



India Africa Forum Summits: Engagements and Outcomes

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With a stable growth rate in most of the states in Africa, thriving young population, and the middle class at a take-off age, “Africa is the prospective global market”. As African states set their own growth agendas and continue to diversify relations with new actors, the African continent is emerging as a significant global player. This has led to a resonance in India-Africa interactions. India and Africa share a stronger bond with long-standing ancient ties, shared colonial experiences and post-colonial interactions at the international forums. India’s Africa policy guided by Nehru, focused on strengthening political solidarity with the nascent states in the international atmosphere of Cold War, and was guided by the ethos of non-Alignment. In contemporary times, there is a pragmatic policy shift, with emphasis on forging economic alliance by harnessing bilateral relations.

As compared to Anglophone Africa, the intensity of India’s relationship with Franco-Lusophone Africa had been limited. Attempts made in the past decade to strengthen political understanding and expand economic cooperation between India and Franco-Lusophone regions have yielded good results. According to government sources, the current relationship is marked by vibrant dynamism with India’s trade with Africa surging to new heights of over US\$ 70 billion in 2012 and is expected to reach a US\$ 90 billion target by 2015.

The India Africa Forum Summits (IAFS) are catalysts for the reinvigorated bilateral relations. Through this mechanism, India has strategised a three way policy framework to foster ties with Africa, at the continental level through African Union; regional level by the Regional Economic Communities (RECs); and at bilateral level with individual countries, guided by two documents i.e., the Delhi Declaration and the Africa India Framework for Enhanced Cooperation. The summits in 2008 and 2011 were the outcome of a realization for enhancing interaction by boosting business cooperative ventures, human resource and infrastructure development, cultural knowledge, and academia interaction, as important channels.

Guided by these Summits, India announced ambitious plans to establish 100 institutes across the continent in consultation with African Union. The proposed capacity building institutes include, (a) Indian Institute of Foreign Trade in Uganda, (b) India-Africa Diamond Institute in Botswana, (c) India-Africa Institute of Educational Planning and Administration in Burundi and (d) India-Africa Institute of Information Technology under IAFS-I. So far, out of the 100 institutes, only a few are operational such as the Kofi Annan Centre for Excellence at Ghana in the field of ITC, and the India-Africa Institute of Foreign Trade at Kampala to commence in 2014. The launch of Cotton Technical Assistance Programme in Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Malawi, Nigeria and Uganda are a success as the programme trains farmers directly in modern techniques to process cotton. The location for 25 regional institutes has been identified and the balance are in pipeline for African Union to decide and the host countries to approve.

The IAFS-II has taken up a wide range of initiatives to be implemented under various training institutes namely Training and Promotion of Rural Development, Water Resources Sector, Art and Culture, Training in Maritime Sector, Industrial Sector, Training in Oil and Gas, Training in Hydro, Thermal and Power Grid, and Training in Climate Change and Environment. In the Francophone region, India has proposed to set up a Food Process Business Incubation Centre in Mali, Solar Charging Station in Cape Verde, Biomass, and two Women Solar Engineer Vocational Training Centers in Liberia and Senegal to name a few.

Under the Human Resource Development, more than 22,000 scholarships for the next three years are the central attraction. Apart from scholarships in the fields of agriculture, CV Raman fellowship for scientific research, and enhancing the already operational ITEC and ICCR scholarships, new scholarships in shipping, maritime and oceanic engineering, nautical sciences and architecture are provided.

The proposal to set up training institutes for African youth is an innovative idea. Yet the feasibility with regard to requirements, location, maintenance, and manning of these institutes in the long run are important modalities, which require greater planning. The challenge is to identify requirements and accordingly develop an action plan for conducive implementation, aimed at transforming the lives of people. India plans to establish these institutes, as also to equip and maintain for 3-5 years from the date of establishment. Therefore, long-term sustainability is an important factor to be addressed.

There are a few challenges due to procedural delays. The African Union being the deciding authority for the location of each institute, the procedure of identification and administrative hurdles from both sides, has slowed the execution of Summit's goals.

Besides the initiatives for capacity building, one of the encouraging development under IAFS-II is the formation of the India-Africa Business Council (IABC) in March 2012. This is headed by Mr. Sunil Mittal, (Bharti Airtel) and Mr. Alhaji Aliko Dangote (Dangote Group) to further consolidate business ventures. The IABC meeting at Johannesburg in September 2013 focused on building business partnership through technology transfers, joint ventures and identify business prospects between Africa and India.

The Indian Government's announcement of about US\$ 8 billion as Line of Credit to Africa for various sectors in infrastructure development, sustainable growth and agro-processing units is an initiative, which identifies Africa's requirement for self sufficiency. Also, pan Africa e-Network for education and health facilities are important pillars for translating the dream of 'South-South cooperation' into reality. These mechanisms are key features of India-Africa cooperative development partnership.

The IAFS-II has identified the importance of the ‘dialogue process’ to further understand and to review India’s relations with African countries. The Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), a premier think tank on India’s Foreign Policy, is an important Indian stakeholder, to further increase academic interaction with an attempt to analyze Africa’s viewpoint and synergize India-Africa relations. The process began with four international conferences in Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ghana and Senegal, and two domestic conferences in Goa and Manipal. These are designed to increase mutual awareness of the stakeholders involved in the relationship. It is important to fast track India-Africa developmental process, target poverty by harnessing employment generation and focus at securing mutual gains for the peoples on both sides.

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