2025. Further exchanges, such as the Kenya-India collaboration on energy efficiency in 2025, reinforce the power of structured platforms for joint learning.

Drawing on models like India's Ministry of Heavy Industries (MHI) Joint Working Groups and the Korea-Africa Partnerships on critical minerals, a joint *Africa-India Working Group on Clean Technology Supply Chains* could be hosted by the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD) with rotating co-chairs (e.g., between the Indian MHI or Ministry of New and Renewable Energy [MNRE] and the AU Department of Trade and Industry). The Working Group would institutionalise Africa-India and country-to-country exchange on industrial policy, trade, investment, research and development (R&D), and skills development related to green value chains.

Pursue Strategic Trade Partnerships Taking a Holistic Green Value Chain Approach

India is currently Africa's third-largest trading partner. Cumulatively, Indian investments totalled US\$ 66 billion between 2010 and 2023, making it the continent's second-largest source of foreign investment (Bhowmick, 2025). The continent's preferential access to Indian markets under India's Duty-Free Tariff Preference Scheme for Least Developed Countries (LDCs), covering more than 95% of tariff lines, further supports expanding trade opportunities.

India and Africa's deep and growing economic relations provide a strong foundation for pursuing the joint development of green technology value chains. Taking a value chain approach can help identify multiple entry points for collaboration along a single

technology pathway, from extraction to final products. For instance, battery-mineral-rich African countries can partner with India to advance exploration, responsible mining, and local refining, supported by financing, technical cooperation, and capacity building. To this end, aligned with the National Critical Minerals Mission (NCMM), the Indian Ministry of Mines has established Memoranda of Understanding with several mineral-rich countries, such as Sri Lanka (2025), Saudi Arabia (2025), Côte d'Ivoire (2024), Zimbabwe (2018), Zambia (2019), Brazil (2020), Argentina (2020), and Mali (2022), amongst others (Ministry of Mines, 2025). These upstream and midstream partnerships can be paired with downstream cooperation, including preferential access to India's rapidly growing ecosystem for batteries, high-efficiency solar PV cells, and EVs under domestic initiatives such as the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) and Electric Mobility Promotion Scheme.

Such reciprocal arrangements can create forward and backward linkages, thereby supporting local industrialisation in resource-rich economies while securing mineral supplies and intermediate materials for countries with fast-expanding clean energy industries. Over time, this form of integrated green trade partnership can promote technology transfer, diversify industrial capabilities, and foster shared prosperity between India and Africa, positioning both as leaders in the global green industrial transformation.

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) provides a further impetus as a framework to access a larger regional market. Structural and infrastructural constraints may present challenges to realising the full potential, including unreliable or limited energy infrastructure necessary to underpin industrialisation, lack of access to concessional financing, logistics bottlenecks, and associated costs (especially in the context of intra-regional trade), as well as regulatory uncertainty.

¹ SEforALL's Green Industrialisation Hub facilitates south-south collaboration to advance local value chain development of energy transition technologies in the Global South.

Facilitate Firm-Level Partnership Building

The private sector is pivotal for building local supply chains for energy transition technologies. Both established conglomerates and new firms are responding to evolving market signals by exploring opportunities in the solar PV modules, batteries, and EV value chains.

African firms have started locally assembling and manufacturing electric buses, cars, and two- and three-wheelers, often through partnerships with original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) supplying knocked-down kits alongside complementary infrastructure. The solar PV sector features a growing pipeline of domestic module assembly facilities, with Nigeria alone hosting over 500 MW capacity. Partnerships with Tier-1 OEMs support the development of assembly lines, workforce skills, and market access.

Given India's robust private sector manufacturing ecosystem, significant opportunities exist for Indian firms to collaborate with African companies. The India-Africa Solar Manufacturers Roundtable (June 2025) convened by SEforALL, in partnership with Dalberg, the World Bank, and the International Solar Alliance (ISA), highlighted the importance of targeted investment and partnership facilitation through matchmaking platforms and export promotion incentives, led by government, industry associations, public trade facilitation agencies, and development partners bringing market intelligence as well as honest-broker platforms. Public instruments, such as de-risking tools, preferential tariff setting for equipment and input goods (e.g., solar cells, knocked-down kits), and procurement preferences for export-import finance-linked projects, can stimulate demand and catalyse firm-level partnerships that anchor localisation.

Explore Joint Investment Opportunities Across Green Value Chains

The energy transition technology value chain faces persistent financing gaps, from mineral exploration to manufacturing. Mobilising new sources of funding aligned with national priorities for local industrialisation and skills development is essential.

India's experience and institutional architecture for development finance offers unique leverage. The Export-Import Bank of India, for instance, has supported Indian investments and project exports in Africa, including lines of credit and buyer's credit mechanisms. Such financing instruments can be strategically deployed, in collaboration with counterparts including Afreximbank, to de-risk investments in critical mineral supply chains and green technology manufacturing, supporting both Indian and African stakeholders.

Other forms of blended finance can provide capital for feasibility studies, demonstration projects, capacity building, and technology adoption. India's NCMM provides dedicated funding to acquire mining assets and establish partnerships with mineral-rich countries. By scaling up joint investment vehicles, India and Africa can catalyse value chain partnerships that maximise benefits, including technology and skills transfers, reciprocal market access, and secure supplies for fast-expanding clean energy sectors.

Facilities such as the US\$ 500 million Distributed Renewable Energy (DRE) Nigeria Fund, led by the Nigeria Sovereign Investment Authority, SEforALL, the ISA, and Africa50, illustrate how targeted development finance, involving sovereign actors and development banks, can mobilise strategic sector-specific financing.

Facilitate Linkages Between Indian and African Centres of Excellence for Skilling

A SEforALL survey identified critical shortages across 15 African renewable energy and electric mobility assembly firms in Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, and South Africa. This offers an opportunity for Africa-India collaboration on green manufacturing skills as the demand for technical and non-technical roles grows across the value chain. For instance, SEforALL supported an East African EV firm to partner with an Indian training institution to co-develop practical, accredited courses, and train-the-trainer programmes, alongside lab and content development. Such initiatives can be scaled significantly but require financing support for training infrastructure, curricula, and industry partnerships. Existing engagement platforms (e.g., the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme) can be leveraged to institutionalise dedicated Africa-India skilling programmes for green manufacturing, building on already existing African skilling expertise and initiatives such as South Africa's PowerUp and Automotive Skills development programme, Kenya's Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) reforms, and Nigeria's FME TVET initiative.

Advance Cohesive Global South Messaging on Industrialisation and Climate Action

The AU's inclusion during India's Group of Twenty (G20) Presidency set a precedent for mainstreaming African priorities in global forums. India and African nations now have a unique opportunity to unify their messaging on Global South priorities such as reforms to the global trade and investment regime, critical mineral and supply chain governance, and technology transfer obligations through platforms like the Africa-India Forum Summit, Focus Africa Programme, and the G20, amplifying the Global South's voice on linking industrialisation with climate action. Such cohesive leadership is crucial to mobilising investment, technology

transfer, and capacity building for just energy transitions, as well as advocating for necessary reforms in the international trade and investment regime.

By jointly promoting resilient value chains and local beneficiation, as reflected in the G20 Outcome Document and the AU's Africa Green Minerals Strategy, these regions can shape global supply chains and advocate for fairer, value-added participation in the energy transition. Coordinated action would help shift resource-rich countries from price takers to price makers, unlocking inclusive growth and avoiding the pitfalls of extractive development.

Existing institutional frameworks can be leveraged to enhance policy alignment as well as emerging multilateral cooperation groupings, including the India, Brazil, and South Africa (IBSA) Dialogue Forum. Thematic platforms, such as the Council for Critical Minerals Development in the Global South, with ongoing engagements across Africa and India, have an important role to play in facilitating the building of a cohesive positioning, potentially through an annual Global South Convening on Critical Minerals Development hosted on a rotational basis.

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Community-Driven, Equitable Energy Partnerships for a Just Energy Transition: Lessons From Zimbabwe With Insights From India

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Community-driven, equitable energy partnerships are crucial for securing sustainable energy futures by ensuring inclusive participation and a fair distribution of benefits and costs. This approach prioritises the active involvement of diverse community groups in decision-making, with a particular focus on gender equality, social inclusion, and safeguards to address systemic barriers in energy access.¹ By integrating local knowledge and empowering women and marginalised groups, such partnerships enhance the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of energy initiatives. This paper highlights how embedding principles of equity and inclusion within energy collaborations fosters resilience, promotes social justice, and accelerates progress towards universal, affordable, and clean energy solutions. Drawing lessons from Zimbabwe and India reveals both challenges and opportunities in implementing these principles through community-driven energy partnerships. The paper concludes with recommendations to embed equity targets in national renewable energy projects in the medium to long term and to facilitate the formation of energy planning committees that involve women and youth, promoting inclusion in just transition projects in the short term.

¹ Sustainable Development Goal Number 7.

Background

In Zimbabwe, the energy sector faces several constraints, including limited access to electricity in rural areas, a heavy reliance on fossil fuels and economic vulnerabilities (Akpan et al., 2024; Ministry of Energy and Power Development, 2023). Approximately 52% of Zimbabweans reside in areas served by the national electricity grid, and 34% of respondents live in households connected to the national power grid. Fewer than one in 10 rural residents are connected to the grid, compared with a large majority (69%) of urban residents (Mpako & Moyo-Nyede, 2025). Coal remains the primary source of grid-supplied electricity in Zimbabwe, amounting to 54% of the total electricity generation (International Energy Agency [IEA], n.d.), even though the burning of coal for energy releases significant amounts of greenhouse gases (GHGs), contributing to climate change (African Energy Commission [AFREC], 2021; Oxfam, 2022).

These gaps underscore the energy poverty faced by women and villagers, who spend hours collecting biomass for cooking and lack basic lighting. With robust local demand and a wealth of renewable resources, Zimbabwe's energy sector is poised for investment due to growing local demand, resource availability, and policy commitments to sustainable energy expansion and GHG reduction targets (Accelerated Partnership for Renewables in Africa [APRA], n.d.). Community-driven projects in Zimbabwe focus on leveraging local resources such as small-scale solar and hydropower, with an emphasis on empowering women who often bear the brunt of energy poverty (see Table 1). Gender inclusion initiatives, therefore, seek to dismantle traditional roles and promote women's leadership in energy decision-making (Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development, 2025). Zimbabwe's approach reflects a strong

need to balance economic growth, poverty alleviation, and environmental sustainability in a context of limited infrastructure and financial resources.

Defining the Just Energy Transition

The concept of the just energy transition is rooted in the Paris Agreement (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change [UNFCCC], 2015). It broadly stipulates a goal to substantially reduce global GHG emissions to limit the global temperature increase to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels (UNFCCC, 2015). To achieve this, countries, through their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), communicate the actions they will take to reduce their GHG emissions and reach the goals of the Paris Agreement every five years.

In 2025, countries are required to submit their updated NDCs. Only 13 of the 195 parties to the Paris Agreement communicated their NDCs 3.0 plans by the February 10, 2025 deadline, with Zimbabwe being the only African country to make its submission on time² (Impact Stories, 2025; Ministry of Environment, Climate, and Wildlife, 2025). In India, the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC), the primary framework for climate action, is being implemented by the government. The nine national missions that comprise the NAPCC are focused on solar energy, water, agriculture, the Himalayan Ecosystem, sustainable habitats, green India, human health, and climate change strategy. In June 2025, India reached a major milestone in its energy transition by achieving the NDC goal of 50% of its installed electric power capacity from non-fossil fuel sources, five years ahead of the committed timeline of 2030 (Press Information Bureau [PIB], 2025).

Top-down and inadequate planning have often led to marginalised communities being left out, worsening existing inequalities, as vulnerable groups are then disproportionately harmed by the economic and social disruptions. The key elements of justice have not been incorporated into just transition planning, and these include the following:

1. Procedural justice, which entails constant and meaningful consultation with impacted parties.
2. Distributive justice, which entails equitable and fair sharing of the transition's costs and benefits. The Climate Adaptation Water and Energy Infrastructure Programme (CAWEP) project not only powered 85 homes and businesses but also provided 100 solar lantern kits and 90 biogas cookstoves to households (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2024).
3. Recognitional justice, which entails acknowledging that present sociocultural, economic, and political structures do not equally value all members of society, and that existing disparities along gender, class, and ethnic/racial lines may be exacerbated by climate change and transitional policies. Zimbabwe's Renewable Energy Policy highlights some of the key socio-economic areas to be addressed by the policy which includes affordability and accessibility of energy from renewable sources, employment opportunities, gender equity, and benefits to children, youth participation, food security, and improved access to basic facilities (Ministry of Energy and Power Development, 2019).

4. Restorative justice, which entails redressing past harm, for example, through compensation or reducing the likelihood of future harm. The CAWEP mini-grid project itself is partly framed as redressing often-overlooked rural areas.

Lessons From Zimbabwe and Insights From India

While Zimbabwe does not have a specific just energy transition policy, several laws and policies support the pursuit of a just energy transition in Zimbabwe. These regulatory frameworks shape and influence energy transition designs and programmes, helping to bring a human rights-based approach to the energy transition conversation, ensuring it is transparent and equitable (Oxfam, 2022). These include the National Energy Policy (NEP) 2012, which “*seeks to promote the optimal supply and utilisation of energy, for socio-economic development in a safe, sustainable and environmentally friendly manner,*” and to “*develop the use of other renewable sources of energy to complement conventional sources of energy,*” buttressed by the National Renewable Energy Policy (NREP) 2019, which sets out in detail the ambitious targets of the government in the development of renewable energy and contribution to the overall electricity supply in Zimbabwe.³

Table 1 provides an overview of some renewable energy projects implemented in Zimbabwe to promote energy access.

² In the NDC2.0, the estimated GHG reduction from the 17 measures was 30,650 Gg Carbon Dioxide Equivalent (CO₂e) in 2030, in absolute terms. For the same year in NDC3.0, the estimated GHG reduction from 27 measures were 41,489 Gg CO₂e. Comparing the mitigation potential for the same year (2030), the ambition increased by 35% under NDC3.0 relative to NDC2.0. In 2035, the 27 mitigation measures will result in an absolute emissions reduction of 50,104 Gg CO₂e under NDC3.0.

³ Laws that support the just energy transition in Zimbabwe include The Electricity Act [Chapter 13:19]; the Energy Regulatory Authority Act [Chapter 13:23]; the Electricity (Licensing) Regulations—SI 103 of 2008 as amended by SI 55 of 2015 Electricity Licensing Regulations Amendment; Electricity (Net Metering) Regulations, 2018; the Electricity Grid Code Regulations (SI 91/2017); the Electricity Distribution Code Regulations (SI 47/2017); Inefficient Lighting Products Ban Regulations S.I.21/2017; Electricity (Levies) Notice—SI 6 of 2008; and The Zimbabwe Energy Regulatory Authority (ZERA) Tariff Code.

Table 1: Renewable Energy Projects in Zimbabwe

Project Name	Project Type	Details
Climate Adaptation Water and Energy Infrastructure Programme (CAWEP) United Kingdom (UK)/UNDP-funded project (2022–2025)	Micro solar grid	This solar project was designed to guarantee sustainable energy solutions for both domestic and agricultural applications (UNDP, n.d.). A 200-kilowatt (kW) solar microgrid system backed by a 900-kilowatt-hour (kWh) battery system was installed as part of the project. It was intended to supply more than 80 houses with dependable electricity and power a nearby clinic, school, and stores (Practical Action, 2025). The project enhanced access to clean energy and water for women and vulnerable groups by installing climate-resilient renewable energy systems like the 200-kW solar mini-grid benefiting 85 homes, 18 businesses, a school, clinic, and boreholes (UNDP, 2024). The project also provided 100 solar lantern kits and 90 biogas digesters to poor households (UNDP, 2024). Targeting marginalised communities in districts such as Chipinge and Hakwata, according to an impact report, the project promoted economic empowerment by supporting new green jobs and local enterprises, particularly benefiting women and youth through vocational training and entrepreneurship opportunities (UNDP, 2024).
Clean Energy, Waste Recovery, and Low-Carbon Construction for Urban Resilience Project UN-Habitat/Swedish-funded initiative (2025–2026) being implemented by Practical Action (Practical Action, 2025)	Micro solar grid	The initiative created two clean energy centres in Epworth and Mabvuku-Tafara to encourage entrepreneurs in using energy to generate revenue while offering solar electricity for companies and services including water, phone charging, internet, salons, tailoring, information and communications technology (ICT), and clean cooking.

Catalysing Modern Energy Service Delivery to Marginal Communities in Southern Africa, Regional Micro Hydro Project European Union (EU) funded initiative (2007–2012) implemented by Practical Action	Micro hydro system	<p>The project’s primary goals were to boost the use of renewable energy technology in the energy mix and enhance access to contemporary energy services in impoverished rural regions of Malawi, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. The overall long-term objective of the project was to improve access to modern energy services and increase uptake of renewable energy technologies in the energy mix in poor rural area of Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe (World Access to Modern Energy [WAME], n.d.).</p> <p>The project installed eight and rehabilitated five mini grids with a combined generation capacity of 345kW (WAME, n.d.). The energy services provided included electricity to health facilities, schools, micro businesses and households and cumulatively benefited 45,000 men, women and children in rural communities of Mulanje district of Malawi, Manica Province of Mozambique, and Manicaland Province of Zimbabwe (WAME, n.d.). In addition 10 Private Energy Enterprises, Rural artisans and blacksmiths, Manufacturers and equipment vendors, local partners, 15 community-based organisations benefitted from the project.</p> <p>The project emphasised community-based management, including training local residents in operation and maintenance, ensuring sustainable service delivery. By involving women in technical and administrative roles and supporting local energy entrepreneurs, the initiative has empowered women socially and economically while increasing their access to modern energy (WAME, n.d.). Further the improved electricity access has enabled better health services, expanded educational opportunities, and boosted local incomes through small enterprises. The project removed the policy, technical and institutional barriers that limited the development and use of renewable energy sources to meet the energy needs of off-grid communities. The project created an enabling environment for the commercial uptake of the technology and stakeholder participation.</p>
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India’s experience offers a complementary perspective. India combines rapid urbanisation with significant rural energy deficits and a burgeoning clean energy industry (IEA, n.d.). The country has implemented large-scale policies promoting the deployment of renewable energy and labour transition in coal-dependent regions. Community-based energy partnerships in India incorporate just transition principles through localised solar and biogas projects that aim to

integrate women and socially marginalised groups, ensuring equitable job creation and capacity-building. The country has expanded renewables. By mid-2025, it had 50% non-fossil capacity, hitting its NDC goal early, highlighting that strong national targets and finance can mobilise clean energy (Reuters, 2025). Additionally, India’s community projects underscore justice needs. For instance, the Hariyali Gram (Green Village) initiative (Natural Resources Defense Council [NRDC]/

Self-Employed Women's Association [SEWA]) has installed biogas digesters and solar home systems in rural Gujarat (NRDC, 2025). The programme spans 500 villages, and one beneficiary from the project reportedly cut her firewood collection time from 60 to 15 hours per month using biogas and saved on electricity bills (NRDC, 2025). India's diverse socio-economic landscape requires adapting these partnerships to address inequality and disparities alongside environmental goals.

Conclusion

Pathways to a just transition must be inclusive and not perpetuate the existing inequalities in energy access. Zimbabwe and India demonstrate that a just energy transition cannot be achieved solely through top-down policies, but must involve bottom-up, community-led actions. The inclusion of women and vulnerable groups enhances social cohesion, strengthens local economies, and improves the resilience of energy systems by diversifying leadership and decision-making roles. Community inclusion fosters sustainable energy futures that are attainable when transition strategies openly address historical injustices and promote inclusive governance, tailored to local needs and contexts.

By comparing these contexts, lessons emerge on scaling community-driven models, integrating gender and social equity into energy access programmes, and designing policies that support just transitions globally. Ultimately, fostering partnerships based on collaboration, respect for indigenous knowledge, and shared benefits can accelerate the shift towards clean, affordable, and socially just energy systems in both Zimbabwe and India. This can be achieved through the following:

1. An inclusive just transition through investment in renewable energy that has enormous potential to address energy poverty and energy access. Community partnerships that address inequality and vulnerability provide an opportunity to promote climate justice.

2. Crafting targeted policies that support community engagement and participation in renewable energy, rooted in the pillars of justice.
3. Adopting holistic approaches that facilitate multi-actor participation. Fostering partnerships based on collaboration, respect for indigenous knowledge, and shared benefits can accelerate the shift towards clean, affordable, and socially just energy systems in both Zimbabwe and India.

Based on these, we recommend the following policy options:

1. Short Term

Create local energy planning bodies: The relevant ministries should mandate the formation of community energy committees for new projects. These committees would partner with project implementers to co-design microgrids and solar installations and participate in the renewable energy value chain. This would ensure procedural justice and ownership and meet actual community needs. A local committee could decide, for instance, where to extend a mini-grid, reducing conflicts and improving upkeep.

2. Medium Term

Allocate funding for community renewables: Governments should earmark a percentage of renewable energy funds for community- or cooperative-owned projects. This would promote distributive justice by directing investment to poor areas. A fund could subsidise a renewable energy project with a requirement that beneficiaries (especially women) get shares or jobs. This creates new incomes and spreads benefits beyond the project developer.

Mandate gender and social targets: There should be set gender targets for renewable energy projects, and the government should mandate project reports on gender metrics. This would help ensure recognition justice by making implementers accountable for inclusion.

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13

Translating India's Experiences of Electricity Access and Development for Africa

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Sub-Saharan Africa has some of the least electrified countries in the world. While there is expected and well-known heterogeneity, on average countries in the region suffer from a combination of limited electricity access and poor supply quality, even when electricity is theoretically available. World Bank data estimate that almost half the Sub-Saharan African population lacks electricity access as of 2023 (World Bank et al., 2025). Only South Africa is a measurable outlier: about 95% of homes have electricity access. Its per capita electricity consumption is roughly equal to the world average, which is more than eight times the total Sub-Saharan average (or about 20 times the average excluding South Africa).

India has been a recent achiever in reaching virtually 100% household electrification. While it was after China's achievement, its build-out used a very centralised and resource-heavy model. In this piece, we examine what experiences from India's more recent electrification journey are relevant for African nations, and suggest a few options for accelerating electrification. We start by examining what happened in India and how it may (or may not) be relevant. We then examine gaps, differences, or cautionary lessons from India's trajectory, ultimately giving inputs to African nations that must inherently do their own planning for the best way forward.

India achieved "100% household electrification" primarily through a flagship scheme of the Central government called Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar

Yojana (SAUBHAGYA), which ostensibly operated primarily between late 2017 and 2019 (Ministry of Power, Government of India, n.d.-a). This was a combination of governmental outlay as well as coordinated bidding for contractors actually delivering the work in the last-mile. According to government press releases, over 28 million households were beneficiaries.

Its scope was limited to all rural homes and poor households in urban areas. For a small minority of remote homes that cannot be connected to the grid, it would provide solar photovoltaic (SPV) standalone systems.

While this appears to be an exceptional pace of deployment, this timeline masks several supporting efforts built up over the years. This push for household electrification was primarily a last-mile connection effort. Older definitions of electrification were at the village level, only requiring a single bulb or, later on, connections in 10% of homes. That was already in place. There was a push for connections under other governmental schemes; as a result, awareness and implementation processes for last-mile build-out already existed.

It remains unclear if this model can directly be translated for African nations, but there are certainly lessons that are important. India's electricity system operates on a federal structure, and while distribution is entirely under the purview of the States, the Central government plays an important role not just in setting policy but also in terms of financial support. One thing that India has done

well not only for this scheme but also for its ongoing renewable energy transitions is to build up scale through not only large bids but standardisation of bids and contracting.

There are two things that India had that might not be available in all countries in Africa. First is density. Once the grid is “nearby” the marginal costs of interconnection are relatively low across poles laid in the last-mile. Second, it built up sufficient generation capacity to easily handle the incremental load from such new users.

The economics of deployments are key. While most capital costs were paid through support mechanisms, and only a nominal charge (Rs 500, typically, or USD 6, spread over 10 months) was taken from the consumer, there was still some amount of expenditure to be undertaken by the States or their public sector utilities. The estimated cost per household was USD 100, which appears very low compared to estimates from African efforts, but at the same time is a nontrivial expenditure for the poorest of the poor.

The Indian model has been to cross-subsidise such users with non-remunerative electricity pricing (i.e., cross-subsidised “tariffs”), but this only works when there are sufficient “paying customers” in the rest of the system. Another challenge has been ensuring quality supply on the physical interconnection. Even to date rural electricity supply is not 24/7 across all of India. This isn't due to lack of electricity at an aggregate national level but due to the economics of serving loss-making consumers.

Table 1: India's Electrification Policy Elements and Their Potential Transferability to African Contexts

India Policy/Element	Transferable?	Preconditions (if Conditional)	Suggested African Equivalent Options
Centralised last-mile connection drive (SAUBHAGYA-style)	Conditional	Dense settlements and/or grid already nearby; delivery capacity; credible supply plan.	Phased “clusters-first” rollout; results-based financing; combine with mini-grids/off-grid where grid is distant.
Standardised bidding + contracting templates	Transferable	Basic procurement capacity and contract enforcement.	National standard tender docs; shared templates via Power Pools/Regional Economic Communities (RECs); benchmarked unit-cost schedules; harness external expertise for initial efforts.
Universal metering for new connections	Transferable	Meter supply chain; billing/collection process; enforcement.	Prepaid/smart meters; minimum service package; third-party verification of installations.
Cross-subsidisation for low-income households	Conditional	Sufficient paying customers; loss/theft control; political discipline on tariffs/subsidies.	Focused (limited) lifeline tariffs + explicit budget transfers; targeted subsidies; subsidy caps + automatic review.
Anchor loads + productive-use focus	Transferable/high value	Identify paying anchors (telecom, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), public facilities); tariff clarity.	Electrify around anchors; bundle household + enterprise connections; productive-use credit lines.
“Connections = reliable service” assumption	Conditional	Distribution upgrades + Operations and Maintenance (O&M) funding; minimum service standards.	Pair connections with feeder/transformer upgrades; publish service metrics (hours/day, voltage); fund O&M; ensure generation (prioritising “green” supply but using any available technology at low cost).

Source: Author's compilation.

There are a number of possibilities for African nations to enhance electricity access to households. First and foremost, they would need to undertake detailed planning studies that would cover several dimensions across this puzzle: (1) density and physical locations; (2) generation ability (including fuel mix); (3) availability of funds for the capital-intensive upfront expenditure.

