

3. India – Africa Relation – International Relations

India needs to 'connect, build and revive' with Africa. The document highlights the renewed diplomatic focus on revitalizing India–Africa ties, emphasizing the need to “connect, build and revive” the partnership ahead of the next India–Africa Forum Summit (IAFS–IV). The relationship, rooted in civilizational and political solidarity, is pivoting toward co-development and strategic collaboration.

I. Evolution of India–Africa Ties

The India–Africa relationship has evolved through distinct historical phases –

Civilisational Links – Built on centuries-old Indian Ocean trade (gold, spices, textiles), reinforced by Gujarati merchant networks and shared experiences of colonial exploitation.

Political Solidarity (Cold War Era) – India championed African liberation movements through the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), supported anti-apartheid struggles, and coordinated decolonisation diplomacy at the UN.

Post-1990s Phase – Economic reforms shifted policy toward investments, ITEC-driven capacity building, and joint positions in global forums like the WTO, climate negotiations, and UN Security Council reform efforts.

Contemporary Phase (2015–2025) – IAFS–III united all 54 African nations. India opened 17 new embassies. Secured the African Union's permanent membership in the G20 in 2023.

Areas of Cooperation

India's engagement is broad, focusing on economic, developmental, and security aspects.

Trade & Investment

Growing Economic Ties – India–Africa trade crossed \$100 billion (2024–25), making India the continent's 3rd-largest trading partner.

Indian Investments – Cumulative FDI stands at \$75 billion, focusing on telecom, hydrocarbons, pharma, infrastructure, and digital services.

Duty-Free Tariff Preference (DFTP) – India grants 98.2% tariff-free access to 38 African LDCs, boosting African exports in agro-products and textiles.

Development Partnership & Capacity Building

Lines of Credit (LoCs) – India's \$10 billion LoC commitment supports 189 projects in 42 countries (power, irrigation, rail connectivity, etc.).

Digital Education & Tele-Medicine – The e-VBAB platform provides digital classrooms and medical consultations across Africa, reducing gaps in remote regions.

Human Capital – Over 40,000 Africans trained under ITEC, ICCR, and the Pan-African e-Network serve as key policymakers and entrepreneurs.

Co-creation in Higher Education – The IIT-M Zanzibar Campus (2023) is India's first overseas IIT campus, offering advanced programs in Data Science and AI.

Maritime & Security Cooperation

Naval Exercise (AI-KEYME, 2025) – India and nine African navies held this exercise, strengthening interoperability in anti-piracy, humanitarian aid, and Western Indian Ocean maritime security.

Peacekeeping – India remains a major troop contributor to UN missions in Africa (Congo, Sudan, South Sudan), enhancing its credibility as a security partner.

Digital & Strategic Partnership

Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) – African countries are exploring India's DPI architecture (e.g., UPI, Aadhaar-like identity solutions) to modernize payments and service delivery.

Energy & Climate – African nations partner with India under the International Solar Alliance (ISA), while collaborations in green hydrogen, EV ecosystems, and blue economy corridors gain traction.

Challenges In India–Africa Relations

Despite strong foundations, the relationship faces structural and operational hurdles –

Chinese Dominance – China–Africa trade exceeds \$280+ billion; China dominates ports, railways, mining, and defense sectors, overshadowing India's smaller economic footprint.

Slow Execution of Indian Projects – LoC-funded projects suffer delays due to strict tendering norms, capacity constraints in African agencies, and cumbersome bureaucratic processes in India.

Loss of Diplomatic Momentum – No IAFS meeting since 2015 has diluted institutional continuity, pushing Africa toward partners offering faster financing.

Weak Financial Muscle – Most Indian private companies lack the deep capital reserves to match Chinese state-backed mega infrastructure investments.

Political & Security Volatility – Conflicts (Sudan, Sahel insurgencies, Horn of Africa) threaten Indian investments, supply chains, and diaspora security.

Poor Connectivity – Lack of direct shipping lines, air connectivity, and digital corridors elevates **logistical costs** and limits deeper integration.

Way Forward

To revive and institutionalize the partnership, several corrective steps are needed –

Revive IAFS-IV – Institutionalize the summit as a regular event, create a permanent Secretariat, and renew political momentum.

Build an India–Africa Digital Corridor – Jointly develop DPI architecture, including UPI–Afripay linkages, DigiLocker-style systems, and tele-health networks for the Global South.

Co-Invest in Strategic Future Sectors – Partner on green hydrogen (Namibia/Morocco), EV battery minerals (DRC/Zambia), and digital startups/AI innovation (Kenya–Nigeria hubs).

Accelerate LoC Delivery – Establish a single-window LoC monitoring dashboard, fix deadlines, and empower local project execution teams to reduce delays.

Strengthen Maritime Security – Make AI-KEYME annual, enhance Western Indian Ocean coordination, and sign logistics support agreements with key nations (Kenya, Mauritius, Tanzania).

Deepen People-to-People Connect – Double ITEC and ICCR scholarships, expand institutions like IIT-M Zanzibar, and support African students in Indian ecosystems.

Conclusion

India–Africa ties are at a pivotal moment, driven by shared demographics and a shifting global order. A decade after the last major summit, the partnership requires stronger institutions and a commitment to co-created growth to protect the integrity of India's long-term engagement.

Source – [https://epaper.thehindu.com/ccidist-
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