



India and Africa: Strengthening Economic Ties in the 21st Century

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Abstract

Apart from trade, India has undertaken a number of investment projects in Africa and is unlikely to reverse this policy.¹ However these investments are not limited to the energy sector and span diverse sectors such as pharmaceuticals, IT and telecommunications, and agriculture. India's engagement with Africa is not just led by government institutions. The private sector also plays an important role. Vedanta Resources has invested in copper mines in Zambia, while the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Videsh Limited (OVL) has invested in equity assets in Sudan, Nigeria, and Libya, and the Tata Group in the engineering and information technology sectors. Similarly, an Indian firm such as Bharti has acquired the \$10 billion African assets of telecom giant Zain in 2010. Investments have also been made in a wide array of sectors including agriculture and water management. Kirloskar Brothers and Mahindra also have a presence in several countries. Indian companies have shown willingness to make knowledge transfers in key areas, such as chemicals, with Uganda's state owned, Quality Chemicals and India's Cipla, being just one example of a joint venture that will enable value addition. The increasing number of business delegations travelling to Africa, and business conclaves in India and Africa suggest that India is an important stakeholder in Africa's development.

Energy Resources in Indo–African Relations

Energy cooperation emerged as prominent area of partnership between India and Africa. It is one of the main drivers of the current partnership. At present India is the sixth largest energy consumer in the world and projected to emerge as the fourth largest consumer after the United

¹ Ruchita Beri, "Evolving India- Africa relations-: continuity and change" SAIIA Occasional paper no. 76, February 2011



States, China and Japan (WTO and CII 013). India requires to expand its energy supply to sustain its growth levels in order to attain its developmental goals and especially to eradicate poverty.

Presently India imports 70 % of its oil from Middle East. It is seeking to diversify its energy sources, for which it is investing in energy assets outside. In this context Africa's energy potential is very significant for India. About 24 % of India's crude oil imports are sourced from Africa (including the North African countries) (Fee 2006). The Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Videsh Limited (OVL) has largest overseas investment over 3\$US billion invested in Sudan. It has also acquired stakes in Senegal, Ivory Coast, Libya, Egypt, Nigeria and Gabon. For its energy requirements India is willing to share with Africa its expertise in exploration, distribution, refining, storage and transportation. Indian investment in this sector should directly assist in the building up of a trained and skilled local workforce capable of efficiently running the assets. India is keen for increasing energy import from Africa. But major issue is as how India is going to reciprocate this by policy and acts which is qualitatively different from traditional buyers in Africa. India has proposed to support food security, human resource development, market access and anything that their 'collective' leadership at AU and Regional organization level request and which India can provide.

Economic Diplomacy

The speech of Mrs. Gandhi in NAM Summit at Lusaka for the first time proposed South–South Cooperation through which India was to provide economic and technical assistance among developing nation to counter neo-colonial policies perpetuated by the industrially advanced countries. She maintained that

...a realistic appraisal of our competence reveals the possibility of our working together to reduce our dependence on those who do not respect our sovereignty so that economic leverage for thinly disguised political purpose cannot be used against us. Neo-colonialism has no sympathy with our efforts to achieve self-reliance. It seeks to perpetuate our position of disadvantage. (Ministry of External Affairs 1970, p. 191)

In fact, by early 1970s African countries started questioning the wisdom of dependent development. The increasing need of South–South Cooperation both in India and Africa, for their own separate reasons, got articulated in various conferences (Chhabra 1986). It was in



Lusaka Summit of NAM that both Africans and Indians underlined the need for its implementation. The resolutions on Non-Alignment and Economic Progress were separated from 14 other resolutions of the conference which for the first time dealt with a working programme and preliminary negotiations among non-aligned nations. The host, President Kenneth Kaunda, in his opening address to the conference emphasized the need of economic unity (Africa Research Bulletin 1964). Julius Nyerere of Tanzania pointed to the disappointments among developing countries in developing through the ideas of developed countries. Nyerere stressed that, “for in seeking to overcome our poverty we each inevitably run the risk of being sucked into the orbit of one or other of the Great Powers” and “it is through these questions of trade and aid that our action in world affairs can be influenced, if not be controlled”. He, therefore, asked the Lusaka Conference to consider “the question of how we can strengthen Non-Alignment by economic cooperation” (Ali Shanti 1987a, b). Indian Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi elaborated in details, at the same conference, the potential areas and logic behind South–South cooperation. She assured the conference that “if we decide and, I hope we shall, India will be glad to play her modest part” (Gandhi 1975, pp. 629–97).