If countries are small, they can enhance regional cooperative frameworks not only for bulk generation supply (such as the multiple regional Power Pools) but also for coordination of standardised bid documents. Controlling generation costs is critical for controlling delivered electricity costs—in India, three-quarters of retail costs are for power procurement upstream of distribution (mostly generation, plus transmission).

In case the challenge turns out to be one not of the last-mile but of bringing the grid even near the village, such a higher expenditure would only make financial sense assuming a minimum offtake. In such a case, we can consider a model of “leopard spots” where one does not deploy the centralised grid equally or everywhere at once but focuses initially on the frontier adjacent to where it is available or viable.

In parallel, thanks to the rise of new technologies including cheap solar and (soon) cheap storage, countries can also plan for decentralised electricity systems, something increasingly popular in South Africa. Here, the objective isn't to have a standalone system per se but rather modular system that can operate in a federated mode with or without other nearby systems or the larger grid. In fact, local supply through solar would benefit from a larger interconnection because midday surpluses would eventually need to be used elsewhere. It's possible the future would eventually be a large, interconnected grid but with lots of local supply as well.

One of the subtle but important features of the SAUBHAGYA scheme was to insist on having electricity meters for all consumers. This helps understand consumption and also keeps a check on usage even if it is meant to be free for the poor. In practice, subsidies should be applied with clear limits and safeguards. One lesson from India is that subsidies are hard to wean off, more so when there is a political push for subsidies as part of an electoral pledge, all the way to “free power”—which: (a) is offered to well more than the needy; (b) discourages energy efficiency. India also didn't plan for these meters to have time-of-day accounting, something that will be increasingly important for a future with renewable energy. Africa should have a trajectory to move towards such metering without requiring retrofits or replacements.

At least a fraction of the one-time capital costs of the physical wires could be with external support, meaning from funds outside

those of the utility. Whether this comes from international aid, national budgets, etc., is a separate question. There is enough global capital, but will it come? At what terms? Risk mitigation (often termed de-risking) is important, else global capital raises costs beyond those around repatriation and currency risks.

Finance will flow when the projects are viable, which ultimately ties back to the business case and the business model, i.e., the economic fundamentals. One option often discussed is blended finance, combining public and private, where public money comes first and lubricates the system. India discovered its own flavour of public-private partnership (PPP) models, as must African nations. The public sector is inevitable given public money is finite. In addition, the private sector usually responds to competition, lowering prices as volumes grow and confidence builds. India and other countries have evolved models of viability gap funding (VGF) that enable the market to do the best it can but simultaneously fill the gap to achieve end-user affordability.

Importantly, there have to be realistic expectations of what end-users should pay. India is not a good example of what should be done. Instead of free supply, ostensibly in the name of the poor, a minimum charge should be mandatory, not only to discourage wastefulness, but also such that as incomes rise and volumes of consumption increase, the consumer can gradually pay more and more over time, which works best with progressive (“telescopic”) tiers of pricing.

To improve the revenue potential, utilities should focus on productive loads and so-called anchor tenants. The latter are users able and willing to pay (e.g., telecom towers), while the former designs a system that goes beyond household electricity consumption. Key uses include irrigation pump sets, agro-processing, public utilities and governmental users, and micro/small/medium enterprises. While a lot of planning ends up being from the supply side, we cannot ignore the demand side of the

equation. While sensitivity to price is obvious, it's more than affordability that matters. Quality supply is critical for consumers to be willing to invest not just in the interconnection but also the devices and appliances that electricity would enable. Their savings would truly materialise not when they “have” an electricity connection but when they can stop using or paying towards alternative energy options or back-up power.

Given the large costs involved for electricity access, it would be useful to have granular data on cost structures across diverse countries and subnational regions in Africa. If costs are five times India's or higher, an estimate suggested by discussions with local experts, analysis should identify the primary drivers. Key factors may include the need for more than last-mile interconnection, low density, bespoke designs rather than standardisation, or structurally higher costs of doing business. Disaggregating these contributors is necessary because each implies a different policy and financing response.

A lot of this process will require significant utility and state capacity, not just for planning or fundraising but also for setting realistic targets that can galvanise the stakeholders across the ecosystem. India can be a partner in such efforts.

To close, the core lesson from India is not that a single model “travels,” but that implementation choices can be made more measurable, bankable, and durable when they are tied to clear definitions of access and service. For African policymakers, that translates into three actionable priorities:

- **Define “access” operationally and fund outcomes, not inputs.** Use clear metrics (e.g., verified connections plus minimum service standards such as hours/day and voltage quality) and tie financing to delivery through transparent verification and reporting.
- **Sequence electrification around viability: standardise, cluster, and integrate decentralised options.** Prioritise contiguous grid expansion where density and proximity make unit costs reasonable, use standardised procurement/templates to reduce transaction costs, and deploy mini-grids/off-grid solutions where grid extension is uneconomic in the near term.
- **Strengthen utility viability by designing for revenue and productive demand.** Pair household electrification with meterisation and enforceable billing/collection and deliberately anchor systems around productive loads (telecom towers, cold chains, irrigation, etc.) to stabilise cash flows and improve long-run service quality.

India can contribute through technical exchange on procurement standardisation, monitoring systems, and last-mile execution, but the pathway must ultimately be tailored to local geography, institutions, and demand conditions.

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Integrated Energy Planning as a Tool for Achieving Net-Zero Emissions

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Kenya has made bold commitments to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. India, on the other hand, commits to achieve this by 2070. These countries, still in their development phase, experience challenges in balancing the rapid economic development with commitments to decarbonise, while ensuring no one is left behind.

The energy sector globally accounts for almost three-quarters of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. This calls for an urgent yet tactical approach to transitioning countries. Integrated energy planning presents itself as a tool for countries to achieve their net-zero targets. This planning ensures developmental, community, and environmental concerns are addressed, thus ensuring a just transition.

The major policy problem facing these countries is the disintegration of planning in the energy sector. Disintegrated planning may lead to stranded energy assets, a biased focus on the industrial demand leaving out the community, more focus on technology over the people, the environment, and duplication of efforts among players. Despite the notable strides in increasing the share of renewable energy in the national energy mix, energy planning in many developing countries remains overly centralised or insufficiently coordinated across sectors and administrative levels. This limits efficiency, undermines the ability to mobilise investments, and weakens the coherence of climate and energy strategies. Kenya is in the process of operationalising its decentralised and participatory Integrated National Energy Planning (INEP) framework, ensuring local capacity and institutional coordination. India's challenge lies in embedding inclusivity, localisation, and community participation into its highly centralised planning systems (Constitution of India, n.d.).

The energy sector in Kenya is undergoing an astounding transformation, with over 83% of the national grid installed capacity being renewable (Kenya National Energy Compact, 2025–2030). To achieve its net-zero target, Kenya needs to do more than expand its generation capacity. It needs a long-term framework that is comprehensive that will encompass different energy uses like cooking, heating, and lighting while integrating cross-sectoral needs such as agriculture, transport, and industrialisation.

Kenya's INEP framework, legally anchored in the Energy Act of 2019 and operationalised through the Energy (INEP) Regulations of 2025, is a pioneering response to this need. INEP seeks to harmonise energy planning across levels of government and sectors, ensuring that decisions on energy infrastructure and investments are guided by data, inclusivity, and national climate commitments. The framework mandates participation from local governments, energy service providers, private sector actors, and civil society organisations, each contributing localised data and plans using standardised templates, as outlined in the framework. The data collection tools focus on the baseline situation, highlighting the county energy resources, energy access rates, energy efficiency and conservation measures, and other cross-cutting issues like environment and gender. This approach ensures that energy planning reflects local realities, resource availability, and community needs.

As opposed to traditional top-down planning, INEP takes an intentionally bottom-up and participatory approach by involving various stakeholders and key nexus departments that form the various committees that support the development process. Each county is required to map its energy resources and demand and propose interventions that address their context. These plans are then consolidated into a national energy plan, ensuring coherence between local development and national climate goals.

In spite of these strengths, Kenya's energy planning process faces some challenges. County governments lack technical capacity, modelling tools, and financial resources needed to generate accurate data and actionable plans. Funding for implementing decentralised renewable energy projects is still a problem.

India's energy mix, though still heavily dependent on imported fossil fuels, is shifting steadily toward low-carbon sources. Renewable energy now accounts for about 35% of the country's total installed energy, with an ambitious target of 500 gigawatts (GW) of renewable capacity by 2030, representing half of its installed electricity capacity (EY, 2025).

India's energy planning system is characterised by a high level of centralisation and technical sophistication. Coordinated through the national policy think tank, and several sectoral ministries, India's Integrated Energy Policy (IEP) provides a comprehensive framework for ensuring energy security, affordability, and sustainability. India uses advanced modelling tools like MESSAGEix to project future energy demand, supply, and emissions trajectories. The process remains largely expert-driven and centralised, with limited participation from communities.

Comparatively, Kenya's INEP excels in inclusivity and local ownership but requires stronger institutional capacity and financial mechanisms to sustain implementation. India's system offers superior modelling capacity and policy integration but lacks localised engagement. Their complementarity provides an excellent opportunity for mutual learning and joint innovation through Africa–India collaboration.

To advance both nations' net-zero ambitions while fostering deeper South–South collaboration, three strategic policy directions emerge: strengthening institutional capacity, mainstreaming inclusion and innovation, and aligning energy planning with finance and investment.

The first priority is to strengthen institutional and technical capacity for integrated energy planning. Kenya's decentralised framework requires robust local capacity to collect, analyse, and use energy data; on the other hand, India's centralised system would gain from deeper subnational engagement and localised data inputs. An Africa–India energy planning exchange platform could facilitate structured technical cooperation between various countries. In addition, the platform can offer modelling clinics to equip energy officers with skills in energy modelling, demand forecasting, and scenario analysis.

The second policy direction is to ensure energy planning is inclusive. This should include gendered data tools, formation of community energy committees, and provision for gender-responsive planning. This ensures that no one is left behind and their various energy needs are met.

The third priority is aligning integrated energy planning with climate finance and investment flows. Kenya's INEP provides a clear investment roadmap, yet its implementation is constrained by limited access to capital. India's success in mobilising private finance and green bonds offers valuable lessons for linking planning frameworks with financial mechanisms. Creating a Joint Africa–India Green Finance Mechanism could channel investments toward decentralised renewable energy projects.

The convergence of Kenya's inclusivity and India's analytical sophistication can inform a new generation of planning systems that are both data-driven and people-centred. By investing in institutional capacity, embedding social inclusion, and linking planning with finance, Kenya and India can accelerate their net-zero trajectories while setting a precedent for Africa–Asia cooperation.

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Accelerating Africa's Just and Climate-Resilient Energy Transition Through Green Industrialisation: Lessons from India

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Despite Africa's abundant untapped renewable energy resources, approximately 600 million people lack electricity, and about 70% rely on unclean cooking methods. This persistent energy deficit limits economic growth, exacerbates social injustice, and increases vulnerability to climate change. In contrast, India has demonstrated that universal access and equity are achievable through decentralised energy systems (DES) and innovative financing. To meet the African Union (AU) Agenda 2063 and the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal 7 (SDG 7) targets, Africa must accelerate clean energy expansion.

This analysis examines strategies that Africa can adapt from India's energy transition, including its National Solar Mission policy and Viability Gap Funding (VGF). Green industrialisation offers a pathway to expand energy access, create green jobs, promote equity, and strengthen resilience. Including marginalised groups, youth, women, and rural residents is imperative. Although Africa contributes minimally to global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, it suffers disproportionately from severe climate impacts that destabilise energy security. Key policy recommendations for Africa's just energy transition include transforming current power infrastructure into smart grids, strengthening cross-border energy trade, integrating climate resilience into power sector investments, and scaling innovative funding mechanisms such as Energy-as-a-Service (EaaS).

Introduction

Africa holds over 7.5 terawatts (TW) of untapped solar, wind, and hydro potential (CMP, 2023). This is more than 10 times the projected 2040 peak demand under the highest growth scenario. Yet, it faces the world's largest energy access gap, with nearly 600 million people (40% of Africa's population) lacking electricity (International Energy Agency [IEA], 2024). Furthermore, 70% of the population lacks access to clean cooking solutions (IEA, 2025a), relying heavily on charcoal and firewood. Although North Africa has almost achieved universal access, Sub-Saharan Africa remains home to 80% of the global population without electricity (World Bank et al., 2025), constraining economic growth and social inclusion.

Africa's progress toward universal access by 2030, aligned with SDG 7 targets, remains slow, partly due to inadequate infrastructure and financing. Accelerating energy expansion must incorporate climate-smart measures. Prior to COP28, key enablers for tripling renewable energy and doubling energy efficiency were identified (World Economic Forum, 2023). These include infrastructure, policy, supply chains, skills development, finances, and international collaboration, serving as a blueprint for Africa.

This analysis explores possibilities of driving a just and climate-resilient energy expansion through green industrialisation, drawing on lessons from India's experience. India is a valuable reference point for Africa, having surmounted similar challenges to ensure equitable, clean, and affordable universal access while capitalising on innovative funding mechanisms and distributed energy systems. Africa has the natural resources, policies, and initiatives required to attain universal access; with financial backing and collaboration, implementation must be accelerated to close the energy gap.

Africa's Energy Access

Africa's reliance on centralised energy systems has restricted access to grid-connected users. DES, driven by key programmes, can bridge the gap through flagship initiatives.

Key Initiatives and Policy Frameworks

The Mission 300 (World Bank Group, 2025) seeks to provide electricity to 300 million people through DES by 2030. The Accelerating Sustainable and Clean Energy Access Transformation (ASCENT) initiative seeks to connect 100 million Africans in 20 countries in Southern and Eastern Africa by 2030 through grid expansion and cross-border energy trade (World Bank Group, 2024a).

Complementary blueprints support these initiatives. The Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) strives to develop financially feasible regional cross-border energy infrastructure (PIDA, 2025). The African Single Electricity Market (AfSEM) aims to harmonise policy for a unified continental energy market by 2040 (Khaleel, 2025). The Continental Power System Master Plan (CMP) outlines the long-term technical strategy for the infrastructure required to underpin AfSEM (AUDA-NEPAD, 2025).

Climate Change Effects

Africa contributes only 3.7% to global GHG emissions (UNEP, 2023); however, its energy sector remains vulnerable to adverse climate change consequences. Unprecedented droughts have caused reservoirs to run dry, reducing hydro generation output. Recently, Lake Kariba underperformed in 2024, causing extensive load-shedding in Zambia and Zimbabwe (Savage & Chingono, 2024). Similarly, devastating floods have caused damage to electricity infrastructure across the continent, including in Nigeria and Mozambique.

Resilience must be integrated into energy infrastructure, including floating solar

photovoltaic systems on hydro plants to offset generation capacity during droughts while reducing water evaporation, DES for mitigating single-point failures, and smart grids to enable demand response management. The benefits of climate-resilient energy systems include enhanced energy security and access.

Innovative Funding Mechanisms

In 2020, the IEA estimated that Sub-Saharan Africa would require approximately US\$ 28 billion annually for energy infrastructure investments (Irerri & Shirley, 2021). Low sovereign debt ratings (SD to BBB+), rising risk premiums, and rapid currency depreciation hinder energy investments (IEA, 2025b). This underscores the need for innovative funding mechanisms.

EaaS provides access to electricity via DES (Schneider Electric, 2025) using tailored subscription models or Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs). Vendors (Enel X, 2025) cover equipment, installation, and maintenance costs, while consumers only pay for usage. This model benefits communities lacking upfront capital. An EaaS pilot in rural Togo and Senegal connected over 20,000 households to sustainable energy, thereby removing barriers to entry (Get. Invest, 2024). A Pay-As-You-Go (PAYG) solar expansion project (InclusiFund, 2025) has secured funding to deliver access to 10 million people in Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya within two years. The subscription options start from US\$ 2 per week, improving affordability for low-income households.

India's Energy Transition Journey

India has achieved universal electricity access and a clean cooking rate of 77% (Esmap, 2025). Innovative funding mechanisms like VGF and PAYG underpinned progress. The National Solar Mission (Umar & Yadaw, 2023) expanded India's solar capacity through solar parks, mini-grids, and rooftop solutions funded through public-private partnerships. Through the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan (PM-KUSUM) initiative

(More et al., 2024), India equipped farmers with DES, enabling energy access in rural regions via subsidies that covered capital costs and reduced reliance on diesel generators. Farmers sell their excess power to the grid through PPAs.

Renewable energy created almost 13.7 million jobs globally in 2022, (IRENA, 2023). Approximately 988,000 (7%) of those jobs were in India and 320,000 (2%) in Africa, reflecting the potential that emerging green markets have for job creation.

Green Industrialisation

Green industrialisation (Asafu-Adjaye, 2025) can modernise Africa's power sector, expand access, strengthen resilience, and generate green jobs. It can foster the participation of women and youth in Africa's equitable energy shift, similar to the transformation experienced by India. This enables communities to develop skills and localised green economies, as demonstrated in India. Though India and Africa differ in scale, they share similar challenges. India was in a similar energy predicament over a decade ago.

There are some key strategies that can drive African green industrialisation (Medinilla & Byiers, 2023): decarbonising current industries, producing goods for the African market, and advancing the ambitions of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Empowering Africa to locally manufacture and assemble renewable energy components will reduce lead times and costs. Green industrialisation offers a pathway to advance several of the AU Agenda 2063 goals (AEDIC, 2025), including climate-resilient economies, job creation, world-class infrastructure, and improved quality of life. Similar to India, Africa can scale energy access through DES, driving green industrialisation. The Africa Green Industrialisation Initiative (AGII) framework, which launched at COP28, aims to grow regional value chains and is driving the mobilisation of US\$ 100 billion for the implementation of climate-resilient renewable energy industries (Koigi, 2025).

Call to Action

The following calls to action are recommended to decision-makers, AU institutions, governments, utilities, power pools, and funding agencies:

1. Capitalise on AU Agenda 2063, UN SDG 7, AfCFTA, AGII, CMP, and AfSEM frameworks to align continental regulatory processes, develop local manufacturing capacity of renewable energy materials to create green jobs and empower local communities, and accelerate implementation.
2. Modernise the energy infrastructure into smart grids through digitalisation for efficiency using real-time data-driven decision-making, enabling demand-driven load balancing, and allowing consumers to sell excess power to the grid through PPAs.
3. Strengthen cross-border collaboration by expanding interconnector lines and generation plants by 2040 to increase trade from surplus to deficit regions, improving energy access. Prioritise the implementation of key recommendations from CMP and PIDA.
4. Establish training programmes to skill 100,000 women and youth in rural regions annually, enabling them to participate in the green energy supply chain.
5. Partner with investors to scale implementation of DES through incentives, subsidies, and innovative funding mechanisms, like EaaS, VGF, and PAYG to enable affordability for low-income households. Target 80% rural electrification and 75% clean cooking by 2030.
6. Integrate climate resilience into all energy infrastructure to withstand floods, droughts, and cyclones.

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ECONOMIC
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FUTURES

16

India–Africa Engagement: Infrastructure Development, Role of RECs, and the AfCFTA

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In the 21st century, India has shifted its trade and private investments towards infrastructure-based projects in Africa. India's infrastructure projects are supported through various means such as loans, lines of credit (LoCs), and private sector investments. A very important part of India's economic diplomacy in Africa today is engagement in transport, logistics, and digital infrastructure. At the same time, it is also important to understand how the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and institutions like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) play an important role in turning these infrastructure projects into productive assets for each of the African countries. This paper maps modalities of Indian infrastructure investment in Africa, examines REC functions in project preparation and implementation, and assesses how AfCFTA can amplify the returns of India-backed infrastructure while flagging risks and policy implications.

Scale and Modalities of Indian Infrastructure Engagement

India's presence in African infrastructure is delivered through several interlocking modalities. The Export–Import Bank of India (India Exim) LoCs and concessional finance have historically underpinned many projects, linking Indian financing to procurement of Indian goods and contractors. Large Indian corporates and engineering firms (engineering, procurement, and construction [EPC] contractors) execute projects financed by LoCs, commercial banks, or public–private partnership (PPP) arrangements; Indian private investment and services firms also participate directly in energy, telecom, and logistics sectors.

The India–Africa economic engagement has evolved from a bilateral, project-based model into a diversified development finance architecture that also aligns completely with Africa’s regional integration agenda. India’s investment and infrastructure presence on the African continent includes the state-backed development finance, private sector participation particularly in areas like transport, digital infrastructure as well as capacity-building. India Exim, the most important Indian development finance institution, has evolved towards adapting to co-financing arrangements with African institutions particularly the RECs and development banks (Research and Information System for Developing Countries [RIS], 2015). Recent country-level packages and credit lines (for example high-profile pledges and LoCs to island and coastal partners) illustrate the ongoing use of both grants and LoCs as strategic instruments (India Exim, 2023). This trend reflects India’s attempt to position itself as a long-term development partner which is eager to support Africa’s regional value chains as well as the cross-border infrastructure.

While the cumulative investments from India to Africa from 1996–2024 are estimated at around USD 75 billion, such a long run aggregate has seen a complete shift in the investment patterns, especially in the last decade in Africa. Since the mid-2000s, the investment strategy of India has seen far more competitiveness from other great powers and new players on the continent such as China, European Union (EU), the Gulf States, and others. China’s Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) was valued at around USD 42 billion in 2024 (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD], 2024). On the other hand, European investors with support from major capital commitments such as EU’s Global Gateway Initiative aimed to mobilise EUR 400 billion by the year 2027 (Reuters, 2025). There was also a major surge in the investments from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries that exceeded USD 110 billion between 2019 and 2023. In fact, the total FDI in Africa in the year 2024 reached approximately USD 97 billion. Against these

figures, while India’s investment seems smaller, it is shaped by historical partnerships and deepening commercial engagements. In fact, India’s influence is derived from its firm-level presence and long-term commercial embeddedness.

Infrastructure Priorities: Where Indian Actors Focus

India’s current engagement with African infrastructure is increasingly centred around a selective and sector-focused strategy. Rather than dispersing investment across various sectors, Indian public as well as private actors have mainly given priority to industrialisation, regional integration, and trade facilitation (African Development Bank [AfDB], 2018; RIS, 2021).

Energy infrastructure has been the central pillar of this engagement. India-supported projects have led to expansion of thermal power plants and a portfolio of renewable energy initiatives in solar and hybrid systems. Some of the examples include the rehabilitation of Hwange Thermal Power Station in Zimbabwe financed through an India Exim LoC and power projects in Tanzania, Mozambique, and Rwanda. Grid-connected solar projects in countries such as Mozambique and Mali have also been taken up by India (India Exim, 2023; World Bank, 2010).

Transport and logistics infrastructure is the second most important pillar of engagement where one can find immense contribution from EPC companies that play an important role in road, rail, and port development. Examples include railway modernisation in Mozambique and Tanzania and road construction and upgrading projects in Ethiopia, Ghana, and Côte d’Ivoire.

Digital and telecommunications infrastructure is also one of the most rapidly growing areas of India–Africa cooperation. The Pan-African e-Network started by India

connected many African universities and hospitals with Indian counterparts, thus imparting tele-education and telemedicine (Ministry of External Affairs [MEA], 2013). Telecom towers by Indian companies like Bharti Airtel have been the backbone of several African countries.

The investments made by India in the African infrastructure sector provide major enhancement of infrastructure modernisation at the same time it also serves the Indian economic and strategic needs. While promoting India’s image in the African continent, it also promotes market access for India and increases its exports to these regions. Such investments also play an important role in highlighting the geopolitical footprint of India in the Indian Ocean Region (UNCTAD, 2024)

The Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Their Role in Promoting Infrastructure Engagement

In the contemporary investment structure of the African continent, which shows powerful competition among different partners, the role of RECs has moved beyond mere coordination to that of strategic intermediaries. The RECs in Africa today are not merely political groupings but they are shaping where, how, and to what scale infrastructure investments must be brought into Africa. They have huge relevance in terms of influencing the external engagements of Africa with any partner like India.

The eight RECs that are recognised by the African Union (AU) are Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), East African Community (EAC), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and Southern African Development Community (SADC). These

RECs have been able to play an indispensable role that has brought together the needs of the African continent.

1. **Prioritisation of projects:** The RECs have worked efficiently to prioritise projects that can prove productive across borders. For example, projects in transport and transboundary water management can work together with continental programmes like Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA). Such demands would make the projects more profitable and larger for the African countries while at the same time making it lucrative for external financiers (African Union Development Agency–New Partnership for Africa’s Development [AUDA-NEPAD], 2023).
2. **Project preparation and capacity building:** Since the investors today are more and more in favour of “investment ready” projects, better preparedness is required. The RECs and PIDA channel can provide technical assistance and project-preparation facilities such as the feasibility studies, environmental and social safeguards, and tender documentation which will do away with the weak project readiness and remove several hurdles during the implementation of these projects.
3. **Regulatory harmonisation and facilitation:** The RECs can prove very useful for investors by channelising the terms and conditions of transit, setting up rules for customs procedures, and establishing technical standards. This would definitely reduce the costs for cross-border infrastructure transfer and create a friendly environment to invest.
4. **De-risking and matchmaking:** The RECs can also act as intermediaries between national governments of the specific African country, regional development banks, and external financiers from different parts of the world.

Despite these positives, RECs also face many challenges in their working. Due to the overlapping membership of many African countries it will always create problems in decision-making. Strengthening REC capacities to prepare bankable projects remains critical if external investments, including Indian ones, are to have maximal regional impact (AUDA-NEPAD, 2023).

AfCFTA: Multiplier Effects and Implementation Gaps

AfCFTA is a project that provides a promising picture to the African nations, converting them into larger markets, and thus increasing the returns to infrastructure that lowers trade costs. If AfCFTA is able to achieve its objectives, there will be more demand for logistics, cold chains, development of ports, etc., which would mean increased finance for revenue model of infrastructure projects by India. African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank) and other continental institutions have highlighted how AfCFTA implementation can increase intra-African trade and create new opportunities in processing, agro-value chains, and manufactured exports that depend on reliable transport and energy systems (Afreximbank, 2024).

However, realising these multiplier effects requires more than a trade agreement. AfCFTA gains depend on national regulatory reform (customs modernisation, sanitary, and phytosanitary alignment), investments in “soft” infrastructure (Information and Communication Technology [ICT] platforms, customs single windows), and functioning cross-border logistics. Without these complementary reforms, new infrastructure risks being under-utilised. Thus, Indian investments that pair hard infrastructure with digital trade facilitation, standards compliance support, and local capacity building will produce superior development outcomes.

Risks, Safeguards, and Policy Recommendations

Risks

Risks included debt sustainability when projects are financed with commercial debt; limited local content and skills transfer; environmental and social impacts; and geopolitical competition that can distort procurement and governance practices.