Meanwhile, the damaging impact of the India–China war in 1962 on India’s foreign policy was subsequently reversed with India’s victory in Bangladesh war of 1971. Soon thereafter, India went on to consolidate and boost its image. With detonation of its first nuclear device in 1974 at Pokhran (Rajashtan), raised its international image in the matter of defence and global power politics. It was also an event to indicate India’s achievement in scientific and technological areas. With the decisive victory over Pakistan in 1971 India emerged as the ‘primary’ or ‘dominant’ power in the subcontinent. India also signed Indo–Soviet Friendship Treaty at this time without compromising its position as NAM member and successfully utilized it to check possible US alignment with Pakistan in 1971 war. All these developments in South Asia enabled Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to emerge as a popular leader at home who soon commanded a worldwide attention.

Like 1962, the 1971 developments in the subcontinent had a direct bearing on Indo–African relations. Many African leaders viewed that India had emerged as a regional power, which had not only been consistently sympathetic towards their aspirations, but they could turn to it for help and assistance. Indian diplomacy during this period changed its priorities. India’s major concern in Africa was to foster economic cooperation under the umbrella of South–South Cooperation. India utilized all its diplomatic strength at different international forums like

UNO, NAM, 'Group of 77', etc., to promote and develop South–South Cooperation (Vhora and Mathews 1997). Explaining India's new policy shift during 1970s the then Minister of External Affairs Mr. Swaran Singh said in Lok Sabha, on 25 April 1972,

...our heads of the Mission have also been told that they have to keep watch over the economic needs of the countries of their accreditation...they should work like commercial salesman on behalf of the private firm and they should not consider this work as inferior or below their dignity. (Ministry of External Affairs 1972, p. 90)

From the very beginning, India's economic diplomacy, among the developing countries, was largely focused on African countries who responded well to Indian moves in this regard. Thus in the post-Nehru years, and throughout Indira Gandhi years the discussions and deliberation on the global issues—like the world peace, the colonial and racist policies of imperial powers and North–South relations—influenced not only India's Africa policy but also that of the newly independent African countries towards India. India soon gained its importance in NAM again. Since Lusaka Summit to New Delhi Summit (1983), the main running issues in all these summits were: (1) the changing concepts of NAM; (2) support to national liberation struggles which has been already discussed above and (3) the increasing emphasis on South–South economic cooperation.

Priorities of South–South Interactions Under NAM

The question related to the definition and purpose of NAM always surfaced in one way or other. To India, NAM as a movement, equidistant from super power's rivalry, 'was the main source of its power' (Heimsath and Singh 1971, p. 61). In Cairo Summit (1964) 'combative', militant views were prevalent, however, India did not deter from its stand. In Lusaka Summit (1970) most of the militant leaders —Nkrumah from Ghana, Ben Bella from Algeria and Nasser from Egypt—were absent, who had vigorously advocated the case of militant struggles. With Lusaka Summit (1970) the appeal for armed struggle was waning. This Summit emphasized on peaceful and non-violent struggle as a method to unshackle the oppressed Black majority. The issue of defining NAM continued at Algiers Summit (1973). Cuba proposed that NAM being anti-colonial and anti-imperialist, Soviet Union was its natural ally. The controversy over the concept of natural ally became very sharp during Havana Summit (1979). In growing divergent position on the nature of NAM, India along with Nigeria helped the host delegation in preparing the final draft. Though it was a compromised draft, it underlined the importance of the unity of



the movement. It was in New Delhi Summit and Harare Summit that this controversy was completely side-tracked. The main thrust and focus of Non-alignment shifted to and for the cause of economic cooperation. In Delhi Summit, South–South cooperation was the first item in Agenda as well as in the Final Declaration. Since then, South–South Cooperation has been an important dimension of Indo–African relations.

Public Sector and Joint Venture Led Cooperation During Cold War

In 1964, India launched its Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme and Special Commonwealth African Assistance Plan (SCAAP). Under ITEC, India provided assistance under the following major heads—(1) Training fellowships in India (2) Deputation of Indian experts to undertake specific assignments, (3) project aid and (4) external assistance by way of techno-economic studies. The Indian economic initiatives in Africa were multi-pronged and a selective approach of friendship was adopted. During 1960s, India also extended its financial assistance to Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda and Ghana. The reasons behind following economic diplomacy were purely political. However, it itself proved beneficial in the long-run. India’s economic relations with Africa became important part of its bilateral relations. Indian state enterprises, which were driving force of economic cooperation during this period, were given ‘special guidelines’ as to how to contrast their cooperation against multinational companies from the North. This relationship which was attempted to be different from North– South economic linkages gave India an edge over other external players in the continent.