Safeguards and Policy Steps

As Africa’s infrastructure is becoming increasingly crowded with new partners entering the race to invest, the effectiveness of this partnership does not rely merely on the volume of finance mobilised but on the institutional framework and safeguards about these investments. The following policy pathways are relevant in identifying specific, reform-oriented interventions:

- Indian financiers and African governments should opt for blended finance and co-financing with multilateral development banks and regional development institutions to lower funding costs and incorporate stronger safeguards.
- REC and PIDA-style project preparation facilities should be expanded to increase bankable project pipelines. Weak project preparedness is a major constraint on infrastructure in Africa, therefore feasibility studies and safeguard assessments would help.
- Indian project contracts should include enforceable local content, training, and technology transfer clauses to enhance developmental spillovers.
- AfCFTA implementation must be synchronised with infrastructure investments: financiers and investors should prioritise projects that explicitly enable AfCFTA-related value chains (cold storage, customs automation, and regional power interconnectors). Indian investors could also prioritise infrastructure projects which

are mapped to AfCFTA value chains, this will enhance India’s position not only as an investor but also as a partner in Africa’s structural transformation agenda.

Conclusion

India’s infrastructure engagement in Africa is an evolving mix of concessional finance, private contracting, and commercial investment. RECs and AfCFTA are not peripheral to this relationship: they are structural levers that convert individual projects into regionally productive assets. For Indian investments to deliver durable development outcomes, stakeholders must align financing modalities with REC project pipelines, invest in project preparation and governance, and pair hard infrastructure with the regulatory and digital systems AfCFTA requires. Properly sequenced, India–Africa infrastructure partnerships can underpin a mutually beneficial era of trade, industrialisation, and regional integration (India Exim, 2023).

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17

Looking Back, Looking Ahead: Shaping the Next Phase of India's Development Cooperation

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Drawing on two decades of India-Africa development engagement, this analysis argues for a recalibration of development assistance in both direction and composition. For much of this period, the composition of India's development assistance has been heavily focused on hard infrastructure. While such investments remain essential, India now needs to supplement them with soft infrastructure, particularly through institution-building, and promote direct investment into African economies. This is not to suggest that hard infrastructure should be discontinued; on the contrary, it remains a critical foundation for development. Put plainly, India's next phase of engagement in Africa should move from a "projects-first" model to a "productivity-and-investment" model, one in which Government of India (GOI) instruments help build the institutions that make infrastructure productive and actively catalyse Indian private capital into African value chains.

Background and Context

On February 28, 2003, an inflexion point in India's development strategy occurred almost without anybody noticing. Mr Jaswant Singh, the then finance minister in the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Government, while delivering the Budget Speech in the Lok Sabha (India's elected lower house of Parliament), made three momentous announcements (Singh, 2003, para. 126). First, India, with gratitude for past assistance, would significantly reduce the Official Development Assistance (ODA) availed by it from various countries, with some stated exceptions. Second, India would shortly extend a debt relief package to certain Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC). Third, and more importantly for

the purpose of this paper, India would utilise the *India Development Initiative* (IDI), with an initial budgetary allocation of Rs 200 crore (over USD 22 million) for 2003–2004, for providing grants or project assistance to developing countries in Africa and South Asia (Singh, 2003, para. 117).

The Export-Import Bank of India (Exim Bank), with its unique experience in the international markets and the developing world, was selected to be the vehicle of the GOI for this initiative. The Exim Bank would raise long-duration funds from the market and extend concessional credit to nations and development institutions, to finance and facilitate development projects in those countries. These included projects in power generation, transmission, and distribution to facilitate industrial production, as well as transport linkages by road and rail to carry raw material to production centres and goods to ports/markets. This *hard infrastructure* is now found in many African countries and has been generally well received.

Like any new initiative, the IDI had a learning curve to negotiate. There were some hard lessons learnt regarding the transparency of procurement, price discovery, project evaluation, and impact assessment. Despite this, there was a steady upward trend in efficiency, transparency, and efficacy of the programme, as lessons learned from experience were implemented. This is especially so in the implementation of major infrastructure projects in vastly varying geographies and conditions, with long supply lines and often inadequate transport linkages to the site. In almost every project, however, barring a few major failures, the projects left the beneficiary country and its populace better off than before. Importantly, the lessons from the few failures were studied and rigorous correctives applied.

India's Development Experience and Africa-Focused Cooperation

GOI-supported Exim lines of credit (LOCs)

have financed infrastructure across very different African contexts, such as the Power Transmission Project in Mali, Power Transmission and Distribution in Liberia, and industrial upgrading in Kenya (Rivatex East Africa Limited [RIVATEX]). In response to these implementation realities, Exim's LOC framework has increasingly formalised the project cycle around implementation monitoring and post-completion socioeconomic impact assessment, with "lessons learned" feeding into future project preparation and review.

A key reason for India's development progress, that has important implications for Africa's development, is the presence of financial institutions' infrastructure. Whatever the politics of bank nationalisation, it cannot be denied that the penetration of the public-sector bank network into rural India played an important role in strengthening savings mobilisation and channelling those savings into productive investment. In many African contexts, differences in financial sector structure, particularly in branch density and intermediation mechanisms, shape how effectively domestic savings are mobilised and converted into long-term productive capital, especially for small firms and rural households. While microfinance institutions charge very high rates of interest on group loans, they are vastly less expensive than the local moneylender (and the latter's recovery tactics are often cruel and inhuman). Their relevance in the African context lies in addressing persistent credit gaps for informal enterprises and smallholders, who remain largely excluded from formal banking systems.

The stock exchanges and the securities depositories in India have generated an equity investment market that has few equals in the developing (perhaps even developed) world. Mutual Fund units are widely held. These institutions have enabled the aggregation of household savings into risk capital for firms, an institutional capability that remains underdeveloped in most African economies, where capital markets are thin, fragmented,

and dominated by short-term instruments. The stern regulatory and supervisory role of the Reserve Bank of India and the Securities and Exchange Board of India has served to safeguard and protect individual investors (for the most part) from speculation and excesses. Moreover, the Indian judicial system despite its excruciating slow speed, has delivered strong judgements to bolster the financial system. Crucially, it was this combination of state-backed financial inclusion, credible regulation, and patient institution-building, rather than capital inflows alone, that enabled deep financial penetration in India. This underscores a set of considerations that may inform African policy debates.

Together, these features point to a role for GOI development cooperation not merely in financing assets, but in supporting regulatory capacity, payment systems, supervisory institutions, and legal frameworks in partner African countries, thereby enabling domestic savings mobilisation and crowding in private investment.

Looking Ahead

There is a need to encourage and incentivise Indian Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) banks, stock exchanges, mutual funds, and microfinance institutions to spread their wings into Africa. The Exim Bank of India had already taken an equity stake in the African Exim Bank and has provided technical assistance to several African institutions (Nigerian Exim Bank, Eastern and Southern African Trade and Development Bank, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Bank for Investment and Development, etc.). This engagement was made possible by Exim Bank's explicit developmental mandate, the availability of patient capital backed by the GOI, and institutional autonomy to combine commercial operations with strategic foreign policy objectives. These enabling conditions, sovereign risk-sharing, policy alignment across ministries, and dedicated instruments for technical assistance and equity participation, offer a

replicable framework through which India can systematically support the internationalisation of its financial institutions in Africa, moving beyond ad hoc interventions toward a coherent development finance strategy.

Incentivising the Exim Bank to foster sister institutions in African countries helps promote their export framework. The same applies to national financial institutions like the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID), National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI), etc. Such investments may not yield a financial return that would meet the commercial demands of these institutions; they would, however, play an invaluable role in India's economic outreach. Since these are predominantly public sector institutions, the GOI may mandate that they take these steps despite the long gestation and (initially) less than attractive returns.

In parallel with investments in soft infrastructure, India needs to pivot towards encouraging direct, enterprise-level investment into African countries. By this, the paper refers not to large, project-based infrastructure financing, but to long-term equity and greenfield investments by Indian firms in manufacturing, agro-processing, pharmaceuticals, services, and regional value chains. Such an investment presence in Africa is more impactful in terms of employment creation, technology transfer, and skills development than stand-alone hard infrastructure projects, which often operate as enclaves. While hard infrastructure investments remain essential and constitute a form of investment in their own right, their developmental impact is significantly amplified when they are complemented by firm-level investments that utilise infrastructure to generate sustained productive activity. A simple example from India will demonstrate the point.

In 1981, Suzuki Motor Corporation of Japan invested in Maruti of India to manufacture just 20,000 automobiles, a drop in the bucket

compared to their Japanese operations. Today, Suzuki India accounted for over 61% of Suzuki's production and 57% of its total global sales in 2023–2024. Beyond this, from the initial days of 100% Semi-Knocked Down (SKD) imports, today Suzuki India has a localisation percentage of 95% as the Japanese auto component manufacturers who supplied to Suzuki Japan, also set up operations in India, in proximity to the Suzuki India plant locations.

Africa's importance lies in its long-term market fundamentals: it is the only continent projected to remain young and growing, with an estimated 40% of the global population by 2100. However, India's development and industrialisation experience cannot be mechanically transplanted.

The “Maruti 1981” logic was successful in a large and increasingly integrated domestic market that allowed supplier ecosystems to form around anchor firms; Africa, by contrast, is characterised by fragmented markets, heterogeneous regulatory regimes, uneven state capacity, and binding constraints to localisation that vary across countries. Replicating productivity-enhancing investment therefore requires a regional rather than national approach, anchored in credible manufacturing hubs, trade corridors, and African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)-enabled market integration. This places African governments at the centre of the process through stable industrial policy, regulatory harmonisation, and trade facilitation, while India's role is facilitative and de-risking rather than declaratory, aligning its development finance and risk-mitigation instruments to local institutional realities rather than assuming direct transferability.

Suzuki India could pursue a Maruti 1981 strategy and set up shop in the African continent and respond to the demands of Africa's huge market. Auto component companies would follow, and the GOI can play an encouraging and facilitative role. While the example is that of automobiles, the same logic would apply to vaccines, pharmaceuticals,

chemicals, and so on. The template is simple and exists; we only need to promote it. In those sectors, the “African-country-specific” constraint is often regulatory and quality infrastructure, which again reinforces the paper's central claim: Soft infrastructure is what makes investment productive and scalable.

Realigning India's development assistance to also focus on soft infrastructure and direct investments in Africa could facilitate Africa's development. Modifying India's financing structures away from vanilla debt structures could allow for more equity and quasi-equity, viability gap funding, and mezzanine financing. In parallel, the minimum Indian content of 75% is patently unworkable and rather than a floor Indian content, should be modified to a ceiling third-country content of about 20%. Thus, 80% of the cost of the project would be from India and the investment destination country. This would keep out predatory third countries while maximising benefit to India and the beneficiary countries.

To operationalise this shift, the GOI should prioritise four actionable reforms:

- **Rebalance the portfolio:** Maintain support for hard infrastructure, but systematically expand “soft infrastructure” assistance, especially institution-building and capacity that makes infrastructure productive (finance, regulation, skills, standards, and implementation capability).
- **Modernise the financing structures:** Move beyond “vanilla debt” by routinely deploying blended instruments where appropriate, equity and quasi-equity, viability gap funding, and mezzanine financing, to make projects and investments commercially and fiscally viable.
- **Fix procurement/content rules to protect deliverability:** Replace the 75% minimum Indian content “floor” with a more workable framework that limits third-country content (e.g., a ceiling of approximately 20%), while allowing sufficient flexibility for local/regional sourcing and efficient delivery.

- **Anchor co-financing and local ownership:** Structure deals so host-country participation is built in from the start, including clear co-financing expectations, stronger counterpart capacity, and transparent monitoring, so projects are sustained after handover and investment ecosystems can take root.

If India's development partnership in Africa is to be measured not only in assets built but in productivity gained, jobs created, and value chains anchored, the next phase must

integrate infrastructure with institutions and align concessional finance with investment that delivers tangible, sustainable outcomes.

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18

Making a Case for India–Africa Capital Market Development Dialogue

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The global financial architecture, for the most part, does not adequately address the development needs of the Global South. Rising development costs, limited fiscal space, and intensifying great power rivalry between China and the United States all pose significant challenges for India and countries in Africa as they seek to secure their development needs and maintain economic sovereignty.

While India has traditionally relied on a mix of domestic savings, taxes, and diaspora remittances to finance its development, most African countries have relied on external borrowing and official development assistance (ODA) to do the same. Neither has been particularly successful in galvanising significant foreign direct investments (FDI). This has left large gaps in their capacity to finance critical infrastructure, education, health, and other public goods.

The problem for Africa has been particularly acute. ODA has been sharply cut in recent years, FDI is concentrated in the resource-extractive sector, and the recent hike in global interest rates has made borrowing from international markets significantly more expensive. For example, while most developing Asian countries pay 5% interest on a bond, African governments have to pay twice as much. On average, African countries spend more on debt servicing than on public health or education. Moreover, heightened strategic competition between the United States and China has influenced infrastructure financing choices across the continent, including resource-backed arrangements that may pose challenges for fiscal sustainability.

Navigating a Fragmented Global Financial Landscape

For much of the past decade, emerging markets benefited from favourable global financial conditions characterised by low interest rates and abundant international liquidity. These conditions facilitated significant capital inflows into emerging market debt and equity, particularly in high-growth economies such as India and several African countries with expanding working-age populations. The resulting influx of external financing supported strong growth and investment. This environment changed sharply in 2022, however, as Russia's invasion of Ukraine heightened global risk perceptions, tightened monetary policy in advanced economies, and brought the period of low-cost capital to an end. Rising commodity prices spurred inflation, and the US Federal Reserve (the Fed) hiked interest rates, not only pulling investment out of emerging economies but also causing their currencies to depreciate (Deloitte, 2022). All this has driven up the cost of borrowing capital for emerging markets.

The willingness by the West to use sanctions, tariffs, and financial action to compel Global South countries to do their bidding has created conditions ripe for the fragmentation of the global financial landscape. The Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) grouping has increasingly discussed the establishment of alternative financial mechanisms and institutions. Some have even floated the idea of a BRICS currency as an alternative to the US dollar. The so-called de-dollarisation of world trade is now no longer a fanciful idea as it may once have seemed. Nor is the use of the Chinese Yuan (CNY) or the Indian Rupee (INR) as alternative hard currencies. The CNY is reportedly already used in 50% of intra-BRICS trade and 18 countries have adopted the Special Rupee Vostro Accounts to make trade settlement with India. Seven of these are African (Poensch, 2025; Reuters, 2025).

Several important lessons can be drawn from the ongoing fragmentation of the global financial order. One is that Africa and India operate within a global economic system in which structural dynamics, such as their current shares of global trade, manufacturing output, and global policy influence, shape their exposure to shifts in great-power competition. At the time of writing, both were affected by the imposition of tariffs on exports to the United States, highlighting how external policy measures can impact emerging economies. Another lesson is that periods of heightened uncertainty tend to prompt capital flows toward perceived safe-haven markets.

In 2024, for instance, foreign institutional investors (FIIs) started pulling out of India and other emerging markets as US interest rates rose. Third, unchecked illicit financial flows can be debilitating to economic development. Africa loses as much as US\$ 90 billion a year due to illicit financial outflows (UNECA, 2025). Neither Africa nor India can rely excessively on external sources of finance. A further critical lesson is the importance of self-reliance. To avoid becoming subordinate actors in an increasingly fragmented global system, both India and African countries need to mobilise greater domestic resources to support their development objectives.

Developing a Liquid Domestic Capital Market

One way to do that is to develop a deeper, more liquid capital market. A well-regulated capital market is arguably the best available means to channel domestic private savings into productive sectors of the economy. A capital market makes it possible to pool small savings into bigger investments. The wider the participation of citizens in the capital market, the less the need for the state to rely on foreign borrowing for development. India today is a US\$ 4 trillion economy backed by a liquid capital market. In 2024, domestic retail investors poured US\$ 8 billion into the Indian equity market even as FIIs pulled out

(Bloomberg NSE, 2024). The Government of India has been able to raise hundreds of billions of dollars from its domestic capital market. It raised over US\$ 10.8 billion through infrastructure bonds in the fiscal year 2024–2025 alone (Investment Information and Credit Rating Agency of India Limited [ICRA], n.d.). Indian firms raise more than 80% of their capital requirements in the domestic market (World Bank, n.d.). There is no reason why Africa could not do the same.

Recommendation

Start with the US\$ 2.3 trillion worth of investment funds, pension funds, and sovereign wealth funds that are locked overseas (African Development Bank [AFDB], n.d.). These could be ploughed back home if the African capital market were deeper and much more integrated. The problem is that the financial landscape of Africa is rather fragmented. There are 29 stock exchanges on the continent, with a total market capitalisation of US\$ 1.6 trillion. Compare that with the Indian stock market capitalisation of US\$ 5.5 trillion (Business Standard, 2024). The ability to borrow through financial markets is viewed by investors as a sign of competitiveness. The success of the African Exchanges Linkage Project (AELP), a pan-African experiment aimed at unifying seven regional stock markets, could, therefore, be a game-changer. Facilitated by the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS), which enables near-instant cross-border payments in local currency, the AELP could potentially consolidate the entire financial trading marketplace of the continent and end dependence on external funding. That sounds promising until you consider what it takes to develop a vibrant, well-functioning capital market.

First and foremost, the expansion of the capital market is related to economic growth. When the economy grows, households have more disposable income, as well as savings. Such savings form the pool of capital that can be channelled into productive investments

in capital markets. Economic growth also expands business opportunities and that generates the demand for financing from firms that seek to tap those opportunities. The sustained three-decade-long economic boom that India has witnessed has been a key factor for the expansion of its capital market.

Capital market development encompasses a broad set of policy measures, rather than isolated initiatives. This covers everything from policies that increase investable savings, such as a mandated provident fund, to widening the tax net and gradual formalisation of the economy. It also requires a strong regulatory environment that can instil confidence in the market. The financial regulatory environment in Africa is largely weak and fragmented. The answer is not creating an all-powerful pan-African capital markets authority but harmonising regulations and establishing listing requirements that meet some minimum baseline standards. This could include developing pricing benchmarks, strengthening investor protection, and tightening disclosure rules. The governance standards set by the Securities and Exchange Board of India may not be a gold standard, but they are arguably “fit for purpose” for developing economies.

In India, the two primary stock exchanges are the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) and the National Stock Exchange (NSE). While the BSE is one of the oldest stock exchanges in Asia, the NSE is known for its technological advancements and high trading volumes. Beyond equities, stock exchanges also facilitate trading in commodities, bonds, and derivatives, providing diverse investment opportunities. With the rise of digital platforms, trading has become more accessible, attracting both retail and institutional investors to participate in wealth creation and economic growth.

Using digital tools and investor education, Africa could leapfrog the growth cycle of mature financial markets. In theory, at least. For instance, issuing government debt is important for developing a functioning

domestic bond market. African governments can create an environment that encourages the entry of new investors and improve market liquidity by issuing local currency bonds in multiple tenors. Capital market development will also require deep engagement with third-party information providers such as underwriters, credit rating agencies, and research analysts. India attracted US\$ 25 billion more in capital when it joined the J.P. Morgan Emerging Markets Bond Index.

Indeed, in more ways than one, India can be viewed as a case study for Africa as countries on the continent attempt to mobilise more domestic resources and reduce its dependence on external sources for capital. It is therefore proposed that the Indian Ministry of External Affairs and the African Union consider convening an India–Africa Capital Market Development Dialogue. Such a forum would bring together bankers, regulatory authorities, securities exchanges, institutional investors, and other experts in financial sector development to exchange knowledge and advance cooperation aimed at strengthening capital markets across Africa.

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India–Africa Economic Diplomacy: From Money Flows to Sustainable Balance-Sheet Resilience

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This chapter examines the macro-financial underpinnings of India–Africa economic diplomacy, arguing that current metrics, focused on mobilisation volume, systematically fail along the diplomatic-financial chain. The confusion between diplomatic finance¹ (optimised for geopolitical returns) and development finance² (optimised for economic transformation) drives these failures. The analysis proposes an integrated balance-sheet framework that realigns these incentives through institutional capacity thresholds, end-use governance, and countercyclical safeguards, transforming diplomatic finance from a source of vulnerability into genuine development capital. A list of key terms used in this chapter is available at the end.

Introduction

India–Africa trade crossed USD 100 billion in 2024–2025, yet this milestone obscures a fundamental problem: capital inflows systematically weaken rather than strengthen African balance sheets (Ministry of External Affairs [MEA], 2025). Twenty-three countries face debt distress not because they borrowed excessively, but because diplomatic finance bypassed the institutional mechanisms required for productive absorption, creating what this chapter

¹ **Diplomatic Finance:** Capital flows optimised for geopolitical returns and measured by announcement volumes, typically deployed within electoral cycles.

² **Development Finance:** Capital flows optimised for economic transformation across decades and measured by institutional capacity and balance-sheet resilience.

terms the “Absorption Paradox”³ (African Development Bank [AfDB], 2024).

This chapter proposes that India possesses the institutional and experiential resources to pioneer this balance-sheet approach in Africa, transforming India–Africa economic diplomacy from a replication of traditional development finance failures into a distinct partnership model.

The core problem lies in the incentive structure of economic diplomacy. Announced agreements measure gains; politicians benefit from visible projects; lenders profit from rapid deployment. No actor bears responsibility for long-term balance-sheet consequences. This disconnect becomes particularly critical in shallow financial systems, where macro-financial vulnerabilities, the interaction between macroeconomic shocks and financial sector fragilities, can rapidly escalate into crises. Hippolyte Fofack argues that African countries will continue to face disadvantageous terms unless the structure of development finance centred on diplomacy changes (Fofack, 2024). This constitutes the “Absorption Paradox”: instruments marking diplomatic success precipitate fiscal fragility when macro-financial institutions lag.

The chapter’s central analytical claim is this: what operates as development finance in current India–Africa partnerships is predominantly *diplomatic finance*, optimised for geopolitical returns and measured by announcement volumes, rather than development finance, which optimises economic transformation across decades and is measured by balance-sheet resilience.⁴ This distinction explains why capital mobilisation volumes have become inversely correlated with institutional capacity and why the current incentive structure systematically leads to absorption failures.

The Absorption Paradox

A central claim of this chapter is that economic diplomacy generates a consequential paradox: success metrics plausibly drive failure mechanisms. This paradox describes why large capital inflows, absent adequate institutional infrastructure, deepen fiscal fragility rather than strengthen economies. Zambia’s 2012 Eurobond issuance signalled successful market access. The country initially issued USD 3 billion at favourable rates, financing infrastructure but creating substantial foreign exchange exposure. When copper prices declined and global rates increased, debt service consumed 37 per cent of revenues. Default followed in 2020 (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2021). Ghana faces comparable pressures, with USD 13 billion in outstanding debt. These cases exemplify the three critical failures: wrong terms (variable rates, dollar denomination), wrong projects (prestige infrastructure over productive capacity), and weak institutions (absent hedging mechanisms, inadequate debt management). These patterns are not historical curiosities; they represent precisely the risk dynamics that could emerge in Indian lines of credit or infrastructure cooperation with African partners if capacity is not systematically addressed.

Competitive diplomacy accelerated debt accumulation. Between 2010 and 2020, China provided USD 143 billion in loans to Africa, while traditional Paris Club lenders, Middle Eastern funds, and private markets competed for market share (Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies [SAIS], 2023). This created a lender’s market with minimal conditionality. Collateralised debt rose from 7 per cent to 30 per cent of external obligations.

Political economy reinforces these distortions fundamentally. African leaders operate within

five-year electoral cycles while infrastructure returns materialise over decades. This temporal misalignment channels finance toward projects with high political visibility but demonstrably limited economic returns. Technical assistance for debt management capacity and financial architecture remains chronically underfunded, while prestige infrastructure absorbs substantial resources and policy attention.

These political distortions cascade through corporate and household balance sheets, causing collateral damage. Without derivatives markets, for instance, African firms cannot hedge currency exposure; without credit bureaus, digital lenders charge excessive rates, creating debt traps. Kenya’s mobile money expansion, for instance, has helped but also enabled predatory lending with default rates exceeding 30 per cent (Central Bank of Kenya, 2024). Countries, including Mali and Burkina Faso, borrowed heavily for security spending, creating unsustainable burdens that contributed to destabilised governance (Chen et al., 2025). These institutional gaps ensure that politically motivated inflows worsen, rather than alleviate macroeconomic fragility at every level.

As noted earlier, the fundamental issue is that diplomatic finance, optimised within electoral cycles for geopolitical influence, has displaced development finance from India–Africa engagement. Development finance optimises economic transformation over the course of decades. Diplomatic finance optimises geopolitical influence within electoral cycles. Chinese infrastructure loans, Western budget support, and Indian credit lines primarily serve strategic objectives. The balance-sheet test is simple: Does finance build absorption capacity⁵ or purchase influence?

Africa loses approximately USD 88.6 billion annually due to illicit financial flows (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD], 2024). Economic

diplomacy focuses on inflows while capital flight, transfer pricing, and corruption drain resources, addressing the faucet while ignoring the drain.

The fundamental issue is that diplomatic finance, optimised within electoral cycles for geopolitical influence, has displaced development finance from these partnerships.

Why Balance Sheets Matter More Than Flows

Why do traditional development metrics fail to predict the build-up of financial or debt stress?

They ignore the mechanisms by which external finance flows into different balance sheets within a country. Traditional economic diplomacy measures mobilised capital (how much money); balance-sheet diplomacy examines absorption mechanisms and the build-up of financial risks that could become an economic problem and in turn destabilise a political process. The macro-financial approach integrates macroeconomic stability with the financial sector and its political economy dynamics, tracking how external finance flows through interconnected balance sheets, sovereign, banking, corporate, and household, before affecting real economic outcomes. For instance, when a sovereign faces currency depreciation, banks holding unhedged dollar assets deteriorate, constraining lending to corporations, which then default on payroll, devastating household balance sheets, and resulting in a public policy and a potentially political problem.

While mainstream development economics focuses on poverty reduction or infrastructure gaps, this analysis argues that macro-financial vulnerabilities are the binding constraint. Macro-financial analysis⁶ identifies systemic vulnerabilities (currency mismatches, maturity mismatches, leverage buildups) that determine

³ **The Absorption Paradox:** A situation where large capital inflows, in the absence of adequate absorption capacity, deepen fiscal fragility rather than strengthen economies. Diplomatic success (measured by announced volumes) paradoxically creates balance-sheet weakness.

⁴ **Balance-Sheet Resilience:** The extent to which external finance strengthens (rather than destabilises) a country’s financial position across all sectors: sovereign, banking, corporate, and household.

⁵ **Absorption Capacity:** A country’s institutional ability to deploy external finance productively, including functioning debt management offices, transparent procurement systems, and supervisory capacity to manage financial risks.

⁶ **Macro-Financial Analysis:** An approach examining how macroeconomic shocks transmit through financial systems to affect real economies, tracking interconnections between sovereign debt, banking sector health, corporate leverage, and household debt.

whether capital strengthens or destabilises economies. In shallow financial systems, these vulnerabilities amplify rapidly through feedback loops, making prevention essential for sustainable engagement.

Consider two countries. Country A receives USD 1 billion in rapid-deployment infrastructure loans. Country B gets USD 500 million, but first establishes its debt management capacity, procurement oversight, and implementation units. After five years, Country A experiences debt distress, while Country B leverages its improved creditworthiness to secure larger, cheaper financing. This difference reflects macro-financial fundamentals: Country B built absorption capacity, preventing balance-sheet deterioration, while Country A's unmanaged inflows created cascading vulnerabilities.

Institutional quality determines absorption outcomes. Below critical governance thresholds, capital inflows worsen institutional deficits. In Sub-Saharan Africa, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) only supports growth above USD 45 per capita annually when backed by adequate institutional capacity (Asafo-Agyei & Kodongo, 2022). These include functioning debt management offices, transparent procurement systems, and central bank supervisory tools for macroprudential monitoring.

India experienced this directly. The 2008 crisis exposed USD 50 billion in unhedged corporate borrowing. When the rupee depreciated 20 per cent, balance sheets deteriorated severely (Reserve Bank of India [RBI], 2019). India's subsequent reforms, mandatory hedging, enhanced monitoring, and strengthened frameworks, provide Africa with a template. India's crisis costs reached 10 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), while subsequent prevention measures cost less than 0.5 per cent annually. Countries that implement macroprudential policies, including foreign exchange lending limits and countercyclical buffers, experience reduced instability during capital surges. Most African jurisdictions lack these instruments.

Financial instruments generate asymmetrical impacts. Portfolio flows temporarily boost reserves but create a vulnerability to sudden stops. Extractive FDI generates exports but limited linkages. Patient manufacturing capital creates jobs, transfers technology, and builds complexity. India's Solar Alliance commitments, though smaller than Chinese loans, embed technology transfer, permanently enhancing capabilities (International Solar Alliance, 2024). The New Development Bank's local-currency lending reduces forex exposure while developing domestic markets (New Development Bank, 2024).

Learning From Institutional Innovations

India's own financial architecture innovations provide directly adaptable templates for India–Africa cooperation, demonstrating how macro-financial capacity builds in shallow or growing financial systems. RBI's Financial Stability Unit, established in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis, conducts systemic risk assessments that African central banks could replicate. India's partial credit guarantee schemes unlocked USD 5 billion in infrastructure finance by sharing risks between public and private sectors (India Infrastructure Finance Company Limited, 2023). The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) currency swap arrangement, providing USD 2 billion in emergency liquidity, prevented contagion during the 2013 taper tantrum (RBI, 2024).

India's priority sector lending requirements, mandating 40 per cent of bank credit for underserved sectors, have facilitated financial inclusion while maintaining macro-financial stability. Export–Import Bank of India's (EXIM Bank) co-financing arrangements with regional development banks reduced project failure rates to below 20 per cent, providing replicable models for Africa (EXIM Bank, 2024). These mechanisms, developed for shallow markets, transfer directly to African contexts. The following section constitutes the chapter's policy core, translating macro-financial analysis into four sequenced reforms.

Operationalising Balance-Sheet Diplomacy

Moving from theory to practice requires sequenced reforms aligning political incentives with economic fundamentals.

First: Condition disbursements on absorption capacity. Verify that debt management systems track obligations, procurement prevents leakage, and implementation units have the requisite skills. Rwanda's climate finance disbursements linked to public investment improvements increased completion rates by 23 per cent (Government of Rwanda, 2024).

Second: Make governance evolution endogenous. As markets develop, regulatory capacity must evolve in parallel. When debt markets expand, they upgrade macroprudential tools. As digital finance proliferates, it is essential to strengthen consumer protection.

Third: Build diagnostic infrastructure. The proposed India–Africa Macro-Financial Institute would create real-time balance-sheet monitoring, tracking sovereign liabilities, banking mismatches, corporate leverage, and household burdens (IMF, 2025). Early warning beats crisis response. The Institute would be co-hosted by India's MEA and the AfDB, with staffing drawn from both central banks and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Secretariat. A coordination mechanism with the African Union Development Agency–New Partnership for Africa's Development (AUDA-NEPAD) will ensure alignment with continental priorities.

Fourth: Align political cycles with economic timelines. Performance-based grants released after project completion change political calculations. Multi-year budget support tied to institutional improvements shifts incentives toward sustainability.

The India–Africa Compact

India possesses distinctive credentials for a macro-financial development partnership, having built expertise through managing crises in shallow markets structurally like those in Africa. Both regions depend on bank-dominated financial systems with credit-to-GDP below 50 per cent and lack well-developed derivatives markets, leaving firms and sovereigns chronically exposed to unhedged currency risk. India's macro-financial reforms, forged through the 1991 balance-of-payments crisis, the 1997 Asian contagion, the 2008 global financial crisis, the 2013 taper tantrum, and the more recent post-COVID, wars, and conglomerate-related economic and financial market disruptions, created institutional knowledge directly applicable to African conditions. Unlike developed-economy partners offering solutions designed for deep, open markets, India's experience addresses the core challenge of building resilience while seeking economic growth and financial development.

The partnership architecture reflects these lessons through **four pillars**:

Pillar 1: Real-Time Macro-Financial and Investment Diagnostics. A Macro-Financial Institute conducting continuous diagnostics while building local capacity through embedded experts, creating learning-by-doing rather than fly-in consultancy.

Pillar 2: Conditional Disbursement. An Infrastructure Fund with end-use governance hard-wired into disbursement. Every project undergoes a debt sustainability analysis, a foreign exchange assessment, and a contingent liability evaluation. Multi-party oversight, public reporting, and performance benchmarks are standard. Digital platforms track finances, reducing leakages while building credibility.

Pillar 3: Regional Currency Resilience.

Local-currency facilities, established through a collaboration between EXIM Bank and Afreximbank, are reducing the country's dependence on the dollar. As AfCFTA expands trade toward 52 per cent by 2050, regional currency mechanisms become viable (UN Economic Commission for Africa, 2024). India's rupee trade arrangements with 20 countries offer templates for reducing intermediation costs.

Pillar 4: Automatic Stabilisers.

A Stability Facility with automatic triggers providing countercyclical support during external shocks. Unlike IMF programmes that require crisis negotiations, pre-approved access maintains confidence, preventing balance-sheet deterioration.

Conclusion

The evidence reviewed confirms that the current incentive structure of economic diplomacy systematically weakens African balance sheets. Twenty-three countries experiencing debt distress represent predictable outcomes of misaligned metrics. Carlos Lopes (2024) notes Africa faces "growth-crushing and default-driven borrowing rates" within structurally disadvantageous systems.

The macro-financial approach addresses this by restructuring incentives throughout the diplomatic and financial chain. Focusing on balance-sheet resilience rather than flow volumes enables sustainable long-term engagement. Linking disbursements to absorption capacity, aligning governance with market development, and prioritising

diagnostics before deployment transforms destabilising flows into sovereignty-strengthening resources. For India and Africa, both operating in shallow financial markets, this shared macro-financial perspective creates genuine partnership potential, mutual learning about managing external finance in challenging institutional environments, rather than relying on aid dependence.

India's Group of Twenty (G20) presidency secured African Union (AU) membership, signalling South-South commitment.

Implementation, however, requires building a financial architecture in which success derives from balance-sheet strength rather than from the effects of announcements.

The choice remains clear: continue with funds-mobilisation metrics that perpetuate debt crises, or implement balance-sheet-driven economic diplomacy that aligns incentives with sustainable absorption. This requires improved loan structuring, enhanced project preparation, and incremental institutional strengthening, ultimately compounding into a transformation that extends beyond debt sustainability toward financial resilience, enabling sustained prosperity.

Within two years, India-Africa policymakers should establish a task force to work on the four Pillars and operationalise the suggestions in Section 5, Macro-Financial Institute governance structure, pilot local-currency settlement in three high-trade corridors, and conduct joint debt sustainability assessments across five priority African partners. These concrete steps would create institutional momentum toward the broader India-Africa balance-sheet economy diplomacy architecture that will be sustainable and international.

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Towards New Africa-India Joint Ventures in the Agricultural Sector: Case of Rice

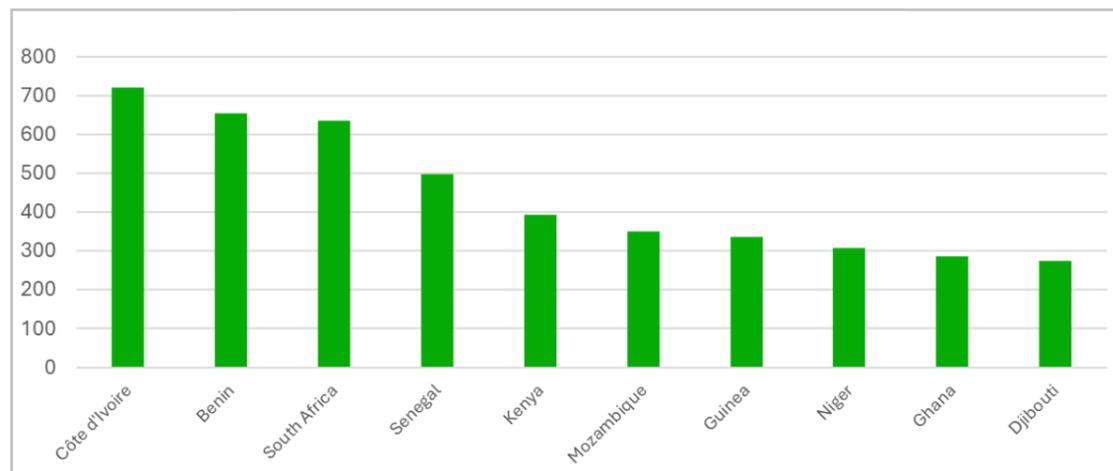
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South-South cooperation has become essential in ensuring the sustainable development and fairness of the global economy in addressing the world's biggest challenges such as food insecurity. In fact, one of the most pressing issues that some southern regions such as Africa face relates to agricultural challenges that hinder food security, productivity, and sustainability. These challenges are directly relevant to the African Union's Agenda 2063, particularly Aspiration 1 (Prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development) (African Union, n.d.) through its Goal 5 (Modern agriculture for increased productivity and production) and also align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 aimed at achieving global food security.

This analysis will therefore focus on how India and its partners on the continent can collaborate to strengthen agricultural development and enhance food security. For instance, when it comes to rice, India is the world's largest exporter while China is the world's largest producer. While Asia is Africa's top trading partner and an increasingly major source of foreign direct investments, Africa imports most of the rice it consumes from Asia, particularly from India. Although there are currently 40 African countries that grow rice, the continent imported nearly 13 million tonnes of rice worth US\$ 5.5 billion in 2024 (Business Insider Africa, 2024), with the top 10 importing countries shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Top 10 African Countries with the Highest Rice Imports

Source: Agbetiloye, 2024.

At the end of 2025, rice consumption in Africa is expected to reach at least 35 million tonnes while the continent imports 65% of that rice (Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa [AGRA], 2024), mostly from Asia at a time when rice consumption in Africa increases by 37%, higher than that of cassava (32%), sorghum (21%), or maize (20%). Meanwhile, West Africa alone has already imported more than 485,000 tonnes of Indian parboiled rice in March 2025 (Kinavoor Madathil, 2025).

A report by AGRA estimates that Africa's rice import bill could reach as high as US\$ 35 billion annually, with Sub-Saharan Africa alone consuming up to 34 million tonnes of milled rice each year (AGRA, 2024). The region is now set to surpass Southeast Asia in rice imports, with 18.6 million tonnes projected for 2025 compared to Southeast Asia's 12 million tonnes this year (Miller Magazine, 2025). This indicates that Africa will continue to need rice despite its low local production. However, although there was a 40% increase in rice farming land in Africa over the past decade (Yuan et al., 2024) and a significant potential to develop local rice production, the average productivity remains stagnant, keeping the continent's food security under pressure.

This challenging reality of food vulnerability in Africa constitutes both an economic issue

in terms of a persistent trade deficit vis-à-vis Asia but also a business opportunity for the continent to recalibrate its economic cooperation and trade relationship with major partners such as India. Indeed, India as the second-largest emerging economy in Asia has the potential to play an even bigger role in developing Africa-Asia business cooperation, particularly regarding partnerships in the agricultural sector.

Such partnerships could take the form of pursuing more joint ventures between African and Indian businesses in the agricultural sector, including new joint investments in agribusiness as well as innovative public-private partnerships. In fact, the potential in such an area is becoming even more significant with India playing an increasingly key role in Africa-Asia economic ties (Ado & Ofori-Adofo, 2025). Thus, Indian businesses with expertise in rice farming and agribusiness should be encouraged to invest more with local partners in Africa so that knowledge and technology are also transferred across the continent. This will enable more win-win partnerships between Indian and African parties.

For this to happen, it is important to create pathways towards more interactions and networking among businesses and other

relevant actors from the two regions. For instance, an annual forum on agriculture between India and the African Union could be launched so that all key actors in agriculture (farmers, farming equipment manufacturers, national policymakers, researchers, ministers of agriculture, agricultural banks, private investors, etc.) can meet, connect, exchange ideas, and sign partnerships, including joint venture agreements.

Such networking platforms and collaboration avenues will generate more opportunities for meaningful bilateral cooperation and cross-border partnerships in agriculture and agribusiness. The potential spillover in terms of technical knowledge and financial synergies between the two regions is indeed significant as African and Indian business communities and policymakers connect more often. This will enable more targeted agricultural knowledge and technology transfer from India to Africa towards achieving the African Union's aspiration for economic prosperity while creating global investment opportunities. This also means that more Africans should be trained in rice farming techniques to increase their productivity and agribusiness expertise.

Overall, this approach will enable Africa to have more food produced locally for its consumption and thus reduce its large trade deficit vis-à-vis Asia, particularly regarding massive rice imports. At the same time, India could benefit from its investments in agriculture and agribusiness on the continent. The fact that Africa continues to import billions of dollars of rice each year when the continent has abundant competitive domestic inputs (land, water, labour, etc.) to farm rice locally is unsustainable.

Thus, when rice is sufficiently farmed in Africa, surely imports from India may decrease, but the investments made on the continent by Indian partners will certainly generate significant returns for investors since African consumers increasingly prefer and buy locally produced rice. This new dynamic also has the potential to avoid transport costs from India to Africa, which could subsequently cut transport

pollution and reduce international shipping risks. The potential outcome of such enhanced, bold cooperation pathways will contribute towards better Africa-India collaborations. This will also lead to a more sustainable bilateral trade while ensuring mutually beneficial investments and a lasting win-win relationship.

Practical Policy Recommendations

Based on this analysis of the current reality of India-Africa cooperation and with the aim to achieve the African Union's aspiration for a more prosperous Africa through improvements in agricultural productivity and sustainable food security, for the ties to continue prospering, it is crucial for both parties to work on:

1. Encouraging More Africa-India Joint Ventures in Agriculture and Agribusiness

This should be supported and implemented across African countries where the potential for rice farming is significant. For this to materialise fully and effectively, there is a need to study, comprehensively, the rice farming potential across all African regions and to identify key agribusiness areas for high-value addition and strategic value chain positioning of local businesses.

2. Creating an Annual India-Africa Rice Forum (IARF)

This forum will occur between African and Indian actors and could alternate between the two regions. This will help establish a more consistent, regular dialogue on rice farming, agribusiness, and farming technology between Africa and India by exploring high-added-value projects through specific collaborations and targeted technical partnerships.

3. Establishing a Special India-Africa Rice Development Fund (IARDF)

This financial agency will focus on supporting rice farmers and entrepreneurs by enabling them to access the grants, loans,

and mentorship they need. This will help them access modern farming equipment, industrialise the production process, mutualise equipment among farmers or within geographical areas for efficient use, as well as ensure knowledge sharing across the continent.

4. Training More Africans in Rice Farming

This will require special scholarships for Africans to study rice farming techniques and innovations in Indian universities as well as vocational, practical training for African entrepreneurs in Indian technical institutes. This could include creating an African Union Rice Research Institute (AURRI) to boost research expertise and practical knowledge in the field.

5. Involving More African Diasporas in India and Indian Diasporas in Africa

This will enable the development of strong cross-border entrepreneurs' networks that connect agribusiness professionals on both sides. This also means making the movement of people between Africa and India easier and possibly even signing broader visa-free agreements. Such easing of movement will generate more international partnership opportunities between African and Indian people.

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21

India–Africa Cooperation in 2025: Reimagining Development Strategy for a Transformative Partnership

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Africa's development trajectory in 2025 is shaped by a complex mix of challenges and possibilities. A multidimensional strategy is essential to emphasise economic diversification, infrastructure development, human capital investment, and good governance. Reducing reliance on raw commodity exports through value-added industries, investing in transformative infrastructure, especially in transport, energy, and digital connectivity, and strengthening institutional capabilities are foundational to building inclusive and sustainable growth across the continent. At the same time, enhancing access to education and healthcare, boosting intra-African trade, and integrating climate-resilient practices are critical to ensuring long-term economic and ecological resilience.

Amidst this evolving development landscape, Africa's strategic profile is rising globally. The continent has become part of intensifying interest from major powers and emerging actors alike. With its youthful population, urbanising economies, expanding middle class, and pivotal natural resources, Africa is not just the world's development frontier; it is a central pillar of the 21st-century global order.

India has responded proactively to Africa's rise by deepening political, economic, and development ties. In 2025, bilateral trade between India and Africa stands at US\$ 83 billion, with Indian exports accounting for US\$ 45 billion. With the momentum of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), crossing the

US\$ 100 billion mark is no longer aspirational; it is achievable. The AfCFTA provides Indian companies with a continental platform to create regional value chains, establish manufacturing hubs, and engage in trilateral ventures with global and South-South partners.

India's foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa has reached US\$ 75 billion, with US\$ 22 billion in new investments announced in 2022 alone. Sectors such as energy, pharmaceuticals, mining, automobiles, Information and Communications Technology (ICT), and agro-processing are key areas of growth. Yet, there are structural bottlenecks. A US\$ 12 billion Indian investment in Mozambique's gas sector remains stalled due to security concerns. Unlocking such projects would send a strong message about India's dependability as a long-term partner.

To remain relevant and effective, India needs to recalibrate its development cooperation strategy for Africa, moving beyond the traditional model of concessional credit and grants. Many African governments are now opting for FDI, blended finance, and public-private partnerships (PPPs) over debt financing models. India must realign its toolkit accordingly.

India's development cooperation must now embrace an FDI-first model. A possible mechanism could be the creation of an India Development Initiative (IDI) anchored within the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and supported by relevant ministries, Indian industry, academia, and venture capital networks. The initiative would prioritise Indian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and mid-sized companies already active or capable of expanding into African markets.

This model should promote sector-specific investment platforms aligned with African development priorities in renewable energy, agribusiness, fintech, education, logistics, and healthcare. Crucially, it must facilitate the ease of doing business in Africa for Indian

firms by offering new Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs) and updated Double Taxation Avoidance Agreements (DTAAs), buyback agreements for key commodities such as pulses from Tanzania and Mozambique, and credit enhancement mechanisms, risk guarantees, and subsidised foreign currency loans through Indian banks operating in Africa.

A notable innovation could be the creation of a Revolving Consulting Fund, designed to support pre-feasibility and detailed project reports for infrastructure and development projects. Indian consulting firms could utilise this fund to develop bankable project pipelines across sectors, with reimbursement linked to successful financing outcomes.

India's experience in frugal innovation, affordable public health, and digital public infrastructure (DPI) such as Aadhaar and Unified Payments Interface (UPI), offers replicable models for African partners. Collaborative initiatives in digital governance, e-learning, telemedicine, and fintech can enhance Africa's digital sovereignty while generating scalable business opportunities for Indian tech companies.

The India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) Process: An Uneven Journey

The IAFS process has been uneven since its inception. It began around 2006, when the then chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC), President Alpha Oumar Konaré, sought a summit with India under the 15-member Banjul format.

The first summit was held in 2008 in New Delhi, followed by the second in Addis Ababa in 2011. The third summit, originally scheduled for 2014, was postponed to 2015 due to the Ebola outbreak in parts of Africa and the emergence of a new government in India, which wanted to give its own imprint to the process. These summits were largely focused on human resource development (HRD) and capacity building, supported by large lines of

credit (LoCs). Ultimately, over US\$ 12 billion in LoCs were extended to 41 African countries, along with grants of around US\$ 2 billion.

India was the only partner to initially follow the Banjul format and also the only country to implement a three-tier cooperation model, engaging with the AUC, the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), and bilaterally. This was ambitious, with over 100 institutions offered to Africa for HRD and scholarships doubled during the IAFS process.

At the pan-African level, India offered institutions such as regional textile clusters, a civil aviation academy, meteorological stations, and rural development centres, as well as a proposed Africa-India Institute of Foreign Trade. The AUC allocated these institutions to different countries, but most failed to materialise. The issue was that allocations were made on political and regional considerations, without ensuring that host countries had the capability or willingness to sustain them.

Similarly, nearly 30 institutions were offered to RECs, particularly in agriculture and farmer support. Despite expectations that at least the more functional RECs would seize this opportunity, not a single one took shape, largely due to disinterest or lack of clarity on hosting arrangements.

The bilateral track fared somewhat better, though implementation was uneven. Some countries embraced opportunities to establish Information Technology (IT) centres, vocational training institutes, solar training hubs, and entrepreneurship development centres. Others did not. As I argue in *The Harambee Factor*, the same project succeeded in some countries and failed in others depending on local ownership, availability of resources, and government commitment. This uneven absorption, combined with weak capacity at the AUC and RECs, led IAFS-III to focus primarily on bilateral engagement. While more practical, this shift reduced opportunities for India's grant support to strengthen continental or regional institutions.

Nevertheless, some bilateral projects have stood out as successes, such as the Entrepreneurship Development Training Centre in Senegal, the Centre of Excellence in IT in Ghana, IT centres in Morocco and Egypt, university support and IT capacity in Tanzania, and vocational training institutes in Ethiopia and Rwanda.

By contrast, India's LoC-based approach was far more successful. It encouraged Indian private sector activity in countries where Indian business was previously absent, including Francophone and Lusophone Africa. Unlike many other partners who lent only to investment-grade economies, India extended concessional credit even to Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC), offering affordable finance where it was most needed, especially after debt cancellations around 2003.

The fourth IAFS, expected around 2020, was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. By the time restrictions lifted, communications between India and the AUC had weakened, and under the previous African Union (AU) leadership, the partnership drifted. Fortunately, the new AU chairperson, formerly a foreign minister and well-versed in India's development experience, has been more positive about reviving the summit. At the same time, the increasingly assertive behaviour of other partners has led to ad hoc Africa summits, while India's regular IAFS process has stalled. India, too, could perhaps have shown greater persistence, as Japan, China, and the European Union (EU) have done by maintaining their summit cycles more consistently.

The IAFS process itself lacks a strong follow-up mechanism. The AUC often depended on member states for updates on implementation, but this information was rarely forthcoming. As a result, progress reports usually came from the Indian side, reflecting primarily India's perspective. Over the last decade, regular contact between India and both the AUC and RECs has declined sharply and urgently needs to be revitalised.

The IAFS remains the nodal framework for India–Africa relations, offering structured cooperation and financing mechanisms. To maximise its effectiveness, responsiveness from the AUC, RECs, and African bilateral partners must be more consistent. An AU Mission in India could improve coordination. At the same time, new avenues, such as Track 1.5 and Track 2 dialogues, should be created to deliberate on issues of mutual interest, including climate change, terrorism, agricultural innovation, and the digital economy.

India and Africa should also strengthen coordination in global forums, especially the Group of Twenty (G20) and other key negotiations, where structured dialogue would be valuable. Business-to-business (B2B) relations, however, remain weak under the IAFS framework. The Africa–India Business Council, despite an impressive roster, has failed to function effectively: Indian delegations are usually accompanied by numerous business leaders, but their African counterparts often fail to attend. This lack of B2B connection needs to be urgently addressed if investment-led growth and deeper commercial cooperation are to become a reality.

That said, the India–Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) remains a vital strategic platform. A reimagined IAFS could address how shared challenges, such as economic transformation, climate vulnerability, health security, and global governance reform, impact the India–Africa partnership. The summit must balance continental, regional, and bilateral perspectives, enabling a comprehensive and inclusive dialogue.

India's historic achievement of bringing the AU into the G20 as a permanent member during its G20 presidency in 2023 marked a symbolic and strategic shift in global diplomacy. This must now be institutionalised and built upon through regular AU–India dialogue mechanisms. An IAFS Track 1.5 platform involving policymakers, industry

leaders, academia, and civil society, with strategic focus areas including Agenda 2063, CAADP (Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme), climate finance, energy transitions, and peacebuilding is suggested.

Given the fiscal constraints facing many African nations, PPPs and blended finance models are increasingly preferred. These models combine public sector risk-sharing with private sector efficiency and capital.

India should scale up its support for impact investing, particularly in areas like agritech, women-led enterprises, micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and rural infrastructure. A dedicated Indian Impact Investment Fund for Africa, co-financed by Indian development financial institutions, African sovereign funds, and global donors, could provide early-stage risk capital, technical assistance, and ecosystem support.

Blended finance structures work best when African governments contribute land, regulatory frameworks, and purchase agreements, while development partners provide concessional finance, credit guarantees, and technical expertise. These models are already being used in energy, agriculture, and water sectors, but they require scaling, greater standardisation, and long-term commitment.

Given the lack of domestic funding, various blended finance facilities have been launched to fund solar energy deployment on the continent with the objective of catalysing commercial capital. Deployment of the funds from these facilities, however, remains low. Multi-country blended finance facilities also exclude many local companies due to strict screening and evaluation criteria. Further, the majority of technical assistance flows to third-party consultants for project preparation, rather than business model validation, where solar entrepreneurs need more support. Investments also remain skewed towards certain regions (Southern and Northern

Africa) and certain solar segments (such as solar home systems and mini-grids), limiting the broader energy access impact.

This calls for a more inclusive, responsive approach to blended finance, one that supports local enterprises, prioritises underfunded regions like Central and parts of West Africa, and channels technical assistance to innovation and entrepreneurship. Indian cooperation, given its experience with distributed solar models and rural electrification, is well-placed to contribute meaningfully in this domain.