Joint Ventures were also promoted through some reputed private sectors of India. These joint ventures form essential part of India’s economic diplomacy. The adoption of joint ventures as a means of economic cooperation among developing countries by India dates back in 1958, when Birla Brothers initiated the setting up of a textile mill in Ethiopia. Since 1964 Government of India adopted a more positive stance towards joint ventures. In that year Indian industrialists Goodwill Mission that visited African countries reported that, “We must actively participate in setting up joint industrial ventures in as large a measure as possible” (Agarwal 1967, p. 353). By 1985, out of 44 Indian joint ventures in Africa 25 were in operation and 19 under implementation. The National Small Scale Industries Corporation of India had helped many African countries to set up organizations for small scale industries, e.g. Small Scale Industries Development Organization (SIDO) in Mauritius, Small Enterprise and Development



Organization (SEDO) in Zimbabwe, and Small Industries Development Organization (SIDO) in Zambia. Indian joint ventures in Africa had been successful both in production as well as in project construction or implementation. In the production area, most of the firms were from the private sector, whereas in construction and project construction it was public sector enterprises like Rail India Technical and Engineering Services (RITES), Hindustan Machine Tools (HMT) and Metallurgy and Engineering Consultants (MECON).

India-Africa: Economic Ties after 1990s

Following the period of neoliberal reforms of the 1990s, and in the context of pressing concern about strategic questions like energy security, Indian foreign policy became more oriented toward economic concerns, even though it has never jettisoned the more normative principles of its foreign relations. It has allowed the expansion of new economic ties at the same time as the continuation and evolution of more established forms of economic and developmental interaction.

Overall trade between India and Africa more than doubled from \$25 billion in 2006-07 to \$57 billion in 2011 — the official target for 2015 is \$90 billion. This meant that India accounted for a comparatively small proportion of Africa's trade (some 5.8 percent of in 2012), but the rate of growth in India's trade and investment has been such as to be comparable to China's.

India's economic profile in Africa is characterised by a number of aspects that conform to wider patterns. First, trade geography is concentrated: India's leading four African trade partners (Nigeria, South Africa, Angola and Algeria) account for some 68 percent of total trade (Nigeria alone accounted for 29.4 percent in 2011 and South Africa for 21.3 percent). Second, the composition of trade rests on a commodity base. Oil dominates overall trade. Africa supplies some 20 percent of India's fuel imports. African imports from India are dominated by manufactured goods. Africa had a trade surplus with India of some \$14.8 billion in 2011, mostly due to primary commodity exports (making up 91 percent of Africa's exports to India in 2010). Third, Indian investment has increased markedly in recent years, especially in agriculture, infrastructure, telecoms and mining. The majority has been concentrated in India's top ten trading partners. Finally, financial credit mechanisms are the centre of India's economic engagement, underwriting business expansion and funding a plethora of projects. The leading mechanism is Exim Bank credit lines. In May 2011, Indian Prime Minister announced a further



credit of \$5 billion for Africa. Africa is the largest regional recipient of Exim Bank's total line of credits.²

There have been efforts to promote economic links and enhance business connections. In 2008, for example, India launched a Duty Free Tariff Preference scheme. Indian corporations have stepped up operations, with the likes of Tata Motors, Dabur, Marico, Essar Group, Godrej, Bharti Airtel or Kirloskar Brothers increasingly active in targeting Africa as a market or centre of resource extraction, like Vedanta Resources in Zambia's copper industry. Overall, India has been most active in the areas regarded as its comparative advantages such as agriculture, information and communication technology, communications infrastructure and petroleum refining. As the 2011 Summit emphasised, agriculture was one area designated for the expansion of ties, including through the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme. When it comes to the operations of certain Indian companies in this sector, however, it has not all been plain sailing. Notably, in Ethiopia, the likes of Karuturi Agro Products, a subsidiary of Karuturi Global Ltd., along with other Indian companies have attracted criticism for the nature of their work in the Gambella region from without India.³ There has been a small debate about 'agro-imperialism' within India as well,⁴ indicative of emerging questions about the conduct of Indian corporations in Africa.