India's Africa strategy can be greatly enhanced through trilateral cooperation with both global and Southern partners. Countries like the UAE, Japan, Germany, France, and Brazil are increasingly active in Africa's development. India can co-create platforms that leverage complementary strengths: India's low-cost innovation, global partners' capital and technology, and Africa's demand and demographic potential.

For instance, India–UAE–Africa partnerships in logistics, food security, and fintech; India–Japan–Africa cooperation in quality infrastructure and connectivity; and India–Brazil–Africa collaboration in agri-science, bioenergy, and social development. These models can pool resources, distribute risks, and unlock larger-scale projects with high development impact.

The Indian diaspora in Africa and Indian entrepreneurs already operating across the continent are vital bridges of trust and knowledge. Their deep understanding of local cultures, markets, and regulatory ecosystems makes them indispensable actors in the India–Africa story.

Yet their role is often under-recognised in formal policy frameworks. Going forward, India's engagement strategy must institutionalise diaspora participation, including them in trade missions, investment roadshows, and policy consultations.

More importantly, Indian business leaders in Africa, especially in East, West, and Southern Africa, should be integrated into the Track 1.5 mechanism of the IAFS. Their insights can provide invaluable input on risk mitigation, regulatory alignment, and business climate improvements.

As Africa's development agenda gains urgency in 2025, amid global economic headwinds, climate risks, and governance reforms, India must rise to meet the moment. Its engagement should be viewed as an enhanced strategic and equitable partnership built on trust, respect, and mutual prosperity.

Recommendations for the Next Phase of the IAFS Process

The IAFS process, along with India's broader development cooperation with Africa, now needs to move into a new phase. This should take the form of an augmented capacity-building and HRD programme, but with stronger integration of trade, economy, and technology. The emphasis must increasingly shift toward private sector engagement, B2B connections, and greater Indian FDI, whether directly or through hybrid financing models.

This is, however, easier said than done. In a survey I conducted for my book *The Harambee Factor*, Indian entrepreneurs interested in Africa highlighted a range of challenges: currency risks, high cost of local finance, economic and tax policy instability, and the absence of integrated markets, among others. These remain major barriers to large-scale investment.

Despite these hurdles, Indian entrepreneurs are actively seeking larger African markets in which to invest, expand trade, and build technological partnerships. To facilitate this, policy-level engagement between Indian investors and the AUC as well as the AfCFTA Secretariat is critical. These institutions should engage with Indian investors directly to understand their requirements and design

policies that reduce risks and improve predictability.

The role of African Union Development Agency-New Partnership for Africa's Development (AUDA/NEPAD) must be enhanced in this development-led partnership.

At the national level, investment commissions in individual African countries are already engaging Indian investors, listening to their suggestions and grievances. Where such mechanisms work well, Indian investment flows more rapidly, since entrepreneurs have a clearer assessment of the local investment climate.

However, a key weakness remains the limited B2B connection between leading Indian and African business leaders. Joint ventures are still rare, even though many major African companies already rely on Indian human resources, technology, and Engineering, Procurement, and Construction (EPC) contractors. Without a stronger sense of mutual benefit, it remains unclear how large Indian companies can build enduring partnerships with African counterparts. This challenge extends to the SME and MSME sectors as well, which account for the bulk of Indian investment in Africa.

A third priority area is technology transfer. India is well-positioned to share its technological strengths, whether through the DPI model, the India Stack, or direct technology transfer. Several attempts, by India alone or with trilateral partners, have sought to create such partnerships to boost African productivity. However, these efforts have been

sporadic and inconsistent. Scaling them up will likely require stronger FDI-led engagements, supported by innovative financing models such as impact investing and blended finance.

In short, the next phase of India-Africa cooperation under the IAFS must:

1. Deepen capacity building and HRD programmes.
2. Strengthen private sector engagement and B2B links.
3. Facilitate FDI flows through supportive policy frameworks at both the AU and national levels.
4. Expand technology transfer and innovation partnerships in a systematic, long-term manner.

Only by aligning capacity-building with trade, investment, and technology will the IAFS process truly move into a more impactful and sustainable phase. India must transition toward a coherent, future-facing development strategy for Africa, one that prioritises FDI-led growth, impact investing, innovative finance, and knowledge partnerships. At the same time, India should maintain its unique identity as a South-South development partner, grounded in shared colonial histories, democratic values, and aspirations for a multipolar world.

With sustained political will, institutional innovation, and a bold new vision for cooperation, India and Africa can co-create a development model that is inclusive, resilient, and globally influential—a model that shapes the future of the Global South.

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Digital Currencies as Catalysts of Financial Inclusion in India-Africa Collaboration

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The Problem: Exclusion, Fragmentation, and Dependence

Despite significant advances in digital finance, vast populations in India and Africa remain excluded from secure and affordable financial services. In India, over 190 million adults still lack access to a bank account (Press Trust of India [PTI], 2018). In sub-Saharan Africa, only 49% of adults have access to formal banking, with financial access concentrated in urban areas (World Bank, 2024). Foreign remittances, a lifeline for millions, remain costly, averaging 7-9% in sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank Group, 2024) and remaining well above the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal target 10.c of less than 3% by 2030 (Pirlea et al., 2020).

Current cross-border payment systems are slow, expensive, and heavily reliant on US dollar settlement through Western intermediaries. This dependence exposes both regions to volatility, sanctions, and transaction delays. Within Africa, fragmented mobile money systems such as M-Pesa, Airtel Money, and MTN MoMo dominate at the national level but lack interoperability across borders.

India faces its own bottlenecks. Despite the success of the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), Aadhaar, and direct benefit transfers, rural and informal sector workers still face connectivity barriers and limited access to credit. Meanwhile, small businesses in both regions are locked out of affordable cross-border trade finance, a key constraint on growth.

The overarching problem is clear: financial exclusion persists, cross-border transactions remain fragmented and costly, and both India and Africa are dependent on external systems that do not serve their developmental priorities.

The Evidence: Digital Finance Innovations in the Global South

India and Africa have each pioneered unique models of digital financial inclusion that demonstrate both the potential and the limitations of current systems. In India, the creation of digital public infrastructure, anchored by Aadhaar, UPI, and more recently the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC), has scaled low-cost, interoperable financial services nationwide. UPI alone now processes over 640 million transactions daily, overtaking Visa's 639 million, making it the fastest-growing real-time payments system in the world (Press Information Bureau [PIB], 2025). Yet, connectivity gaps in rural areas and limited access to micro-credit highlight the need for deeper reforms.

Africa, by contrast, has led with mobile money innovations such as M-Pesa and MTN MoMo, which have enabled millions to leapfrog traditional banking access. However, these systems remain largely fragmented at the international level, with limited interoperability across borders. The recent launch of the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS), which seeks to accelerate local-currency payment settlement for intra-African trade and commerce, is a crucial first step to reduce costs and reliance on the US dollar, but significant challenges persist (Times Now, 2025).

At the global level, over 130 countries are now exploring central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) (Jones, 2023). While some are still in the exploration stage, a few have already launched pilots, including advanced economies such as Australia (Hall, 2025) and developing nations such as India (The Hindu, 2025), Nigeria (Ledger Insights, 2021), and China (Ledger Insights, 2025). For the Global South, this presents a critical opportunity to

design CBDCs that address the challenges faced by contemporary payment systems, go beyond replicating Global North models, and advance inclusion, resilience, and monetary sovereignty.

The Opportunity: CBDCs as Instruments of Digital Solidarity

The emergence of CBDCs presents a rare opportunity for India and Africa to reshape the future of digital finance on their own terms. The success of China's digital yuan has nearly doubled its payment volumes over the past 14 months, reaching RMB 14.2 trillion (US\$ 2 trillion) through September 2025, up from RMB 7.3 trillion in July 2024 (Ledger Insights, 2025). Furthermore, the People's Bank of China (PBoC) has established a digital yuan international operations centre in Shanghai to oversee cross-border cooperation and a digital yuan operations and management centre in Beijing to manage system development and maintenance, promoting the currency's broader application. These actions create the foundations for its internationalisation and position it as an alternative to the US dollar.

CBDCs cannot be seen simply as digital cash; they are instruments that, if implemented well, can advance financial inclusion by extending the reach of digital finance to rural and underserved populations. Offline-ready CBDCs, for example, could directly complement UPI in India and mobile money systems in Africa, ensuring that communities with limited connectivity are not excluded from the digital economy (Kalash, 2024).

They also have the potential to lower costs by bypassing traditional correspondent banking systems. Interoperable CBDCs could dramatically reduce the time and expense of remittance transfers, a development that would directly benefit migrant workers and their families (Kalash, 2024).

In principle, CBDCs could also create space for innovation. Their programmable nature allows governments and private actors to

design new tools for specific, designated purposes (Reserve Bank of India, 2025). This could include targeted subsidies, cross-border credit facilities for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), or new fintech services tailored to the needs of low-income households.

Equally important, CBDCs can enhance monetary sovereignty. By reducing dependence on dollar clearing and currency substitution, India and Africa can better insulate their economies from external shocks, sanctions, and volatility (Brooks, 2021). This aligns with Africa's African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agenda of increasing intra-African trade and capital flows (International Trade Centre, n.d.) and with India's broader push for financial self-reliance.

Finally, a shared India-Africa approach to CBDCs could become a cornerstone of South-South innovation diplomacy. By co-developing interoperable frameworks, both regions can chart a "third path" distinct from US or Chinese models, one that prioritises fairness, privacy, and accessibility, and establishes India and Africa as global standard-setters in development-oriented digital finance.

Policy Options

Turning the potential of CBDCs into meaningful outcomes requires concrete policy actions that bridge ambition with implementation. For India and Africa, the objective is not simply to pilot digital currencies but to embed them within financial ecosystems in ways that expand access, reduce costs, and foster trust. Achieving this will demand joint frameworks, interoperable technologies, and inclusive, development-oriented governance models. Several priority areas stand out.

1. **Creation of an India-Africa CBDC Forum:** This forum would convene central banks, finance ministries, fintech associations, telecom regulators, and civil society to coordinate pilots, harmonise standards and serve as a knowledge hub.

Such a forum would ensure that lessons are rapidly exchanged and best practices adapted.

2. **Cross-Border Interoperability Pilots:** Demonstrating CBDC utility in high-value use cases such as remittances, SME trade finance, and people mobility would provide proof-of-concept while addressing pressing needs. Early corridors between India and African leaders in digital finance—such as Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa—could deliver quick wins and eventually scale up through the AfCFTA and South Asian partnerships.
3. **Tiered KYC Frameworks:** The design of CBDCs must be inclusive from the outset. Tiered Know Your Customer (KYC) frameworks can ensure access for migrant workers, farmers, and small traders without undermining safeguards for larger-value transactions. A differentiated, lighter, and outcomes-driven compliance regime for low-value transfers will help avoid excluding those who most need affordable digital finance (Bank for International Settlements, 2024).
4. **Offline CBDC Functionality:** Perhaps the most critical innovation for both regions is offline CBDC functionality. Connectivity gaps remain severe: mobile internet penetration in rural Africa is still below 38% (Zavazava, 2024), and large parts of India (particularly rural and remote areas) rely on patchy 2G or 3G networks (Manzar & Kanjil, 2025). Offline-capable CBDCs are therefore essential to ensure that digital inclusion does not remain confined to urban centres. This could be achieved by integrating CBDCs into existing Short Message Service (SMS) and Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD) systems that already support mobile money, enabling device-to-device transfers through Near-Field Communication (NFC) or Bluetooth, and allowing hybrid settlement where transactions executed offline are validated once connectivity resumes. Such features

would not only bring farmers, traders, and rural households into the digital economy but also guarantee resilience in times of crisis, such as natural or man-made disasters or network outages.

Integration with Digital Public

Infrastructure: CBDCs must be linked with digital IDs and Electronic Know Your Customer (e-KYC) systems and be interoperable with existing payment platforms in both jurisdictions. This integration would unlock scale by ensuring that transactions are trusted, authenticated, and seamless across the two regions.

5. **Developing Shared Standards for Data Protection and Privacy:** The success of CBDCs will hinge on trust. India and Africa should co-develop South-South governance principles that embed privacy-by-design, establish clear limits on surveillance, and create protocols for cross-border data flows. By doing so, they can position CBDCs as trusted public goods.

Conclusion

For India and Africa, CBDCs represent a practical solution to three interlocking challenges: persistent financial exclusion, dependence on costly and exclusionary systems, and the absence of a Global South voice in shaping the rules of the global digital economy. If the first wave of digital innovation, led by UPI and mobile money, showed that achieving national economic and social goals through largely indigenously developed technology was possible, the second wave must show that collaboration can scale these gains across borders and integrate the Global South.

What is at stake for the Global South is more than financial efficiency; it is strategic control. This is a moment for leadership. India and Africa need not replicate the models emerging from Washington, Brussels, or Beijing. Together, they can chart a “third path”, one rooted in fairness, resilience, and collaboration. If governments from both regions move decisively from ideation to pilots

and implementation, CBDCs can become pillars of digital solidarity and a visible symbol of South-South innovation diplomacy, reshaping the global economy to serve people, not just markets and great-power interests.

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23

International Solidarity, Trade, and Investment

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On July 1, 2025, the Donald Trump administration officially closed the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), ending decades of US development assistance. While European countries have also reduced their official development assistance (ODA) over the past year, the US decision was seismic: until then, the United States had been the world's top single-country aid donor (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2025). Since then, analysts and world leaders have been split. Some warn of the ODA crisis's dire humanitarian consequences and urge reform of international assistance, while others frame it as a painful but necessary opportunity to transition from aid to trade and investment.

The notion of moving “from aid to trade” is hardly new, and it resonates strongly in Africa, which was the leading recipient of US aid. However, while new models of international solidarity are needed, it would be naïve to believe that simply shifting from “aid to trade” will be a silver bullet to address the deep challenges that African states face, including food and energy insecurity, deindustrialisation, and climate change, among others. Too often, discussions about international trade and investment in Africa are dominated by narratives about how the continent can become the world's “powerhouse” and “granary,” sidelining the needs of African citizens and failing to address structural inequities in international economic exchanges. At a time of significant changes in the international arena, including great power competition and emerging powers increasingly investing overseas, there is a unique opportunity for the African continent and its leaders to drive investment towards local initiatives that seek to address domestic demands for services and goods by integrating human development objectives into their business models.

For decades, African leaders and thinkers have called for win-win partnerships with Western states to advance the interests of African countries, a demand that was notably enshrined in the United Nations General Assembly's 1974 Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order (United Nations General Assembly, 1974). Recent years have brought massive investments from China, new commercial partners such as India, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia (Gopaldas, 2025), and Turkey, and new investment deals with traditional partners such as the European Union (EU), Japan, and the United States, all of which could signal a lasting boost to trade and investment (UN Trade and Development [UNCTAD], 2025). Examples include the United States and the EU's joint Lobito Corridor Project in Central Africa, in partnership with Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Zambia; Japan's recent commitment (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2025) to invest in the Nacala Corridor in partnership with Mozambique, Malawi, and Zambia; US\$ 97 billion in investments (The International Institute for Strategic Studies [IISS], 2024) from the UAE in 2022–2023; and the European Commission's identification (Kavalov et al., 2025) of 11 Global Gateway Transport corridors for potential investments.

Yet, African analysts continue to note (Ngundu, 2025) the stalling of Africa's industrialisation, as its various economies' integration into global value chains remains weak, and to decry major infrastructure projects as façades to continue "extractivism" (Ògúnmodé, 2024), "the removal of large quantities of natural resources with minimal processing, for the purpose of exporting." Indeed, these projects are primarily presented by foreign partners as an opportunity to increase connectivity and transport minerals, and only secondarily as an opportunity to develop digitisation, agriculture, and other sectors to boost local economies. In Washington, meetings between US policy experts and business leaders and government officials from African countries that produce critical minerals often illustrate this dichotomy.

While the latter strive to drive investment in the local economy, the former usually show interest almost exclusively in critical mineral exports. As long as this dynamic persists, Africa will serve primarily as a source of raw materials for others' prosperity, while its own populations lose out.

An alternative is possible. As economist Fadhel Kaboub argues (Kaboub, 2025), African states need to develop long-term strategic visions for themselves, not simply fit into the visions of others. That applies to every sector, from green industrialisation and agriculture to sustainable energy, and from large-scale projects to more modest ones.

In this sense, as South–South cooperation continues to grow, it is crucial that these partnerships do not merely replicate Western models of engagement. Instead, African governments should draw on their vibrant thinkers and civil society to develop an alternative vision for trade and investment, one rooted in making international solidarity work with long-term mutual benefits that prioritise populations' needs over external actors' interests. Absent that, "moving from aid to trade" will merely be a smokescreen that perpetuates inequality.

Of course, investors and recipient governments alike want to reap the benefits of trade and investment deals. However, for too long, short-term, immediate gains have taken precedence over governments' responsibility to provide for their populations. Similarly, traditional growth indicators fail to provide a comprehensive picture of a country's economic health, as they overlook the importance of human-centred indicators, such as food, water, and energy security and sovereignty, at the micro level. For instance, although Africa is often praised as an economically dynamic region, with several countries displaying high growth rates, "over half of Africa's population still lacks reliable access to electricity," according to a 2025 United Nations article (United Nations Sustainable Development Group, 2025), and the World Health Organization's 2025 State

of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report states (World Health Organization, 2025) that over 20 per cent of the continent's population faced hunger in 2024.

Currently, African governments struggle to convince investors in infrastructure mega-projects to also finance sectors critical for human development. Moreover, trade deals continue to position African states as producers of low-value-added products for export, while keeping them dependent on imports (Ghaedi, 2022) for strategic sectors. For instance, the continent imports approximately US\$ 50 billion worth of food (Izuaka, 2025) annually. This cycle can be broken by adopting an approach to economic diplomacy that considers growth and human development as an intertwined process, as opposed to two disconnected or competing objectives.

In sum, if Africa's potential resides in its youthful population, making the continent "one of the fastest-growing consumer markets in the world," as noted by Brookings Institution's Senior Fellow Landry Signé (Signé, 2018), then sustainable economic development and sovereignty can only be achieved by prioritising trade and investments geared towards the services and goods African citizens need to create a robust society. In fact, there are opportunities to promote impact investment through international solidarity by leveraging existing social enterprises.

Social enterprises are businesses that prioritise social impact over profits by addressing the challenges faced by populations. The rise of investment in social enterprises in India (Intellicap Africa, & African Venture Philanthropy Alliance, 2020) is a promising avenue to boost South–South cooperation by sharing lessons learned and encouraging impact investments in Africa. As expert Punye Mehta notes, India has a rich history of social entrepreneurship across various sectors, including health, education, and

employment. In 2024, Shri Hardeep Singh Puri, India's minister of petroleum and natural gas, estimated (Press Information Bureau, 2024) that social enterprises in India had the potential to reach US\$ 8 billion by 2025, with the average deal size increasing from US\$ 7.6 million to US\$ 17.6 million between 2010 and 2016. Furthermore, healthcare, agribusiness, and clean energy have emerged as leading sectors, according to a 2024 Intellicap report (Intellicap, 2014).

Similar efforts exist in Africa. In Kenya, Adeso Africa aims to redefine international solidarity and investment through social entrepreneurship, supporting locally led and human-centred development with impact financing. Among its successful initiatives, Adeso Africa has collaborated (Adeso, 2022) with communities in Somalia to strengthen water systems and support local agriculture through "sustainable use of the region's natural resources." Adeso Africa has also launched, in partnership with the Network for Empowered Aid Response and the African Philanthropy Forum, Proximate Fund, an Africa-led donor pool that aims to invest in African social entrepreneurship and civil society. Other initiatives include the Africa Enterprise Challenge Fund, and international investment funds like Acumen also support African social businesses.

Unlike traditional greenfield investments (UNCTAD, 2025) and international project financing, which often repatriate profits abroad, supporting local social enterprises develops locally rooted ecosystems. This contributes to building a skilled workforce, leverages indigenous systems of knowledge, and enables African businesses to produce services and goods for African development. Of course, foreign investments in mega-projects will remain necessary, particularly for infrastructure. Nevertheless, if African leaders truly want to provide for their populations, they should urgently explore innovative forms of investment.

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Digital Ecosystem and Tech Entrepreneurship for Inclusive Growth: The Africa–India Partnership

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This paper argues that African countries and India share structural and institutional similarities, such as large informal economies, mobile-first digital adoption, youthful populations, and gaps in legacy infrastructure. These similarities can be leveraged through aligned technological approaches to support homegrown entrepreneurship and inclusive growth. These “shared” approaches can help achieve greater scale economies to address common challenges such as those of inclusion and access.

The digital ecosystem is one such domain that offers unprecedented opportunities for shared prosperity. For Africa and India, which share similar youthful populations, entrepreneurial dynamism, and developmental trajectories, technology-based partnerships can redefine inclusive growth. Leveraging India’s experience with Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), inclusive innovation, and start-up ecosystems, both regions can share learnings and even co-create digital solutions for highly heterogeneous users.

This monograph professes that aligned digital frameworks, supported by partnerships and facilitative policy, will enable innovation, entrepreneurship, and inclusive growth in both regions.

Introduction

The global economic landscape is being redefined by digital technologies, connectivity, artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and fintech among others that enable improved productivity and inclusion. For developing regions like India and Africa, the digital economy represents not just economic transformation but the opportunity to forge a new development paradigm.

This is feasible due to some striking similarities between the two regions that include an extensive informal sector, youthful demographics, and significant digital innovation potential (Impact and Policy Research Institute [IMPRI], 2025). Given similar underlying socio-economic structures, some of India's recent successes in enabling financial and digital inclusion through its DPI can prove useful. While African nations can potentially pick and choose appropriate elements from the DPI (given its modular structure), a layer of innovation to fine-tune for African needs can not only benefit Africa, but also potentially help create new digital services for India.

Historically, India and Africa's partnership has evolved from postcolonial solidarity to practical collaboration in trade, education, and capacity building (Saran, 2012). This partnership is now expanding into the domain of digital diplomacy. For African countries, India offers an alternative model of technological partnership, one that prioritises inclusive digital innovation and ecosystem development over resource extraction. The possibility of a collaborative engagement in the growing technology space, can yield benefits to both regions, not least stimulating and enabling socio-economic inclusion. This analysis examines how digital technologies and entrepreneurship, enabled through India-Africa digital partnership, can help shape inclusive growth pathways in both regions.

The Imperative for Digital Inclusion

Both India and Africa face fundamental inclusion challenges such as limited infrastructure, low literacy, and unequal access to many public facilities. Approximately 500 million Africans still lack formal means of identification that limits access to state services and to the formal sector (IMPRI, 2025). Identification and bank account figures in India are higher, with almost nine out of 10 adult Indians having access to formal banking channels.

In this context India's recent experience has demonstrated that secure digital identity systems, integrated with welfare and financial delivery, can lift millions from a largely excluded state to a far more inclusive economic environment.

India's DPI platforms, namely, Aadhaar (Identification), Unified Payments Interface (UPI), and DigiLocker (data sharing), have enabled societal scale coverage at a speed previously not experienced globally (Research and Information System for Developing Countries [RIS], 2025). Therefore, one opportunity involves learnings from India to enable African commerce.

However, there are challenges within India as well, for instance those related to dark spots (regions where telecom network has not spread) and limited usage of such accounts by some demographic segments. These have proved difficult to address, and experiences and learnings in Africa could help India in its own domestic challenges as well. This would be better achieved if a cooperative mechanism of sharing, innovating, and fine-tuning is enabled.

Africa's political economy and state capacity vary sharply by country, so a staggered approach is more practical. Early pilots are most likely to work in countries with high

mobile penetration and functioning digital finance/ID ecosystems (for example Kenya, Ghana, Rwanda, Nigeria, and South Africa), paired with offline/assisted channels, local-language User Experience (UX), and clear data-protection enforcement to build trust.

Moreover, African experiences with community-based onboarding, agent-assisted digital services, and interoperability across mobile money and government platforms provide practical lessons that can help India address last-mile exclusion and advance its goal of leaving no one behind.

As mentioned earlier, a co-creation or co-development model therefore could in theory work well with mutual benefits for both regions. It would enable African countries bridge their digital divide without creating dependency on a proprietary system given the open-source potential of India's DPI (Danish, 2025).

Operationally, the "cooperative mechanism" can be made tangible through an Africa-India DPI sandbox and peer-learning network that curates reusable building blocks and standards, runs joint pilots and regulatory sandboxes, and publishes reference documentation as digital public goods. Drawing on the India Stack building-block approach, the Digital Public Goods Alliance's registry/standard, and catalytic grant support models such as Co-Develop therefore can prove to be a sound cooperative solution.

India-Africa Technology Partnerships: The Evolving Digital Compact

India and Africa's digital cooperation has been growing and evolving over the years. The Pan-African e-Network Project in 2009, for instance, provided for telemedicine and distance education links across the continent. Digital partnerships such as the Bank of Namibia and India's National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) in 2024 to help

build a UPI-like payment system, or for a *Smart Zambia Initiative* with Airtel Zambia for technical support, are also illustrative (CNBCTV18, 2024; ITU Academy, n.d.; Ministry of External Affairs, 2009).

These initiatives align with pan-African continental frameworks such as the African Union's Digital Transformation Strategy (2020-2030) and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Since India's open-source DPI model enables precisely such integration, India is well positioned to play the role of a South-South innovation intermediary (Sang et al., 2025).

But enabling factors for the success of potential partnerships need to come together for there to be a higher likelihood of success. Some of the key ones include:

- a. readily available learnings from a similar socio-economic environment with rollout at continental-societal scale;
- b. modular and open-source nature of India's DPI, that African countries can adapt and adopt without concern of dependence.

Together these elements help facilitate lower transaction costs and also align well with African nations' sovereignty goals (Kapoor, 2025), and as mentioned previously through the innovation potential in Africa they also create learnings for the Indian context.

At the same time India and African nations can further deepen their economic relationship in the digital space. This is possible through enhanced economic integration, particularly via digital trade under the AfCFTA. The relative success of transaction and trade models, like the UPI and Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC), could support this possibility (see Confederation of Indian Industry [CII], 2025). Though these services will need to be tweaked for cross-border commerce they provide immense opportunities for both trade within Africa and that with India.

Technology as an Engine of Inclusion

It is well known that India's start-up ecosystem is attracting significant global investor interest and many fintech, edtech, and agritech start-ups have emerged. Africa too has an established start-up ecosystem, with Nairobi, Cape Town, Lagos, and Kigali being globally recognised as fast expanding start-up hubs with reported funding in excess of USD 5 billion in 2024 (CII, 2025).

Africa's M-Pesa was arguably the earliest fintech success which the world learnt much from. Both M-Pesa and India's UPI rest on innovations in the cellular telecom space. Twiga Foods, another Kenyan initiative and E-Chaupal and DeHaat from India as well address the market access and supply chain gaps. Similarly in the education and healthcare spaces a host of innovative start-ups have come up in both Africa and India, an important element of such new initiatives is their non-profit nature. India's *Women Entrepreneurship Platform* and Africa's *She Leads Africa* foundation, which focus on women's employment, are illustrative.

The uniqueness of these start-ups is that though the profit motive may be central, the low cost of digital delivery enables inclusion, and the scalability enhances the employment potential. Digital entrepreneurship, whether non-profit or for-profit, therefore is becoming instrumental in bottom-up inclusion, merging local innovation with global scalability (Bajpai, 2021).

Building Sustainable Digital Ecosystems

Building sustainable, inclusive digital ecosystems requires integrated backend software and telecom infrastructure, and also collaborative institutional mechanisms and enabling policies. India's UPI and Aadhaar based DPI have succeeded in no small part because of the success of its low-cost telecom network. Therefore, expanding 4G/5G

networks and broadband capacity at low cost will be central for Africa as well. Bharti Airtel's deep experience across Africa telecom, and software services major Tech Mahindra's experience is helping enable partnerships with multiple African governments for developing networked solutions (Gopaldas, 2025).

Over the years the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) have built significant expertise in churning out globally competitive engineering talent. The IIT Madras campus in Zanzibar symbolises an intellectual bridge for digital talent development within Africa. This sets the stage for the creation of an African value chain where the talent and innovation from within Africa can help power its digital ecosystem. This makes it possible for African governments and firms to localise modules, manage vendors, secure systems, and iterate based on user feedback.

India's digital march was not pre-scripted in the sense that there was no long-term plan. As one set of rollouts succeeded, it created the need and avenue for another. Even the regulatory set-up and the various rules and regulations governing the digital ecosystem have come about through this ongoing churn (Maheshwari & Sharma, 2025). One example of a ground up development is the need for data privacy within a developing country frame, with India's Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 working at ensuring protection and privacy for the public (Kapoor, 2025). The core lesson is sequencing with feedback: trust is sustained only when adoption and adaptation keep pace with the rules and vice versa.

Finally, consider environmental sustainability. Adaptation to a fast-changing climate and mitigation have become central to all economic progress. In this context both India and Africa can gain immensely from each other's experiences in enabling green digital entrepreneurship. Note that the focus of the digital space in India has historically been on inclusion. Africa's experience shows how digital initiatives can finance basic access at the

bottom of the pyramid while India's experience points to the next layer: digitalising utilities and demand management through smart metering and grid-modernisation efforts. These help strengthen service delivery and reduce losses (International Renewable Energy Agency [IRENA], 2020). This is inclusion with a second dividend: DPI lowers the cost of participation (identity/payments/data), and green digital entrepreneurship lowers the cost of resilience (energy access and reliability) for households and small firms (World Bank, 2022).

The green-digital domain is at a fairly nascent stage which African nations can be at the forefront through climate-tech innovations such as smart grids and AI-based resource management opportunities (India-Africa Report of 2025 [CII, 2025]). Placed in that frame, "green digital" can be seen as DPI applied to resilient delivery of utility services, so that inclusion is measured not only in terms of accounts opened or persons covered, but also in affordable and reliable services delivered and enabling their use to empower the excluded.

Conclusion

Both India and Africa share related socio-economic challenges, infrastructure gaps, and heterogeneous populations. Consequently, digital products and services developed in one geography could have immense potential in the other. Therefore, if India and African nations can build a digital partnership that is based on the principle of mutuality rather than that of provider-providee, it will yield benefits for a long time to come.

This monograph therefore makes the case for an institutionalised partnership that is based on a structured frame with the following elements.

- **Africa-India Digital Partnership:** A roadmap built on digital public goods, shared standards, and co-innovation clusters. The approach that allows African

nations to pick and choose different elements based on their priorities is, however, key to its success.

- **Institutional Capacity and Talent Sharing:** A strengthening of partnerships and collaborations between African and Indian universities, digital skill missions, and research institutions such as IIITs (Indian Institutes of Information Technology), and African Union Digital Academies. Here it is important to recognise the criticality of localisation, training needs must be assessed and provided in a localised and inclusive setting.
- **Digital Trade Facilitation:** any long-term geo-political relationship could be sustained better if economic relationships are also enabled. Cross-border information and data flows and e-commerce can be enabled through harmonised digital regulations under AfCFTA. India has had some success with its UPI and ONDC protocols and models (CII, 2025).
- **Financing and Impact Measurement:** There is greater digital cooperation, and opportunity for the establishment of an "Africa-India Digital Innovation Fund." This could be co-created by the African Development Bank and Exim Bank of India to finance inclusive and green start-ups benefitting from a growing African DPI.

As both Africa and India navigate the digital century, technology should not be seen as a product or service to be transferred from one entity to another, but as a method of co-creation. India's experience in scaling public digital infrastructure at low cost and nurturing grassroots innovation complements Africa's demographics and demand for inclusive technology solutions. As India works with African nations the learnings and diverse experiences can help it further its own inclusion and innovative aspirations.

Concretely, India's DPI experience speaks to Africa's most binding "inclusion bottlenecks": bringing people into the formal system through trusted identification, lowering

the cost of everyday transactions through interoperable payments, and making credentials and records portable so access to services does not depend on paperwork or proximity to the state. Moreover, the learnings obtained by such experiences in Africa, would also help improve the coverage of the excluded in India. And in that sense digital partnerships, when embedded in entrepreneurship and policy coherence, can help enable inclusion in both the regions.

An Africa-India digital innovation alliance should therefore be framed less as a slogan and more as an operating compact: co-build interoperable public rails, prevent vendor lock-in through shared standards and digital public goods, and run pilots that can be judged on inclusion outcomes (onboarding, usage, grievance resolution, and service delivery) rather than on a platform roll-out alone.

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Strengthening Africa-India Digital Partnerships: A Compendium of Data Governance, AI, and DPI Challenges

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Introduction

Africa can be considered a strategic area of investment (Coke-Hamilton, 2025). If the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is fully implemented, its economic benefits would be immense. According to the International Trade Centre, strengthening trade within Africa could create US\$ 22 billion in additional annual value for the region, particularly through expanding agricultural product exchanges (International Trade Centre, 2022).

The AfCFTA's Digital Trade Protocol and the Single Digital Market ideals present opportunities to unlock these agricultural gains through projects like "smart agriculture" and AI-facilitated precision-farming initiatives. As Pamela Coke-Hamilton, Executive Director of the International Trade Centre, has written, "This digital ecosystem is not just creating tech jobs in an increasingly competitive global market. It is also creating new chances for local agribusinesses to adopt technological solutions that can help with everything from upgrading production practices to meeting supply chain traceability requirements" (Coke-Hamilton, 2025).

India is set to become among the world's largest economies in 2026, fourth to the US, China, and Germany (Mirano, 2025). As India's economic relevance increases, so too does its bargaining power in international affairs. With such an advantage, India is poised to use its political status as an important bridge between the Global North and the Global South to elicit further investment into the Global South's developmental priorities.

India's strategic partnership with Africa can help to achieve both areas' economic and political ambitions. As a precedent, India has successfully lobbied for the African Union's seat at the G20, marking an important milestone in the representation of the Global South in international affairs and policymaking. If Africa can improve its market competitiveness through the implementation of the AfCFTA and the successful fulfilment of digital transformation initiatives, such as localised DPI and Artificial Intelligence (AI) deployment, India will also be able to rely on the region as a market for Indian merchandise exports, thereby reducing the need for fragmented country-specific strategies (Goel, 2025).

This short paper examines the intersecting challenges and opportunities at the nexus of digital trade, data governance, AI development, and digital public infrastructure (DPI) in the context of Africa-India cooperation. While ambitious in scope, these themes are intrinsically linked. Effective data governance enables trustworthy DPI; DPI provides the foundation for locally relevant AI development; and together, these elements can unlock digital trade opportunities that advance development goals in both regions.

Data Governance Gaps

Africa has made strides in coordinating regional trade agreements, but the continent's ability to leverage digital innovation for public value depends critically on robust data governance frameworks. Without these foundations, digital transformation risks deepening rather than closing development

gaps (Rens et al., 2025).

Two key continental frameworks, the African Union Data Policy Framework (AUDPF) and the Malabo Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection, remain largely undomesticated across member states. This fragmented regulatory landscape creates uncertainty for AI development and deployment, as developers and businesses lack the harmonised standards necessary for cross-border innovation and data flows.

This governance vacuum has tangible consequences. The absence of local data infrastructure and frameworks forces African AI initiatives to depend on external data sources, limiting the development of contextually relevant, locally trained solutions. When African countries instead import AI technologies developed elsewhere, they face difficult trade-offs. For example, these systems may not address local needs and can disrupt labour markets and economic stability in ways that differ from their countries of origin.

Meanwhile, the current AI boom remains concentrated among Western tech giants, further widening the technological gap between developed and developing countries. Without coordinated data governance that enables local AI ecosystems to emerge, Africa risks remaining primarily a consumer rather than a producer in the global AI economy.

The AI Investment Landscape

The capital-intensive nature of AI infrastructure presents barriers to entry for African and Asian economies. Advanced AI systems require investments in computational infrastructure and energy-intensive data centres, creating structural challenges for countries seeking to develop domestic AI capabilities. The concentration of global capital in Western AI ventures (including planned investments exceeding US\$ 1 trillion in AI data centres) diverts financial resources away from traditional development priorities in the Global South, such as basic infrastructure, education, and healthcare.

This capital allocation pattern raises concerns about opportunity costs, particularly given the uncertainty surrounding returns on AI investments should market valuations correct. The financial risks are substantial. If the AI bubble bursts, global capital markets will likely see increased volatility, reducing investment flows to developing economies that depend on external financing for infrastructure and development projects. Digitisation will continue where the infrastructure exists, although perhaps not in line with current aspirations. The African continent faces a predicament where it is *too expensive to enter AI development during the boom*, and *too far behind to benefit from any correction*. This predicament underscores the importance of alternative development pathways, like DPI-enabled approaches that can provide technological advancement without requiring the massive capital outlays associated with frontier AI development.

DPI as an Alternative Development Pathway

The economic and social impacts of India's Aadhaar system demonstrate the potential value of locally driven AI development, particularly when removal of economic barriers can assist local innovators through preferential access to data (Desai et al., 2023). The same generally holds for DPI and AI when implemented with appropriate safeguards.

Turning to conditions for enhanced development, what matters most is clear data governance frameworks that are both user-centric and human rights-centric. These can facilitate data access and usage that enable equitable and just DPI scalability and local AI development and deployment. India's lessons learnt in scaling DPI in a Global South context can support emerging DPI initiatives on the African continent. These lessons have specific utility in options for public value creation opportunities, addressing informality in digital financial inclusion and missed tax opportunities for socio-economic development

(Floyd et al., 2025), or even access to public data for data-driven innovation and decision-making.

Understanding models of access to DPI to drive localised AI development can reduce the risks and safety concerns associated with importing Global North AI governance models in Africa (Floyd et al., 2025). While in no way a "cure-all," well-governed DPI can serve as foundational infrastructure to address pressing challenges, including algorithmic bias, cybersecurity vulnerabilities, and labour market disruption. When DPI systems are designed with appropriate data governance safeguards, they create standardised, interoperable platforms that enable local developers to build AI solutions using contextually relevant data. This bottom-up approach allows for AI models that better reflect local languages, cultural norms, and economic realities, while establishing accountability mechanisms that are often absent in imported systems (Segun et al., 2025).

Beyond immediate safety concerns, locally governed DPI generates broader systemic benefits. It can strengthen competitive trade by enabling African businesses to participate in digital markets without dependence on foreign platforms. It reduces structural data dependencies on Global North technology providers by creating domestic data ecosystems and technical capacity. It also catalyses both public and private sector growth by lowering barriers to entry for local innovators and creating opportunities for government service delivery improvements. These interconnected effects position DPI not merely as technical infrastructure, but as economic infrastructure that can shift power dynamics in the global digital economy.

Policy Recommendations

Africa and India confront similar development questions, offering scope for joint innovation and coordinated approaches. Strategic solidarity can assist with redressing widespread

inequality, unemployment, and lagging economic growth caused by historical colonialism and digital neocolonialism.

Developing Fit-for-Purpose Data Governance Frameworks

To realise DPI-enabled opportunities, policymakers in India and Africa must prioritise the development of fit-for-purpose data governance frameworks that can enable AI and DPI interplays that can drive fulfilment of developmental goals (Ilavarasan, 2025). These frameworks should ensure data governance mechanisms prioritise trust, data minimality, data usage standards, sovereignty, and competitive AI-specific usage mandates.

Strengthening Institutional Coordination

Improving DPI and AI governance requires data protection agencies, competition authorities, and similar regulators to work cohesively and cooperatively. What is needed are clear rules for public and private sector engagement in DPI and AI while enabling international AI cooperation through shared governance standards. Additionally, agencies and regulators must inform responsible public AI model repositories that prevent dependence on private hyper-scalers.

Digital Sovereignty Beyond Data Localisation

Data localisation appeals to many countries for privacy protection, national security, and economic development reasons. However, strict localisation requirements can frustrate cross-border data flows between regions like Africa and India that would benefit from closer digital integration. Digital sovereignty need not depend on data localisation. Countries must focus on strengthening the governance of AI and DPI through policy and regulation whilst investing in technical capacity building, ensuring regulatory autonomy, and enabling

competitive markets and infrastructure ownership. South-South cooperation offers promise here. Countries can strengthen their sovereignty by sharing systems, coordinating standards, and developing joint approaches to digital governance that reflect their specific needs.

Integrating Digital Trade and Industrial Policy

Looking to existing frameworks for guidance, India and Africa can both look to the lessons and ideals stipulated in the AfCFTA for clarity on how digital trade and cross-border data flows between their two regions can also enhance economic gains when it comes to integrating trade policy, competition policy, and AI industrial policy, so that AI models and DPI developed in the Global South can be interoperable and maximise productivity.

Conclusion

With localised DPI and AI models, supported by contextually relevant datasets and equitable data governance frameworks, Africa and India can both unlock foreign trade, investments, and socio-economic growth that align with the Global South's development imperatives (like employment opportunities, poverty reduction, food security, and digital inclusion).

The path forward requires deliberate policy choices that prioritise data sovereignty, regional cooperation, and human-centred digital transformation; choices that can position both regions as leaders in equitable technological development rather than perpetual consumers of imported solutions. While the challenges span multiple domains, from data governance to AI safety to digital trade, they are unified by a common imperative: the need for Global South-led approaches that reflect local contexts, priorities, and developmental needs.

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Research and Development as a Pathway for Economic Development: Lessons for India and Africa

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Advances in technology are the primary drivers of long-term growth. They lie at the core of the most astonishing improvements in well-being of the past several decades, such as pocket-sized smartphones that connect us to the entire network of human knowledge and modern medicines that have increased life expectancy on every continent.

While the effects of technological progress touch almost everyone, the investments that generate this progress remain extraordinarily concentrated in just a few places. According to recent estimates (National Science Board [NSB], 2022), US, China, and Europe performed 71% of the world's Research and Development (R&D) investment (US\$ 1.7 trillion). By contrast, the entirety of Africa contributed only 1% (US\$ 25 billion) and India just 2% (US\$ 59 billion). What are the consequences of this striking inequality of investment for producing the new science and technology that could improve livelihoods for all of the world's citizens? And what, if anything, should policymakers in the Global South do about it?

One orthodoxy in economic development accepts these inequalities in research as inevitable and suggests that policymakers work around them. Starting the engine of R&D in low- and middle-income countries is costly and challenging, the argument goes, and adopting foreign technologies is an appealing substitute. This perspective is echoed in numerous economic studies and development programmes that aim to identify, and then overcome, the barriers to adopting foreign technology.

On the other hand, a mounting body of evidence in economics suggests that adopting “frontier” foreign technologies does not automatically lead to growth and productivity. The fundamental reason is a phenomenon that economists call *technology mismatch*: a misalignment between the conditions in which technology is created and the conditions in which it is applied. Innovators in rich countries have strong financial incentives to develop technologies for lucrative local applications: for example, new payment systems for global bankers in London or new medicines for modern hospitals in Boston, Massachusetts. In terms of price, complexity, and features, these technologies are carefully crafted for these specific contexts. When transported to a different context, like a local bank or clinic in Africa, these technologies can be vastly less effective.

In research with collaborator Jacob Moscona of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), we quantify how technology mismatch underscores persistent global disparities in one particularly important sector, agriculture (Moscona & Sastry, 2025). Our research starts from the observation that agricultural technologies are inherently tied to ecological characteristics, like climate, soil conditions, and the pest and pathogen environment. Through a comprehensive analysis of global agricultural variety development and patents, we show that technology development is heavily tailored towards the temperate environments of the US and Western Europe. This, in turn, inhibits the global diffusion of these technologies and reduces their global impact. Our quantitative analysis suggests that technology mismatch explains 15%–20% of cross-country differences in agricultural productivity and constrains opportunities for productivity growth to parts of the world that (perhaps incidentally) bear a geographic and ecological resemblance to centres of R&D in the West.

This story is perhaps best illustrated via example. There are thousands of biotechnology patents and many effective modern varieties

of maize that guard against the Western corn rootworm, nicknamed the “Billion Dollar Bug” in the US biotech industry. Underlying these technologies are decades of research into genetically engineering plants that repel this specific foe, but are harmless to other creatures. But there is no comparable technology or body of knowledge to combat the African maize stalk borer, which decimates maize harvests in sub-Saharan Africa but has no significant presence in the West. A more subtle example is the pink bollworm which ravages cotton crops in India and, in the not-so-recent past, was a comparably significant threat in the US, China, and Australia. In the latter three countries, pink bollworms have been effectively controlled through cutting-edge biotechnology, which scientists have continuously tweaked to keep pace with an evolving foe, combined with smart farming practices (Tabashnik & Carrière, 2019).

In India, regulations that limit intellectual property (IP) protection for foreign seed companies have dulled the incentives for global biotech to wage a comparably strong fight against local subpopulations that, as they gain resistance to the available modern varieties in India, have evolved to become more distinct from their cousins elsewhere in the world. The end result is that India’s bollworms are winning the war, to tragic effect for farmers (Pulla, 2018). In sum, while pest threats in the Global South cause incalculable damage to lives and livelihoods, the system of profit incentives keeps the full force of global biotechnology research focused on the “Billion Dollar Bugs” of wealthy markets.

Similar forces are at play in other sectors. In medicine, it has long been recognised that global R&D focuses on the medical conditions of the rich world, while infectious diseases that have an immense burden elsewhere in the world (“neglected tropical diseases”) languish in relative obscurity (Hotez, 2021). In the high-tech world of start-ups, recent research suggests that new, innovative business models only cross borders when they match the socio-economic characteristics of the destination (Lerner et al., 2024), meaning the “unicorns,” of Beijing, Mumbai, or Nairobi are reaching

different places than their counterparts from Silicon Valley, US.

Of course, one might argue the assessment above is overly coloured by a focus on profit-seeking innovation. Could scientific curiosity, and our shared humanity, perhaps still lead us to inclusive growth in the end? For example, collaborative global research, funded by philanthropists, provided the engine of the mid-20th century Green Revolution that helped fight off hunger in many parts of the world, and some of the world’s top vaccine scientists continue to train their full attention on producing low-cost solutions for neglected tropical diseases. But, especially in the current climate, such efforts should not be taken for granted. Public funding for both scientific research and international aid is currently under considerable scrutiny in the US, and similar dynamics may soon play out in other rich economies facing budgetary crises. It is easier than ever to imagine a future in which the current centres of R&D are further isolated from the economic, scientific, and technological needs of most of the planet.

Amidst this landscape, what policy solutions are possible to ensure inclusive growth? Perhaps it is time to question the second major presumption of the prevailing development orthodoxy: that emerging economies cannot participate in frontier scientific research and technology development. Fostering homegrown science and technology offers a compelling path to escape the “technology mismatch trap,” and recent history provides important clues about how this policy challenge can be met in India, Africa, and elsewhere in the Global South.

In recent research with collaborators Ariel Akerman (Inter-American Development Bank), Jacob Moscona (MIT), and Heitor Pellegrina (University of Notre Dame), we conduct a detailed study of an important R&D success story in an emerging economy: the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (*Embrapa*), established in 1973 to “promote, stimulate, coordinate and carry out research

activities, with the objective of producing knowledge and technology for the agricultural development of the country,” (Akerman et al., 2025). From the outset, Embrapa’s goal was original scientific research rather than adapting or tailoring existing foreign technology. In the words of one of its founders, agricultural scientist Dr Eliseu Alves: “[T]he major problem in Brazilian agriculture was not a lack of potential. The potential existed, but there was no science capable of generating technology suited to what we needed.” The solution devised by Alves and others was an enormous national investment in agricultural research. By 2010, the total budget of Embrapa was about US\$ 1.15 billion, comparable to the R&D budget of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) (US\$ 2.3 billion). Two of Embrapa’s scientists have received the World Food Prize, the highest international prize in world agriculture, for their path-breaking scientific work: Edson Lobato, for studying the unique soil chemistry of Brazil’s tropical savanna (*Cerrado*), and Mariangela Hungria, for developing new techniques for bacterial nitrogen fixation that limit the need for fertilisers.

Our analysis uses newly compiled data on the career trajectories of all Brazilian agricultural scientists and the productivity dynamics of different Brazilian regions to quantify Embrapa’s effects and shed light on the underlying mechanisms. We find that Embrapa increased Brazilian agricultural productivity by 110% from its founding in 1973 to the present and had a benefit–cost ratio of 17.

What was the secret to Embrapa’s success? Our analysis highlights two key ingredients, each of which provides potential policy lessons for India, Africa, and other parts of the Global South looking to catalyse growth through R&D.

A first key factor was Embrapa’s decentralised structure, under which research labs were brought to the ecological regions and communities that they were intended to serve rather than concentrated in a few central clusters. Crucially, as we can show in our

empirical analysis, Embrapa was able to sustain highly productive research even in these remote parts of the country: for example, deep in the tropical savanna (the *Cerrado*), a region of mostly unclaimed land and low-productivity ranching as of the 1970s. When researchers were planted in these parts of the country, they produced locally relevant technologies with transformative effects: for example, the soil correction practices and new crop varieties that turned the *Cerrado* into the epicentre of Brazil's soy and cotton machine. Our quantitative analysis suggests that spreading out, rather than concentrating all resources in established urban centres like Rio de Janeiro or São Paulo, more than doubled Embrapa's social benefit. Executing this vision of a decentralised research organisation required a large up-front investment and a clear commitment towards Embrapa as a national priority. Once centres were established in all parts of the country, the existence of a national network provided natural avenues for collaboration and career progression. This experience suggests that broad, inclusive investments can in some cases be *stronger* than the tempting alternative of leaning on existing infrastructure concentrated in a few places.

The second ingredient was Embrapa's commitment to education and skill improvement. At the outset, the organisation's researchers primarily held bachelor's and master's degrees; over time, the share of researchers with a PhD steadily climbed, capping at about 75% today. How did Embrapa achieve this transition, all the while producing international-calibre research? At the beginning, Embrapa invested heavily in education and training within centres, totalling about 20% of its budget. It also collaborated with other arms of the Brazilian government to fund PhD studies at elite global institutions, primarily in the US, for young researchers who committed to returning to Brazil for public service. Over time, as Brazilian research grew in international stature and as the domestic industry grew, it has become possible to staff Embrapa's labs with domestically trained scientists. A lesson is that cutting-edge science

requires significant investment in talent, leaning in early stages on foreign institutions, combined with a strong commitment to creating stable and meaningful careers for those who invest heavily in training.

If the challenge of creating an Embrapa seems daunting for a single country, it is worth considering that future such efforts need be confined within borders. Particularly in Africa, critical agroecological zones spill over across national borders, and the natural configuration of research might require international collaboration. In this spirit, international collaboration between research organisations, in particular through jointly sponsored training, may be particularly welcome. There may also be other, less obvious opportunities for partnerships that cross regions within the Global South. For example, in 2023, Embrapa announced a partnership with the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) to promote new, mutually beneficial research (Pennaneach, 2023). Brazil and Africa are natural partners because of shared *ecology*: Brazil's tropical savanna, which the architects of Embrapa realised had no analogue in the US and Western Europe, are vastly present in sub-Saharan Africa.

The 21st century is guaranteed to bring a host of new challenges: feeding the planet as climate change continues to accelerate, fighting pandemic diseases, and harnessing the power of artificial intelligence for social good, just to name a few. It is, however, *not* a foregone conclusion that the 21st century will bring shared prosperity. In a world of unequal R&D and strong forces towards technology mismatch, the very process of rising to meet humanity's new challenges can *entrench* existing disparities, if technological solutions are designed primarily to help a few places. To actualise a vision of inclusive growth may require a fundamental rethink of this system. And recent history provides important clues about how targeted investments in R&D might contribute to economic development.

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HEALTH AND
HUMAN CAPITAL

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The Power of Knowledge Production and People-to-People Ties in Africa-India Relations

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Introduction

At the second India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS), which took place in Addis Ababa in 2011, “knowledge sharing” was designated as a pillar of India’s Africa policy. By the third edition of IAFS (in 2015), Prime Minister Modi announced 50,000 scholarships for African students to be offered over a 10-year period (Times News Network, 2015). Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, which made international travel more difficult owing to flight disruptions and quarantine restrictions, by 2022, more than 32,000 of these scholarships were already claimed (Waruru, 2022).

Knowledge sharing is ever more critical in today’s age of transformation. Indeed, as African countries face energy transition demands and grapple with shifting geopolitical formations and technological advances such as artificial intelligence and their impact on the economy, they are in the midst of increasing their focus on skills transfers and orienting their industrial policies to expand capacity-building programmes to meet such demands. In this regard, India has accomplished a lot, but there is more to be done.

This brief will focus on “knowledge sharing” insofar as think tank cooperation and knowledge-production joint platforms in Africa-India relations are concerned. The emphasis on knowledge production and enhancing opportunities for academics and policymakers from India and from African

countries to collaborate stems from the belief that these stand to achieve the following vital goals:

- Creating and maintaining a practice of knowledge co-production between Indian and African partners.
- Having the ability to shape the narrative about fields of research important to Indian and African institutions.
- Keeping a bridge between policymakers and academic research for the sake of normalising research-based policy recommendations.

With this in mind, this analysis is structured in three sections. The first one discusses some successful examples that have proven to generate positive perceptions and increased influence of India by Africans. The second section discusses some of the challenges that can be observed in “knowledge-sharing” initiatives in Africa–India relations. The final section deals with some recommendations—both for Indian and African stakeholders.