Energy security has influenced India's moves into the African oil sector. Partly facilitated by the Indian government and its leaders, the strategic importance of this predictably meant that hard commercial considerations have trumped the normative thrust of Indian foreign policy. Debate within India over the risks of the engagement in Sudan by its leading national overseas oil company, ONGC Videsh (OVL), predominantly focused not the morality of investing but on the company's safety. India's petro-partnership with Sudan began in 2003 when OVL bought a 25 percent stake in Sudan's main oil consortium. Further investments made Sudan one of the largest destinations for Indian foreign investment between 1995 and 2005. Following a hugely profitable peace dividend from 2005, Sudan's financial importance for OVL began to

² Export-Import Bank of India, 30th Annual Report 2011-2012, 47. Of a total of \$8,160 million, operative LOCs as of 31 March 2012, Africa accounted for \$4,313 million (and Asia for \$3,458 million). Ethiopia was the top African recipient with \$705 million.

³ The Oakland Institute, *Unheard Voices: The Human Rights Impact of Land Investments on Indigenous Communities in Gambella* (Oakland: Oakland Institute, 2013).

⁴ Ajoy Ashirwad Mahaprashasta, 'Recolonising Africa,' *Frontline*, 23 March, 2012.



decline in 2010-2011 as growing assets in Russia began to produce significant amounts of crude. OVL encountered diminishing returns amidst declining production, insecurity, political uncertainty and then South Sudan's secession.⁵ India has been working hard to nurture its relations with other major oil-producing African countries, including Nigeria, Ghana, Equatorial Guinea or Côte d'Ivoire.

The Indian business engagement in Africa extends significantly beyond energy. More than oil, India imports a range of other commodities such as coal from South Africa. One area where India stands out in its economic relations flows from Africa is its position as the world's largest customer of gold bullion (important in its relations with South Africa), and as the leading processor of diamonds, making up some 86 percent of the world market. In terms of Indian exports to Africa, there are strong links in such sectors as automobiles, with Tata buses, Maruti cars, or Bajaj motorbikes and auto-rickshaws leading operators, and the active pharmaceutical business, as a range of Indian companies look to Africa to increase overseas sales and the government plans to further 'Pharma India' promotion.⁶

India's Development Cooperation

India's development assistance has become more intertwined with commercial considerations. This is partly seen in how either the Ministry of Commerce or Exim Bank has assumed more important roles in overseeing concessional finance agreements with African states. The Ministry of External Affairs had previously been the principal coordinator of Indian development assistance. Development cooperation policy is based on the twin foundations of economic and technical cooperation, with the former focusing on trade, investment and other linkages together with efforts to promote business regulation and opportunity. The latter engages with capacity building and human resource development.

A notable area where India styles itself as different in Africa is human resource development and capacity building support. This has deep roots, notably in generations of Africans educated in India, and in the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme dating to 1964 (its corollary is the Special Commonwealth Assistance for Africa Programme). India's

⁵ Luke Patey, *The New Kings of Crude: China, India and the Global Struggle for Oil in Sudan* (London: Hurst, forthcoming)

⁶ Renu Modi, 'The Role of India's Private Sector in the Health and Agricultural Sectors of Africa' in Fantu Cheru and Cyril Obi eds., *The Rise of China and India in Africa* (London: Zed, 2010), 120-131.



role here is held to be different on account of its approach, including emphasis on local skills development and emphasis on ‘a people centric development approach in Africa’.⁷ Human resource development is seen by India as a distinctive aspect of its engagement, which is competitive also through the advantages it has of a good quality affordable higher education sector and advanced IT. The 2008 India-Africa Summit launched a plethora of new training initiatives. Particularly, India committed to establishing 19 new institutions for capacity building.⁸ How far this agenda advances will rest partly on the extent and manner by which this programme is realised and carried out in future years.

Indian business has also been involved in technology transfer, pursuing approaches held to be applicable like the ‘Triple A’ strategy championed by the Confederation of Indian Industry for affordable, adaptable and appropriate technology. In 2004, India launched the Techno-Economic Approach for Africa-Indian Movement, a special credit facility for eight West African countries, to promote socio-economic development through access to Indian technology. It has also been extending support for cotton sector development in Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali and, since May 2010, Nigeria and Uganda. India’s Pan African E-Network Project, with African Union cooperation, uses Indian IT expertise to link academic institutions and hospitals in 47 African countries with counterparts in India via a satellite network enabling ‘tele-education’ and ‘tele-medicine’.