Successful Examples

Several knowledge-sharing platforms illustrate both the promise of Africa–India cooperation and the importance of institutionalised recurrence. Civil society actors have also had a role in taking this partnership ahead. The India–Africa Strategic Dialogue, launched in 2015 and convened most recently in its fifth edition in March 2025, brings scholars, diplomats, and officials together in New Delhi to set near-term agendas and chart a vision for the India–Africa partnership for the next decade. At the grassroots level, India’s Barefoot College model, which trains women from unelectrified, remote communities to become solar engineers, who return home as “Solar Mamas,” shows how practical skills transfers can travel across multiple African contexts. Built on that success, there are now training centres established across parts of the continent, including Zanzibar.

More examples can be given here, but the point behind highlighting these three is to emphasise the importance of recurrence and predictability in enhancing knowledge-production cooperation. These dialogue- and knowledge-sharing platforms offer the frequency needed to build a muscle memory around research and policy cooperation and around grassroots-driven practical solutions to real-life roadblocks. Frequency in academic exchanges has the advantage of offering scholars unfiltered access to policymakers and giving policymakers a chance to hear concerns, feedback, and questions from academic communities on the continent as well as in India.

One of the biggest challenges to development models or investment projects that are transplanted from emerging economies into African contexts is that sometimes the realities on the ground can be completely different, which leads some projects to be inefficient or disconnected from the lived experiences of Africans. Hearing from African experts coming from various African backgrounds can provide crucial information that can help shape policy in a meaningful way.

The second advantage that recurrence and consistency offer is visibility. The more such events occur, the more they become routinely reported about in the news, which can then raise awareness among the broader public and send signals about the seriousness of holding these events.

Thirdly, where we have seen “soft power” really work and not be tarnished as state-driven propaganda is where civil society organisations thrive. India is host to a vibrant culture and record numbers of civil society organisations that are active on multiple fronts. As such, Africa–India relations stand to benefit from this unique attribute of India by fostering an environment where more grassroots-level exchanges can occur. The impact of such an initiative goes directly to the communities in rural areas that now, in addition to having the skills to build solar electrification systems,

can also earn income through training more women in this skill. Grassroots-level influence can have more effective outreach and results than government-led initiatives.

Bottlenecks and Challenges

Asymmetry in both convening power and funding can often be an obstacle. From the African side, we observe a limited range of initiatives based on the continent that aim to engage youth in India and bring students and learners, for example, from India to various African institutions of learning. Few Indian students who go abroad for long or even short-term study-abroad programmes choose to go to African countries. Such an asymmetry is also symptomatic of soft power challenges facing African universities and institutions in attracting visiting scholars and international students. From the Indian side, when dealing with a continent as diverse and big as Africa, attempting to create diverse and recurrent opportunities for nuanced representations and equitable knowledge-production cooperation can be time- and money-consuming. Beyond tactics such as tapping into alumni networks and reaching out to various funders, launching trilateral collaboration initiatives could open up some creative ways of dealing with limited funding and could propel African actors into a position of equal stakeholders and decision-makers.

A second major challenge lies in the consistency and frequency of knowledge-production forums and exchange seminars. We know that one of China’s greatest advantages in its influence in Africa comes from the consistency and frequency of exchange programmes, scholarship schemes, and seminars held both in Chinese and in various African institutions. Holding events and collaborations on a one-off basis or in an inconsistent pattern can be detrimental to realising the full potential of these collaborations, especially in terms of trust-building and the added value of giving academics access to policymakers, and vice versa, thereby making academic research accessible to policymakers.

A third possible challenge lies in the language used for these collaborations. Again, from what we know about Africa–China relations, due to limited language proficiency, many seminar opportunities and educational exchanges are hindered by the difficulty in communicating. As such, this creates an uneven influence, with most opportunities being provided to Anglophone Africans. This means that investing in training the foreign service in other official languages spoken on the continent can give India a sizeable asset in addition to its already established English-language advantage.

Related to the previous point, we note that in order to navigate some of these linguistic barriers, Beijing has started to mobilise services from diplomats based in Macao while conducting business in Angola, Mozambique, and other Lusophone countries. For India, likewise, mobilising the vast Indian diaspora on the continent can not only provide linguistic access to the major languages but also potentially to indigenous and local languages, which could yield even more efficient results as cultural fluency is sometimes as important as, if not more than, linguistic competence.

Recommendations

Launching a flagship programme like the Yenching Academy or a signature scholarship programme like Erasmus or the Rhodes Scholarship could enhance India’s profile and make its knowledge-sharing diplomacy on the continent more visible. Even though some examples exist such as the India–Africa Maitri Scholarship Scheme (previously the Africa Scholarship Scheme) (High Commission of India, Maputo, Mozambique, 2025), these might not be widely known, and it would be even more memorable if they were consolidated into a larger, more streamlined initiative that could be recognised by young people as desirable and prestigious.

Devising a strong communication strategy to publicise knowledge-sharing events so that

they are better known to the public is also important. Perhaps penning op-eds in major newspapers in various African countries to inform the public about this cooperation or reaching out to the youth on social media can be an option. Another option would be having high-profile diplomats (including current and former ambassadors) endorse such collaborations in op-eds and various other media to lend even more legitimacy to this “knowledge track” and encourage various ministries in India and African countries to reach out to academics and be responsive to their inputs on South–South cooperation and development policy issues.

African universities should invest in launching more centres for Indian studies. Leaning on technological advances, research centres could digitise archives, create datasets, and make documents available and accessible to researchers based on the continent as well as outside of it.

Similarly, Indian and African stakeholders should support launching collaborative centres on common subjects. For instance, the Indian Ocean could both generate interest from various stakeholders and also help boost discursive power around common issues related to climate change, shipping routes, sea lines of communication, maritime security, archaeological heritage, and so on.

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Positioning TVET as the Pipeline for Africa's Economic Transformation, Sustainable Development, and Inclusive Growth

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Introduction

Agenda 2063 is the African Union’s 50-year blueprint for inclusive growth and sustainable development. Its current Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan (STYIP 2024–2033) sets out an ambitious agenda for most of Africa’s countries to have attained middle-income status. This vision will be propelled by accelerated industrialisation, expanded manufacturing capacity, and deeper regional and global trade integration. These structural shifts will demand a workforce equipped with modern technical and vocational skills. This makes Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) not optional but the most pragmatic response to Africa’s current and future labour market needs, linking industrial policy with employment outcomes to drive the continent’s transformation agenda. This imperative is more pressing as many African countries are experiencing a fast-growing youth population. In this regard, vocational education and training can offer meaningful career pathways and help harness the youth bulge.

Figure 1: Linking Growth Sectors with Skills Development

Sector	Key Skills Areas
Agrifood Value Chains	Agro-processing, food technology, logistics, sustainable farming
Renewable Energy & Green Tech	Solar installation, wind maintenance, battery systems, energy management
Digital Technology & Services	ICT, software development, data analytics, cybersecurity
Fintech & Digital Finance	Blockchain, mobile money operations, digital marketing, financial analysis
Manufacturing & Processing	Automation, robotics, quality control, industrial design
Construction & Infrastructure	Masonry, electrical systems, plumbing, green building techniques
Mineral Extraction & Processing	Mining safety, mineral beneficiation, metallurgy, machinery operations
Circular Economy	Recycling management, waste-to-energy, eco-innovation, sustainability auditing

Source: African Union Commission (AUC)/Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2024).

A key success factor for the growth and development of these sectors will be investments in skills development. Africa's youth population is projected to double to over 830 million by 2050. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), there are around 72 million young people (approximately 30% of youth) who are not in employment, education, or training (NEET), while 10–12 million people enter the labour market each year, with only about 3 million landing a formal job with decent wages and potential for upward mobility (Karkee & O'Higgins, 2023). The AUC/OECD (2024) also posits that at least 82% of Africa's workers are employed in informal activities—in self-employment, micro-trading, street vending, domestic work, and small artisanry—predominantly low-paid, low-quality, and low-protection activities. This presents an opportunity to upgrade TVET systems to address the skills mismatch and shortages in formal sectors whilst also building capacities for enterprise development.

Main Issues

A large portion of the skills required to drive the economic aspirations espoused in Agenda 2063 will be artisanal and professional competencies. TVET skills such as electrical, mechanical, welding, construction trades, and agro-processing, in addition to digital and green skills, will be in high demand for the multiple high-growth sectors that will drive the attainment of Africa's ambitious targets. The role of South–South cooperation is pivotal in enhancing cross-regional learning to help strengthen and transform Africa's TVET ecosystems so that they become the pipeline for an adaptable and future-ready workforce.

Challenges Facing Africa's TVET Systems

To achieve this, Africa must overcome low perceptions of vocational training as a career pathway, coupled with poor infrastructure, curricula not aligned with local business demands, low investments,

and low involvement of the business sector as co-investors and collaborators and future employers.

Opportunities to Unlock Innovation

System-wide capacity strengthening will unlock innovations in policy implementation, institutional capacities, and training and delivery methods and approaches for teachers and learners alike. Importantly, training institutions will be better positioned not only to develop and train their students for employment but also to support pathways into self-employment and, in turn, enable them to become innovators that bring solutions to their local communities and society at large. In this way, young people can aspire from an early age to pursue a vocational education as a pathway to employment, purpose, and prosperity.

Lessons from India

The 2024 education report by the World Bank identifies similarities in the context of challenges and opportunities faced by low- to middle-income countries, citing, among others, weak links to labour markets (employers), including high levels of informal employment, weak foundational skills among job entrants, and poor incentives for providers (Levin et al., 2024). To address these challenges, the Government of India has focused on three transformations:

- (1) moving from recognition to excellence;
- (2) shifting from input-focused to results-focused systems;
- (3) using evidence and data for decisions.

Some of the observable and promising good practices emerging from India include the establishment of national initiatives and institutional architecture such as Skill India, which operates as a collaboration among various institutions to provide scale, standard-setting, and a market-facing push (including Sector Skill Councils). These institutions have been set up to help coordinate standards,

certification, and employer engagement. In addition, Sector Skill Councils emphasise industry leadership to help shape and align curricula and assessments to real workplace needs. Furthermore, the expansion of apprenticeships, supported via large online apprenticeship portals, has improved work-based learning pipelines and school-to-work transitions. Through these initiatives, it is becoming evident that large-scale initiatives can be catalytic—central funding and national campaigns create visibility and scale—but they need complementary quality assurance, trainer development, and local employer ties to translate into better jobs.

Africa could benefit from Global South cooperation with India by leveraging India's experience in building large-scale skill development ecosystems, such as Sector Skill Councils and apprenticeship models, to strengthen employer linkages, improve quality assurance, and scale up demand-driven TVET, which is agile and adaptable to fully cover digital, Artificial Intelligence (AI), robotics, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), and other emerging technologies and green competencies. Shared learning on digital platforms, governance reforms, and inclusive skills strategies would help African countries adapt proven practices to their own labour market realities. Also, considering the relatively high levels of informal employment common in both regions, skills development initiatives need to be tailored to equip young people to thrive in both formal and informal economies. South–South cooperation can be a vehicle to harness lessons on the upgrading of TVET systems so that delivery is in alignment not only with formal sectors but also can meet the needs of informal enterprises. Transforming TVET into a competitive and aspirational pathway for youth will create a future-ready workforce capable of driving innovation, entrepreneurship, and sustainable economic growth, as well as ensure inclusive access for youth with low educational attainment.

Lessons Learnt From Kenya–India South–South Exchange

Kenya–India Collaboration in the TVET Sector Under South–South Cooperation

Kenya and India share decades of strong bilateral ties in trade, culture, education, and technology. Within the framework of South–South cooperation, both countries have prioritised TVET as a driver of skills development, industrial growth, and youth employment. Over the years, bilateral cooperation has evolved from a focus on technical institution building to technology transfer and capacity building to reform alignment. As a result, the collaboration has multiplied through partnerships with lead institutions such as the National Skills Development Council (NSDC), the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority (TVETA), and the National Industrial Training Authority (NITA) in curriculum modernisation, training of trainers, and policy harmonisation. Current areas of collaboration focus on modernisation, driving the adoption of digital skilling, green jobs, AI, and renewable energy. Examples include the following:

- **Capacity building and skills transfer:** Exchange programmes, short-term training, and exposure visits in Indian institutions.
- **Technology and curriculum development:** Joint curricula in Information and Communications Technology (ICT), renewable energy, automotive engineering, pharmaceuticals, and agro-processing.
- **Infrastructure support and investment:** Indian-backed Centres of Excellence in engineering, ICT, and applied sciences.
- **Private sector engagement:** Indian companies in Kenya supporting apprenticeships and work-integrated learning.
- **Scholarships and technical assistance:** Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) scholarships and adoption of blended/online training models.

Opportunities for Deepening Cooperation

- Establishment of a Kenya–India TVET Innovation Hub for green jobs, AI, and digital skilling.
- Scaling up joint certification programmes recognised in both countries.
- Development of regional Centres of Excellence in East Africa with Indian support.
- Enhanced collaboration in TVET financing models, including Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) and concessional credit lines.

Reflection

The cooperation with India has strongly influenced Kenya’s training models and systems, with a shift towards competency-based and industry-linked training. Far from replicating India’s model, learning and co-creation through South–South cooperation have fostered innovation through adaptation, resulting in locally relevant, industry-specific regulatory frameworks and sustainable training models. It is evident that leveraging India’s vast skilling expertise and Kenya’s labour market demand can create a model for Africa–Asia collaboration in workforce development and serve as a strategic enabler for inclusive growth, youth empowerment, and industrialisation.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Acknowledging the changing dynamics affecting the continent’s socio-economic prospects, the African Continental TVET Strategy (CTVET) 2025–2034 for Sustainable Development, Social Justice and Employability for All represents a transformative blueprint designed to harness the immense potential of TVET systems across Africa. The Strategy focuses on TVET for All to unlock the potential of youth, women, and disadvantaged communities. The CTVET positions vocational education and training as having the potential

to empower and create transformative career pathways for the many young people aspiring for decent employment and productive economic prospects. By promoting cooperation with Global South countries that share similar socio-economic contexts, Africa can unlock innovative TVET ecosystem building, sustainable practice, and inclusive development pathways, thereby making TVET a central game-changer to achieving the ambitions of Agenda 2063—*For the Africa We Want*.

Drawing from the reflections above, South–South cooperation between Africa and India can serve as a strategic driver of the transformative vision set out in the CTVET and its attendant implementation plan. Some key levers could include the following:

- **Systems change facilitation:** Foster exchange and multi-stakeholder dialogue informed by lessons and evidence-based reforms to model the scaling up of inclusive, relevant skills training which expands access to youth, women, and disadvantaged communities.
- **Model innovation:** Promote twinning arrangements among African TVET centres with Global South partners to share expertise in leadership, management, regulatory reforms, and industry engagement, thereby closing the gaps between training and industry and being responsive to informal enterprise needs, given the huge population of youth employed in the sector.
- **Promote labour market–driven models:** Include TVET interventions that are interdisciplinary and can create higher technical value to better equip young people, thereby creating prospects for mobility and skills upgrades as economic growth opens up opportunities.

- **Unlock barriers related to access, recognition, and relevance:** Create strong TVET pathways by enabling certification ladders and formal recognition to give formally and informally trained individuals improved economic prospects.

The call to transform Africa’s systems demands a reimagining of vocational training as a driver of innovation and sustainability, improving social mobility and the economic development of the continent. With Africa’s youth population projected to double by 2050 (United Nations, n.d.), the time to invest in TVET and make TVET a first choice for African youth is now.

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Towards Global Health Diplomacy and Collaboration: Africa-India

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Introduction

The African region is guided by Agenda 2063, a master plan informed by historical events and current affairs aimed at transforming the continent into a desired state by the year 2063. The goals and priority areas of the master plan are aligned with the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), wherein SDG 3 refers to “health and well-being”. Evidence from various reports shows that Africa exhibits limited progress towards achieving the human development-related SDGs, and that this slow progress is mainly linked to inadequate and inaccurate efforts to address poverty and inequality within Agenda 2030 (which precedes Agenda 2063).

This report unpacks some of the challenges that the African region experiences in advancing positive health status, systems, and outcomes. This situational analysis sheds light on the readiness of the region for partnership with the Asian region, particularly India. India is a key player because of its similarities with many southern African countries, countries, including shared histories as former British colonies, as well as multi-ethnic and culturally diverse populations. South-South cooperation (SSC) and the Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) intergovernmental organisation aim to promote economic and geopolitical integration among member states.

SSC is a viable strategy for collaboration between Africa and India because it allows for countries to pursue their individual and/or shared national development objectives (World Health Organization & World Bank Group, 2014). The advantages of SSC include the fact that countries that share similar characteristics and socio-economic backgrounds can stipulate initiatives that

align with their own objectives. In this regard, Africa and Asia are in a good position to exchange knowledge, skills, and technical know-how on similar health challenges, practices and lessons learnt. This can be done through a variety of commonly shared stakeholders and forums.

Health Systems Strengthening (HSS)

- i. **Weakened Health Systems:** According to the African Union (AU)'s Africa Health Strategy (AHS), addressing the challenge of underperformance in achieving the SDGs requires a focus on strong health systems and scaling up effective and efficient health interventions that improve the living conditions. HSS has been a top priority of the World Health Organization even before the era of COVID-19 (Hafner & Shiffman, 2013) amplified the cracks in dilapidated health systems, with Africa being amongst the weakest in the world (Hutchinson et al., 2019; Seydou, 2021). Health ministries' plans for HSS must be informed by context-based, coordinated responses to health issues that burden the health system (Kickbusch, 2001).
- ii. **Advocacy for Universal Health Coverage (UHC):** The global move towards UHC also supports the notion that the persistent inequalities caused by out-of-pocket financing systems undermine the ability of states to provide equitable health care for those who depend solely on the government for their health care needs (Elebesunu et al., 2021; Ifeagwu et al., 2021). This is the case in many lower- and middle-income countries (LMICs) in Africa and states in India.

HSS should thus be driven and informed by clear and direct plans to also eradicate poverty and inequality since the persistent dominance of poverty undermines the sustainability of results or progress (AU Department of Social Affairs, 2016; Mahlatsi, 2021; Oppong, 2025). Well-run public systems may even facilitate buy-in for the UHC model from the

various stakeholders, especially the private sector, which sees UHC as a threat for profit or revenue. A turnaround strategy for UHC demands a funding strategy that harnesses various streams of financial resources: state funds, external funding, input from the private sector, and domestic health financing mechanisms (Elebesunu et al., 2021).

India, together with Thailand, is among the countries known for its strength in pharmaceutical development and access to essential medicines. On the other hand, African countries are weaker in these areas, depending on countries like China for most of their medicine supplies. In this regard, the SSC Strategic Plan for Health Cooperation allows for African countries to benchmark against India through bodies such as the African Medicines Agency, particularly in harnessing support for local pharmaceutical production and evaluating medical products for priority communicable diseases such as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/AIDS, tuberculosis (TB), diabetes, and hypertension—diseases which are a huge burden for health systems (Bassil et al., 2022).

Having had a long engagement with the globally funded HIV response, both Africa and India are in a good position to propose strong premises upon which to state their own priorities in discussion with the funders. These countries also have many lessons learnt from the funded projects that were implemented in their own countries, some of which were funded by the United States (US) President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). An exchange and sharing of these lessons help both the African region and India to identify low-hanging fruits and common wins, as well as determine priorities in light of the recent funding cuts that have been imposed by the US in March 2025. Moreover, there is an emergence of new development partners from the Global South, and these civil society organisations (CSOs), the private sector, philanthropists, international organisations, and multilateral

development banks who are willing to engage in the health and wellness agenda must be engaged proactively (World Health Organization & World Bank Group, 2014).

As part of the BRICS consortium, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, and India are also in a position to advocate for more health budgeting within BRICS, utilising the platform to extend beyond the usual focus of trade in goods and services and addressing the non-tariff barriers to include a focus on health. Although their contexts may differ, collaboration between these four countries can assist the African countries involved in saving costs and re-channelling funds to other priorities that may bring the UHC goal closer to fruition. Ethiopia is also strategically placed, as the headquarters of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) are in Addis Ababa, making it an opportune location for such discussions. The India, Brazil, and South Africa (IBSA) Fund is another budgetary opportunity for projects that address health beyond the objectives of poverty and hunger eradication.

The Importance of Data

Data is the backbone of all solid plans and gives way to measurable progress and impact. Hence, poor health information management systems (HIMS) compromise the potential success of HSS. Most African countries' health systems have fallen short of adequacy, with many still using paper-based filing systems, which leave room for gaps in service and human error in data capturing. Investment in functioning and reliable routine health information systems (RHIS) gives health ministries a chance to access information that depicts the real picture of the burden that health systems carry. Well-functioning RHIS enables countries to have control of their own health priorities and articulate these so as to channel plans towards the most pertinent programmes (AbouZahr & Boerma, 2005).

India has made strides in its web-based Health Management Information System (HMIS), an area in which countries such as South Africa

are still struggling, having only managed this within the HIV patient management systems called *Tier.net*, a South African electronic patient data system used for HIV and TB monitoring. The Tier.net system of South Africa allows clinicians at the facility level to manage patient clinical outcomes and follow-up care, and report on these quarterly and annually. The database is, however, limited in terms of planning because it is not web-based (Etoori et al., 2020). Health practitioners at the facility-level therefore cannot use the information for planning purposes. However, the national government (of the Republic of South Africa) can make use of this data, largely as a direct result of the focus and funding that have gone into the South African HIV programme.

Establishing proper and functioning health systems entails a few important components: individual patient management data, filing systems, infrastructure, and HIMS.

- i. As it is, many users of the public health system suffer long waits and ill-treatment because their information or files are not found in the filing cabinets.
- ii. This is especially true for clients with more than one health or chronic condition.
- iii. Facilities operate in the absence of information and communication technology (ICT) such as computers. However, India has started the process of moving towards digital health systems and has insight on some of the possible challenges. These reports can be shared in consultative meetings with the South African health ministry.
- iv. Proper health information systems require relevant infrastructure, equipment, and reliable internet connection. This has been a challenge as African countries experience regular power outages, with South Africa still trying to permanently do away with "load-shedding"—a practice used to balance the electricity grid when demand exceeds supply by deliberately shutting off power to certain areas.

- v. Moreover, complete HIMS also require trained human capital, policies, standardised data indicator sets, and standard operating and reporting procedures that are upheld at various levels. India's Integrated Health Information Platform (IHIP), which is used to integrate and analyse health data, may be a great platform against which Africa can benchmark or contrast with though differences in infrastructure might affect implementation and outcomes in different countries.

Conclusion

Countries of the South have more to gain from using data to analyse disease burden and progress towards the attainment of the SDGs. This activity should be done with the aim of balancing efforts to eradicate poverty, inequality, and glaring developmental gaps that undermine sustainable development.

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From Knowledge Sharing to Capacity Building: A Roadmap for India–Africa Educational Cooperation

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India and Africa stand at a pivotal point in redefining their roles in the global knowledge economy. With two of the youngest populations in the world, both regions face urgent yet promising opportunities to equip their youth with future-ready skills. Both share a youthful demographic profile that positions them as potential global skill hubs amid ageing populations in developed countries. Africa's Agenda 2063 emphasises human resource development for inclusive growth, while India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 prioritises skill enhancement and international partnerships. Existing initiatives like the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme and scholarships have trained thousands of African youth and professionals. However, to address emerging industries such as renewable energy, digital economy, and artificial intelligence (AI) in Africa, collaboration must evolve toward targeted, scalable programmes in research and innovation for climate change, agriculture, and healthcare. This policy brief explores how India and Africa can deepen collaboration to build resilient, inclusive, and adaptive education-to-employment pathways. It outlines actionable strategies for deepening collaboration between India and Africa in learning and education for capacity building and human resource development for nurturing a future-ready workforce. Recommendations focus on continental, regional, and bilateral levels, emphasising joint programmes, knowledge exchange, and resource mobilisation to achieve measurable outcomes. By harnessing digital education, vocational training, stronger institutional linkages, and industry-aligned curricula that better meet African needs, India and Africa can foster mutual economic benefits by 2030. India and Africa can co-create scalable, cross-regional models for learning and employment that are relevant to the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

Introduction: The Imperative for Collaboration in the Current Context

In the context of global shifts in demographics, technology, and labour markets, both India and Africa find themselves in a similar position: young, dynamic, and striving to leapfrog into a knowledge-based economy. Africa, home to the world's youngest and fastest-growing population, is projected to have the world's largest workforce by 2040, while India's demographic dividend continues to be a central pillar of its development narrative. Africa and India together represent over 40% of the global population, with median ages of 19 and 29, respectively, contrasting sharply with developed regions like Europe (median age 42) and East Asia (median age 37), where ageing populations are projected to shrink workforce by 2040. Sub-Saharan Africa's working-age population (15–64 years) is expected to grow faster than any other region.

This demographic advantage aligns with Africa's Agenda 2063, which aims for transformed economies through human capital development, and India's NEP 2020, which seeks to build a skilled workforce via vocational integration and global ties. Africa, with over 60% under 25 years of age, however, faces immense pressure to equip its youth with skills. Agenda 2063 and India's NEP 2020 both emphasise holistic, skill-oriented learning pathways that align with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) on quality education.

NEP 2020's emphasis on flexibility, multidisciplinary learning, digital education, and global knowledge exchange mirrors Agenda 2063's aim for harmonised education and skills revolution based on science, technology, and innovation. Both frameworks prioritise youth empowerment, inclusivity, and sustainable development, key to addressing Africa's demographic surge and workforce needs.

Current pathways emphasise capacity building, student exchange programmes, technology-enabled learning, and skill development, laying a foundation for deeper partnerships in the future.

India's Contributions in Capacity Building So Far

- **ITEC Programme:** Since 1964, ITEC has trained over 50,000 African professionals in areas like IT, agriculture, and healthcare. It covers course fees, allowances, and expert deputations.
- **Scholarships:** Through the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), India offers 15,000 scholarships for African students, including the Africa Scholarship Scheme for undergraduate and postgraduate studies in fields like engineering and medicine.
- **Programmes like the Pan-African e-Network (e-Africa)** provide online higher education access. Digital projects like e-VidyaBharati and e-ArogyaBharati, providing online access to Indian educational and medical expertise.
- **Collaboration on curriculum development,** supporting Africa's goal of well-educated citizens as prioritised by Agenda 2063.

African students increasingly choose Indian universities due to affordability, English instruction, and diverse courses, making India a major contributor to Africa's educational advancement.

These initiatives have fostered capacity building, with India establishing vocational and skill development centres and supporting research in shared priorities.

Identifying Key Gaps in Education and Capacity Building

Despite existing initiatives, significant gaps hinder effective collaboration and progress in education and capacity building between India and Africa. These gaps span access, quality,

infrastructure, and alignment with labour markets, exacerbated by resource constraints and systemic inequalities.

First, access to quality education remains uneven. In Sub-Saharan Africa, net enrolment rates in secondary education hover around 40%, compared to India's 75%. Though primary education enrolment is relatively high, with some countries exceeding 90% enrolment rates; however, enrolment rates in secondary education are lower, especially in rural areas as there is a high dropout rate, particularly among girls, due to child labour, early marriages, and gender inequality. The digital divide compounds this: only 40% of Africans have internet access, limiting e-learning opportunities, while India's 800 million internet users enable broader digital education.

Second, capacity building faces challenges in teacher training and institutional development. Africa's teacher-pupil ratio often exceeds 1:40, with many educators lacking specialised skills in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) or digital literacy. India's public education system also grapples with capacity issues, such as overburdened infrastructure, but has advanced in areas like continuous professional development through initiatives like the National Initiative for School Heads' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement (NISHTHA), a flagship programme by India's Ministry of Education. Bilateral exchanges are limited, with only about 40,000 African beneficiaries under India's ITEC programme since inception, far short of the continent's needs.

Third, learning pathways lack relevance to economic demands. Skills mismatches contribute to youth unemployment, with African graduates often unprepared for jobs in emerging sectors like AI and green energy.

Africa's digital economy is projected to reach US\$ 180 billion by 2025, with AI contributing US\$ 1.5 trillion to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2030. Key sectors include: renewable and green economy could create three million

jobs by 2030, needing skills in solar tech and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) analysis; Digital and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector demand AI, coding, and data skills, with 63% of employers citing gaps; in the agriculture and health-tech areas, climate-smart farming and telemedicine require vocational training in biotech and engineering. Currently youth unemployment hovers at 12%–15%, which is exacerbated by mismatched skills; over 80% aspiring to high-skilled roles, but training lags.

Curriculum silos persist, with limited integration of vocational training; for instance, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) enrolment in Africa is below 10%, vs India's 25% target under NEP 2020. Funding gaps are stark: African education budgets average 4%–5% of GDP, insufficient for infrastructure upgrades, while India–Africa joint funding mechanisms remain underdeveloped.

Finally, coordination gaps at multiple levels impede scalability. Continental frameworks like the India–Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) exist but lack robust monitoring, regional disparities (e.g., North vs Sub-Saharan Africa) are overlooked, and bilateral ties often focus on scholarships without long-term institutional linkages. Addressing these requires targeted, multi-level interventions to bridge divides and unlock potential.

Strategies for Collaboration at Continental, Regional, and Bilateral Levels

India–Africa collaboration should operate across continental, regional, and bilateral levels to ensure comprehensive coverage, leveraging frameworks like IAFS and Agenda 2063 for synergy.

At the continental level, partnerships should focus on pan-African initiatives to build scalable systems. India can expand Pan African e-Network Project (PAeNP), launched in

2009, to include AI-driven learning platforms connecting African universities with Indian counterparts for virtual classrooms and joint research. Collaborating with the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD), India could co-develop a Continental Education Strategy emphasising learning pathways, such as harmonised TVET standards aligned with African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

At the regional level, engagement with Regional Economic Communities (RECs) like the Southern African Development Community (SADC) or Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) allows tailored approaches. For instance, India could partner with SADC on regional teacher training hubs, drawing from its experience in establishing Indian Institute of Technology (IIT)-like institutions abroad. Joint funds for digital infrastructure, such as broadband networks in East Africa, would facilitate learning pathways in agribusiness and renewable energy. Regional collaborations could include mobility programmes, enabling credit transfers between Indian and African institutions, fostering cross-border skills recognition.

At the bilateral level, direct government-to-government ties enable customised interventions. India has bilateral agreements with countries like Ethiopia and Kenya for scholarships and institution-building; these should expand to include co-created curricula in emerging fields like cybersecurity. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) with Indian firms like Infosys could establish skill centres in African nations focusing on employability. Bilateral monitoring committees would track progress, ensuring alignment with national priorities like Kenya's Competency-Based Curriculum.

Integrating these levels requires a tri-tiered governance model: a high-level IAFS oversight body, REC liaison offices, and bilateral joint working groups. This multi-layered strategy maximises impact, promoting knowledge transfer, and innovation.

Actionable Recommendations for Policymakers

To translate collaboration into tangible outcomes, governments should adopt the following recommendations, prioritised for implementation within 2–5 years:

1. Investment in education has to be in sync with development that is taking place in education and industry sectors. While much of the focus in India–Africa cooperation has been in the higher education sector, as it is employment oriented, secondary education needs to be given emphasis, particularly the high dropout rates.
2. Expand Scholarship and Exchange Programmes—increase ITEC slots for Africans to 10,000 annually, focusing on women and STEM fields. Expand Industry-Aligned Vocational Training. Increase ITEC slots in emerging fields like AI and renewable, partnering with African tech hubs for hybrid programmes. Establish 10 more vocational centres by 2030, focusing on private sector involvement.
3. Establish reciprocal scholarships for Indian students in African institutions to build mutual understanding. Scale PAeNP scholarships to 20,000, integrating NEP's digital learning with Agenda 2063's innovation goals. Foster joint online courses on climate and health.
4. Develop Joint Digital Learning Platforms: Co-invest in an India–Africa EdTech Hub, integrating platforms like India's Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM) with African systems for open online courses in TVET. Allocate US\$ 500 million jointly for broadband expansion in underserved areas.
5. Strengthen Teacher Capacity Building: Launch bilateral training-of-trainers programmes, sending Indian educators to African RECs for workshops on pedagogy and digital tools. Partner with

AUDA-NEPAD to certify 50,000 teachers continent-wide.

6. Align Curricula with Labour Markets: Form joint task forces at all levels to map skills gaps and co-design learning pathways, incorporating apprenticeships, and micro-credentials. Promote PPPs for sector-specific training in agriculture and healthcare.
7. Strengthen Research Partnerships: Create bilateral funds for innovation in agriculture and healthcare, involving Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and African universities. Promote faculty exchanges and co-developed curricula.

These recommendations are cost-effective, building on existing frameworks, and should involve multi-stakeholder consultations for ownership.

Conclusion

India–Africa collaboration in education and capacity building holds transformative potential for shared prosperity. By addressing gaps through multi-level strategies and actionable steps, policymakers can empower millions, drive economic growth, and strengthen ties.

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Shaping a Sovereign Future for Health Through South-South Solidarity

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Introduction

The world stands at a defining moment for global health. After three decades of progress (World Health Organization [WHO], n.d.-a), from cutting child deaths by more than half, from over 12 million in 1990 to around 5 million in 2021, to expanding maternal care where hundreds of thousands more women now survive childbirth, hard-won gains are now at risk. These gains stem from stronger primary health care (PHC) systems, expanded immunisation coverage, and improved access to essential services for women and children.

Yet, behind these global averages lies an uncomfortable truth that much of this progress is fragile and unevenly distributed. Asia and Africa, the two regions that together account for three-quarters of the world's population (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2017) and bear almost 70% of the global disease burden (World Bank, 2011), continue to face deep inequities that threaten to erode these hard-won gains. In a recent publication, the 2025 Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Global Monitoring Report (World Bank, 2025) outlines that, despite significant progress globally, the African Region still faces the lowest service coverage index score and the highest indicators for financial hardship. Conversely, the most notable progress was made in the Southeast Asian Region across all indicators; however, Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health (RMNCAH) coverage has been in decline, and more people are facing out-of-pocket spending. As aid declines and geopolitical priorities shift, the Global South must forge a new path: one that reclaims control over health systems through financial independence, policy alignment, and people-centred innovation.

A Shifting Landscape for Global Health

Today, geopolitical realignments and sudden reductions in global health financing are reshaping the development landscape and threatening to undo decades of advancement (Think Global Health, 2025). The aspiration to leave no one behind, enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals (UHC2030, n.d.), is giving way to a more fragmented order driven by national interests. Across both continents, governments face rising debt burdens, reduced aid flows, and health systems struggling to manage the dual crises of infectious and non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

Meanwhile, the ever-increasing impacts of climate change on human health, from droughts to floods, are worsening malnutrition, driving displacement, and straining already fragile primary health systems. In this moment of overlapping crises, one question defines the future of the Global South: How do we reclaim health sovereignty?

A partnership between Asia and Africa, anchored in India-Africa collaboration, offers a practical pathway to reimagine how health systems are financed, governed, and sustained. This is not only about cooperation, but also co-creation. Both regions share common challenges, complementary capacities, and converging priorities. India provides a significant learning partner, given the remarkable progress it has made over the years. Since 2000, India has nearly tripled its per capita income (World Bank, n.d.). India has also emerged as an essential global supplier of generic medicines and vaccines; this was clearly illustrated by the role it played in ensuring COVID-19 vaccine access to Africa. This growth has led to significant purchasing power and overall investment in the social sector, including health. Together, India and countries in the African Region can craft a blueprint that transcends aid dependency and builds true health sovereignty rooted in financial and programmatic independence, integrated care, and community-driven systems.

Reclaiming Health Sovereignty in the Global South

Financial Models and Approaches That Enhance Sovereignty

Health sovereignty, the ability of nations to set their own priorities, finance their own systems, and drive their own programmes, is the foundation of long-term resilience. Yet for much of the Global South, this remains aspirational. Many health systems are still shaped by fragmented donor financing and externally driven agendas that, while well-intentioned, often undermine local ownership.

Across low- and middle-income countries, nearly 80% of health expenditure is domestically financed, but almost half of this comes directly from out-of-pocket payments (Think Global Health, 2025). This inequitable model drives millions into poverty each year. In India, rapid private sector expansion has outpaced regulation, making care expensive and exclusionary.

Encouragingly, several countries are redefining what sovereignty looks like in practice. Ghana's National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) (Results for Development Institute, n.d.), Rwanda's community-based insurance model, and India's Ayushman Bharat initiative (Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana [PMJAY], n.d.-a) show that financial sovereignty does not mean rejecting aid but rather determining how external support complements national priorities. These models expand coverage and accountability through domestic financing, policy reform, and strategic partnerships. To advance health sovereignty, countries must pursue two interlinked goals: financial and programmatic sovereignty.

Financial sovereignty demands stronger domestic resource mobilisation. Taxing harmful products such as sugary drinks, alcohol, and tobacco as seen with South Africa's Health Promotion Levy, reduces disease risk while generating predictable health revenue (South African Revenue Service, 2025). Beyond taxation, mechanisms such as blended finance, sovereign health

funds, and development impact bonds can crowd in private capital for public goods while maintaining accountability (Think Global Health, 2025). In India, subsidised insurance mechanisms such as the PMJAY offer expanded cover for inpatient secondary and tertiary care for the most vulnerable populations (PMJAY, n.d.-a).

Programmatic sovereignty requires countries to set their own health agendas, aligned with local realities rather than donor preferences. Aid must support and not substitute national systems. This means embedding external support into national budgets, aligning with national plans, and ensuring domestic oversight.

The Lusaka Agenda and the African Union's New Public Health Order offer strong blueprints, emphasising local leadership, financing, and accountability (Africa CDC, 2023; UN Foundation, 2024). For India and Africa alike, the next phase of reform must focus on debt-for-health swaps, pooled procurement of medicines, and cross-border knowledge exchange. India is harnessing the digital health and data ecosystem through the National eHealth Authority (NeHA) and prioritising open-source digital health solutions, which could be a game changer for programme delivery. Germany's mechanism, recently expanded to Indonesia, demonstrates how bilateral partnerships can convert debt into domestic health investment while preserving sovereignty (The Global Fund, 2024).

Service Delivery Models and Innovations Towards Sovereignty

Confronting the NCD and Mental Health Emergency

While infectious diseases remain a concern, NCDs and mental health challenges now represent the defining threat to health systems in both India and Africa. In sub-Saharan Africa, NCDs such as hypertension, diabetes, and cancer account for up to half of hospital admissions and over a third of deaths (WHO, n.d.-b). In India, they cause two-thirds of total

mortality (NCD Alliance, n.d.). Yet, health systems in both regions were largely built to respond to acute infections, not chronic conditions that require lifelong management, continuity, and integration across services.

The mental health dimension compounds this crisis. Depression and anxiety are rising sharply, particularly among young people, women, and urban populations. Despite the scale of the challenge, mental health care remains grossly underfunded, receiving less than 2% of national health budgets in most countries, and is often stigmatised or neglected (WHO, 2023). The result is a silent epidemic that erodes productivity, deepens poverty, and undermines social resilience.

To reverse this trend, countries must move toward integrated care models that treat NCDs and mental health as inseparable. Embedding mental health screening and counselling within routine NCD programmes and community outreach is essential. Kenya's pilot initiatives linking hypertension screening with mental health support groups, for example, show that integration improves both detection and adherence to care. Similarly, India's District Mental Health Programme, now active in more than 700 districts, demonstrates how decentralised, community-based mental health services can extend access and reduce stigma. In South Africa, the Friendship Bench approach, where trained community counsellors provide evidence-based therapy within primary care, has led to measurable reductions in depression scores and improved treatment outcomes.

Integration must start at the community level. Equipping community health workers (CHWs) with basic diagnostic and mental health screening tools such as glucometers, blood pressure monitors, and short psychosocial questionnaires can "downstage" diagnosis, identifying risks early when interventions are cheaper and more effective (Rodrigues et al., 2022). Embedding NCD and mental health services within national insurance schemes such as India's PMJAY or Ghana's NHIS can protect

families from catastrophic health costs and ensure continuity of care (Blanchet et al., 2012).

Community-Led Primary Health Care: The Foundation of Sovereignty

At the heart of sustainable health sovereignty lies the community. Both India and Africa have rich legacies of community-based PHC, from India's Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) to Africa's network of CHWs. These workers form the backbone of local health systems, trusted by their communities. They deliver preventive services, track disease outbreaks, support medication adherence, and link patients to clinics.

Amref Health Africa's work across 35 countries demonstrates how investing in CHWs transforms systems. Equipped with digital tools, CHWs in Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Kenya now conduct door-to-door screenings for NCDs, deliver vaccines, and provide maternal care to the last mile, building trust and resilience where it matters most (Amref Health Africa, 2025a). Similarly, India's Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres integrate NCDs, maternal health, and mental health services under one roof.

Scaling such models will require long-term investment in CHW training, fair remuneration, and digital innovation. A South-South partnership between India and Africa on ethical Artificial Intelligence (AI) for health, including countering misinformation, could also help shape a globally relevant, equitable digital health ecosystem. Furthermore, mutual exchange around regulatory harmonisation and shared open-source platforms could strengthen collaboration.

A Shared Future for Health Sovereignty: Proposed Policy Recommendations

The destinies of Africa and India are intertwined. Both regions face parallel

transitions that threaten to overwhelm health systems but also present a chance to pioneer a new model of resilience—one grounded in equity, sustainability, and community.

This is the moment to redefine South-South partnership as a coalition of equals, rooted in shared experience and mutual learning. By aligning policy, financing, and people-centred action, the Global South can lead a new health paradigm, one that values dignity over dependency and collaboration over charity. This means focused collaboration and building on the existing strengths of India and Africa founded in mutual partnerships and growth. To further leverage the potential that these collaborations promise, some key considerations for policy would include bilateral agreements that are founded in mutual partnerships and growth and include:

- Multisectoral approach towards increased investments in health where economic growth is tied to domestic health financing.
- Scaling models of integrated care and PHC system interventions that increase efficiency.
- Manufacturing plans that support both regional and national efforts and enable equitable access to global market share. This would include collaboration with regional bodies such as the Africa Medicines Agency (AMA) and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and national agencies in India such as the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO).

In this way, Africa and India can together replace aid dependency and fragmented projects with sovereign systems and curative consumption with health production (Amref Health Africa, 2025b). This is not merely a development strategy but a moral and economic imperative. Building sovereign, community-rooted health systems will unlock human potential, drive inclusive growth, and safeguard the future of generations to come.

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Strengthening South–South Collaboration Between India and Africa

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The potential for deeper collaboration between India and Africa is evident from the historical engagement with each other across numerous areas. Multiple bilateral programmes between the Government of India and the governments of specific countries in the African continent, as well as programmes at the African Union level are a testimony to this. Prime Minister (PM) Modi’s vision for an India–Africa partnership included several areas, with health being a key priority amongst these.

Current engagement in health has included varied strands such as capacity building and training; lines of credit, concessional loans, and grant assistance; and investments and trade. Partnerships within these have taken the form of (1) government-to-government partnerships (grants, lines of credit, medical aid, government-led training and capacity building, and research and development [R&D]); (2) privately led collaborations (several Indian hospitals have presence in African countries, African patients to India in the form of medical tourism, and export of generic medicines by Indian companies); and (3) non-government initiatives (knowledge-sharing platforms).

The emergence of such partnerships is not surprising given the parallels (and admittedly differences as well) across both. Low incomes, a high disease burden, high out-of-pocket expenditures on health, and a fragmented healthcare architecture, characterised by a combination of private and public providers and diverse subnational geographies, are common across the two. Areas of prioritisation, for both India and African countries also overlap, including the strengthening of public goods (in the form of health promotion and disease

prevention), and enhancing the effectiveness of health expenditures through health system reforms, and delivering efficient, accountable, and quality services through both private and public systems.

With some shared challenges and overlapping priorities, the potential for deepening collaboration and knowledge exchange between the two is noteworthy. India's extensive health workforce, strong digital strength, and innovations across the country (in different state contexts and across public and private delivery systems) and Africa's use of telecommunications for health concerns and its regional approach are some examples. Furthermore, Rwanda's national drone delivery programme, for example, has operationalised rapid, on-demand delivery of blood and essential medical supplies to health facilities, showing how targeted logistics innovation can reduce last-mile constraints in public health systems. Similarly, Kenya's M-TIBA (linked to mobile money rails) has been used to structure health savings and payments while generating auditable data trails, illustrating how "mobile-first" financing tools can reduce friction in out-of-pocket contexts and enable more targeted purchasing and subsidies.

More specifically, there are several areas through which the two can deepen collaboration, including government-to-government, business-to-business, and business-to-government approaches. These can very broadly be categorised into knowledge sharing, joint research and other initiatives, and cooperation for a stronger Southern role in global health governance.

- **Institutionalise Knowledge Exchange on "What Works":** Sharing of knowledge, tools, and insights (both technical and process-oriented) on areas such as digital health, health financing, regulation, government stewardship of the private sector, among others, stands out. India has made significant strides for example, in the use of technology for healthcare, and has rich experience with the largest tax-funded

health insurance programme (Ayushman Bharat, Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana [PMJAY]) and the associated mechanisms developed in the form of fraud management processes, e-claim mechanisms, etc. India has also valuable experience in public-private partnerships for disease management such as for tuberculosis (TB), which is of relevance to African countries. African countries have institutionalised the integration of traditional medicine into the mainstream system, akin to India's focus on its own traditional medicines programme. India's PMJAY experience is directly relevant here: the scheme targets approximately 120 million poor and vulnerable families (about 550 million beneficiaries) with ₹5 lakh per family per year in hospitalisation cover, and by January 1, 2025, had authorised 85.9 million hospital admissions worth ₹1.19 lakh crore, creating a large operational base for learning on claims processing, anti-fraud controls, and provider accountability.

- **Deepen Digital Health Collaboration:** India's technological thrust, in the form of the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM), has created a unified digital health ecosystem, leveraging technology to make healthcare more efficient, accessible, and inclusive. The institutional, governance, and technological architecture of this digital thrust offers the potential for exchange between India and African countries. Similarly, Africa has rich experience in digital health platforms and innovations, with its rapid adoption of disruptive digital health technology, such as mobile applications, artificial intelligence for diagnostics, and remote treatment, which can strengthen India's journey in this direction. As of February 6, 2025, 739.8 million Ayushman Bharat Health Accounts (ABHAs) had been created under ABDM, alongside large-scale enrolment of health facilities and professionals, suggesting meaningful progress on the "registry layer" needed for interoperable digital health. Adoption nonetheless varies across subnational contexts: Andhra Pradesh,

for example, reported ABHA creation for 96% of its population (approximately 48.8 million) by December 2025, highlighting how state capacity and ownership shape implementation velocity and data depth.

- **Structure Joint R&D, Manufacturing, and Technology Transfer Where Scale Matters:** The potential for R&D collaborations remains vast. Indian companies are known for research and manufacturing of various vaccines, which can support African countries in creating a strong base of manufacturing across the African continent. R&D on low-cost drugs and diagnostics, as also on clinical research, are areas for joint research and technology transfer agreements.
- **Coordinate for a Stronger Southern Role in Global Health Governance:** Beyond bilateral exchanges and partnerships, India and African countries, through a South-South cooperation strategy, can strengthen the Southern role and voice in global health governance institutions. With geopolitical transitions and an expanding set of actors playing a role in global health governance, current governance institutions have come under question, with global equity in health being undermined. The mobilisation of the African voice on health has been relatively effective through the African Union and the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC). Lessons, not only for India but for other Southern regions such as the South and Southeast Asian regions, would be valuable. An emerging school of thought envisions a reimagining of global health governance, with a stronger voice, representation of, and ownership from the Global South amidst such institutions. India, with Asian countries, and Africa can cooperate to chart a pathway towards such a vision.

In the context of adapting innovations across India and Africa, towards universal health coverage, of particular importance is the diversity across African countries and Indian states. India is one country but the economic, social, political, and governance differences across states offer a richness of contextual insights, that could be of relevance to varied countries. Africa similarly is not a monolith, offering very varied experiences. Thus, contextual synergies between African countries and Indian states increase the possible value of collaborations.

In order to better understand the different contexts and potential synergies it would be important for different stakeholders (governments, industry, think tanks, civil society, and others) to engage and deliberate, as a process of identifying areas of collaboration. This could entail the development of platforms that can enable this through mobilisation of varied actors (public and private) across countries and states in India. This can enable (a) identifying potential cross-country partnerships for adoption of innovations in various areas; (b) supporting India-Africa exchanges in specific areas; and (c) facilitating deeper partnerships in these areas. CSEP has recently initiated an Asia regional collective that brings countries together for knowledge exchange and for the strengthening of an Asia narrative within global discourse. The experience of this and other similar collectives could be instructive. Amid shared health challenges, India and Africa offer complementary strengths and opportunities for joint learning and collaboration, not only for their own countries, but towards global health equity.

The Africa-India Global Dialogue Series

Co-hosted by CSEP and AUDA-NEPAD, *The Africa-India Global Dialogue Series* is a flagship initiative launched in January 2025, convening experts across Africa, India, and beyond, to turn Global South priorities into actionable ideas, informing this report. The monthly, 10-part webinar series was moderated by Veda Vaidyanathan, Pamla Gopaul, and Mahao Leuta Mahao.

Episode 1: India-Africa Relations: Strengthening Strategic Cooperation, January 31, 2025

- Constantino Xavier, Senior Fellow, CSEP
- Denis Foretia, Executive Chairman, Nkafu Policy Institute
- Kossi Toulassi, Head of Industrialisation, Trade, Markets and Economic Analysis, AUDA-NEPAD
- Sushmita Rajwar, Associate Professor, Centre for African Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University

Episode 2: Developing Digital Futures: Tech Solutions & Policies for Inclusive Growth, February 28, 2025

- Karthik Sastry, Assistant Professor, Department of Economics and the School for Public and International Affairs, Princeton University
- Pria Chetty, Executive Director, Research ICT Africa (RIA)

Episode 3: Mining for Tomorrow: Sustainable Approaches to Critical Minerals, March 28, 2025

- Alecia Ndlovu, Senior Lecturer, University of Cape Town
- Christian-Geraud Neema, Africa Editor, China Global South Project
- Kossi Toulassi, Head of Industrialisation, Trade, Markets and Economic Analysis, AUDA-NEPAD
- Veda Vaidyanathan, Associate Fellow, CSEP

Episode 4: Africa and the World: Reimagining Global Partnerships, April 24, 2025

- Amit Jain, Director, NTU-SBF Centre for African Studies, Nanyang Business School
- Eric Olander, Editor-in-Chief, The China-Global South Project
- Lethabo Sithole, Managing Partner, Amila Africa

Episode 5: Building Resilient Health Systems: Global Health Diplomacy in Action, May 30, 2025

- Desta Lakew, Director, Group Partnerships & External Affairs, Amref Health Africa
- Nithya Ramanathan, CEO and Co-Founder, Nexleaf Analytics
- Njabulo Banda, Deputy Dean of Research, IIE's Varsity College
- Sandhya Venkateswaran, Senior Fellow, CSEP

Episode 6: Africa's Energy Leap: Driving Abundance While Tackling Climate Change, June 26, 2025

- Divyam Nagpal, Principal Specialist for Renewable Energy, Sustainable Energy for All
- Grace Chileshe, Energy and Power Sector Data Expert, The Continental Energy Programme in Africa
- Prudence Purity Lihabi, Founder, Youth for Sustainable Energy
- Rahul Tongia, Senior Fellow, CSEP

Episode 7: Power, Roads, Rail: Forging Infrastructure for Connectivity and Growth, July 31, 2025

- Ambuj Chaturvedi, Executive Director, Overseas Infrastructure Alliance
- Ibrah Wahabou, Head of Infrastructure and Transport, AUDA-NEPAD
- Ruchita Beri, Senior Fellow, Vivekananda International Foundation
- Paul Nantulya, Research Associate, Africa Center for Strategic Studies

Episode 8: Together We Grow: Reimagining Agricultural Ecosystems, August 28, 2025

- Brian P. Mulenga, Executive Director, Indaba Agricultural Policy Research Institute
- Clement Adjorlolo, Principal Programme Officer, Agriculture and Rural Transformation, AUDA-NEPAD
- Malancha Chakrabarty, Senior Fellow and Deputy Director (Research), Observer Research Foundation

Episode 9: Telling New Stories: Artists Bridging Worlds, Shaping Narratives, September 25, 2025

- Amil Shivji, Director, Kijiweni Productions
- Sarah Ferdjani, Senior Programme Officer, Tourism and Creative Industry, AUDA-NEPAD
- Sumangala Damodaran, Professor, Development and Music Studies & Director, Gender and Economics, International Development Economics Associates
- Youlendree Appasamy, Writer, Kutti Collective

Episode 10: Shared Histories, Emerging Futures: Africa and India in a Multipolar World, October 30, 2025

- David Rasquinha, Former MD & CEO, EXIM Bank of India
- Fatma Ahmed, Programme Specialist, Regional Programme for Africa, UNDP

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