India’s new development cooperation phase is proceeding amidst the on-going reality of domestic poverty and on the back of moves to reposition India in international development. India ranked 134 (out of 187 countries) in the 2011 UN Human Development Index. This places it in a medium category, but it is still beset by severe poverty. Following government insistence that all donors apart from the main six stop official flows to India in 2003, New Delhi moved to announce debt relief for seven African states. An excess of development initiatives followed. India has also been engaged in efforts to mobilise support at international bodies like the UN for its development cooperation.

⁷ Ajay K Dubey, ‘India-Africa Relations: Historical Connections and Recent Trends’ in Ajay Dubey, ed., *Trends in Indo-African Relations* (New Delhi: Manas Publications, 2010), 37.

⁸ These included the India-Africa Institute for Information Technology, the India-Africa Diamond Institute, the India-Africa Institute of Planning and Administration, the India-Africa Institute of Foreign Trade, 10 Vocational Training Centres and five Human Settlement Centres.



India's development cooperation with Africa follows on from and contributes to New Delhi's efforts to move from a former aid recipient to a more active development actor with a wider international voice. While such ambition may for now exceed the present capability of an already overstretched government machinery, persistent debate about establishing a ministry for international development is indicative of how being more active in developing others, albeit through the mutualism of South-South means, is bound up with India's changing international stature.

India's development cooperation is far more significant than its narrowly defined aid per se.¹⁸ In January 2012, the government of India created a new Development Partnerships Administration to harmonise the work of Indian agencies involved in development assistance under the Ministry of External Affairs and streamline aid spending. While partly indicative of the growing scale of development assistance and future aspirations, this also underlined 'the intent to manage them more effectively and strategically, including in terms of public diplomacy — building India's image around the world'.⁹

Concluding Observations

India is neither a new actor in Africa, nor is it merely 'emerging'. In 2010, the US President Obama drew applause from the Indian parliament not only by declaring that 'India is not simply emerging; India has already emerged' but also by calling it 'a rising global power'.²² The language of India as a 'rising power' or 'emerging actor', folded as these are into the wider meta-narrative of a 'rising Africa' and Asian global economic ascendancy, is convenient. However, this is also unhelpful in conveying a simplistic uni-linear trajectory, eschewing complexity and taking official rhetoric at face value. It is revealing that some in New Delhi oppose such terms, arguing that it creates a psychology of its own for leaders out of touch with gravity. At a more basic level, this entry point neglects the much more deep rooted, interesting and problematic histories beyond a multifaceted and diverse Indian role in the African continent and, concomitantly, the new histories in the making.

While India has avoided direct competition with China in Africa, instead positioning itself to exploit its niche areas, it has been looked to more as a collaborator in African development,

⁹ Emma Mawdsley, *From Recipients to Donors: Emerging Powers and the Changing Development Landscape* (London: Zed Books, 2012), 97.



not only from within but also from outside the continent. Established development agencies from the US, the UK or Japan are increasingly seeking to engage and work with India on African development cooperation, even while adjusting their own development relations with India. Following the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in late 2011 in South Korea, India endorsed the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation and appeared set on a more prominent international role should it choose to pursue such a path and participate more actively. For now, in its Africa relations, it appears to prioritise its own approach and prefer the South-South partnership track.

In previous decades, India's economic relations with Africa never went 'beyond a verbal repetition of [the] South-South cause'.²³ The recent phase of enhanced business relations, expanding investment and more involved government engagement has marked a departure that if continued and sustained looks set to have an increasingly consequential significance. Whereas India's relations with the continent were previously stronger on ideology than on substance, this new underlying change has pointed to the opposite: an increasingly substantive, business-led engagement over which official rhetoric of South-South partnership is overlaid and subject to increasing strain by virtue of the nature of emerging Indian relations with Africa.

India's Africa relations in their current form remain a comparatively recent rejuvenation as an area of deliberate government attention and activity. Having moved to a more important position within India's foreign policy, yet still not a clear priority, Africa has been elevated as a policy concern sometime after Indian business mobilised into more active forms of engaging various opportunities. The government of India was widely being urged to move 'from agreement to action'²⁴ in its Africa relations. This begged the question of how, in the context of the Indian government's capacity constraints and practical limitations on its Africa endeavour, India can not only articulate but also pursue an engagement with Africa that delivers and more effectively realises the substantive principles and commitments upon which it is based.

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