



Indian Council of World Affairs
Sapru House, Barakhamba Road
New Delhi

ICWA Sponsored
Event Report

on
Roundtable Discussion

on
‘India- Africa Cooperation:
Role of Regional Economic Communities’

at

Sapru House, New Delhi
21 August, 2014

A Round Table Discussion entitled “India-Africa Cooperation: Role of Regional Economic Communities” was organised by ICWA on August 21, 2014 at Sapru House. The discussion, in which representatives of the 6 major Regional Economic Communities (RECs) of Africa shared their views, followed the opening remarks by Ambassador Rajiv K. Bhatia, the Director General of ICWA. Shri Vinay Kumar, Joint Secretary (E&SA), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, also shared his views during the event.

Ambassador Rajiv K. Bhatia in his opening remarks congratulated the leadership of India and the partner countries of Africa in making the India-Africa Forum Summits a huge success. Previous two summits were held in 2008 and 2011. Africa watchers, diplomats, scholars and supporters of Indo-African ties look forward to the 3rd India-Africa Forum Summit, in December 2014. He stated that the India-Africa Summit level dialogue will go a long way in deepening and consolidating the Indo-African partnership.

Ambassador Bhatia highlighted that the RTD would focus on the second tier of the three tiers which exist in terms of India’s engagements with Africa, namely:

1. Pan African;
2. Regional and;
3. Bilateral.

In his address, Shri Vinay Kumar, Joint Secretary (E&SA), Ministry of External Affairs, reiterated the point made by the DG, ICWA and said that India’s cooperation with Africa has taken the shape of a ‘three - level programme’. He said that there are eight RECs that are recognised by the African Union (AU), and India has been engaging them in a comprehensive manner. These include the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), East African Community (EAC), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CENSAD) and the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA).

Briefing about the run-up to the 3rd India – Africa Summit, he said that the officials from African RECs have been in touch with Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) and TERI (The Energy and Resource Institute), in addition to the Ministry of External Affairs of India.

In his address, Dr. Richard Sezibera, Secretary General, EAC, said that as the world is moving fast with globalisation, India and Africa's endeavours for free trade, scientific cooperation, peace and security need further strengthening. Highlighting the importance of India's ties with Africa, he said that India and African countries have centuries-old cultural, economic and historical linkages. He underscored the criticality of the economic and political situation in the world and India and Africa's attempts to promote peace and prosperity.

Dr. Sezibera added that in terms of land mass, together the countries of the African continent are larger than the US, West Europe, India and China put together; and yet in terms of share in the global trade, Africa's share is a miniscule three percent. He emphasised that in order to change the situation, regional economic integration has to be intensified. He identified five macro-level challenges that Africa has been facing: fragmentation of the continent into 54 economies; energy security challenges; infrastructure deficit; skill deficiency, and lack of food security. He argued that sustained focus on the key aspects such as skill development, energy generation, infrastructure building and food security is the key to peace and prosperity in Africa.

Amb (Eng) Mahboub M. Maalim, Executive Secretary, IGAD said that the colonial masters had robbed Africa off its culture, language, and natural resources. Missing 'designated strategic engagement' has further crippled systematic and comprehensive development of Africa. He highlighted the importance of private sector participation, calling it the key to development in Africa. In that regard, strengthening the human resource potential is vital. Facets of multilayered cooperation viz., Track II diplomacy, capacity development programmes, and public private partnership are essential in that context.

Mr. Ibrahim Sani Abani, Acting Secretary General, CEN-SAD said that Africa is a land of opportunities, and active and effective cooperation between India and Africa is important to tap the potential of countries of the continent. He also mentioned the popularity of Indian cuisine and

Bollywood in several African countries. He pointed out that there is a lack of Indian airlines flights to West Africa.

Dr. Kipyego Cheluget, Assistant Secretary General (Programmes), COMESA underlined the need for greater interaction between the Indian and African policymakers and leaders at political and strategic levels. India-Africa partnership holds a lot of potential as the two sides not only have common interests at the international forums but some are India's maritime neighbours too. So far as RECs are concerned, overlapping membership has become a bane for economic integration. Therefore, the ongoing tripartite agreement among EAC, COMESA and SADC, which comprises half of the African Union member countries, to establish a Free Trade Area is extremely important. The agreement, if realized, would pave the way for a stronger Africa. He underscored the importance of national languages and the need for Hindi and Swahili language training in Africa and India respectively. He emphasized the need for India and Africa to find practical ways to collaborate and added that "breaking borders to encourage regional trade and developing infrastructure at regional level is essential." He suggested that India should work towards opening chains of AIIMS and Apollo hospitals in African countries.

Mr. Sidjime Saleh, Director, Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) listed out several challenges that African countries are facing. The list includes: problems relating to peace and security, energy, agriculture, infrastructure, and education. He added that ECCAS and India have committed themselves to a number of goals; turning the commitments into reality will be a 'win-win situation' for the two sides. In that regard, he emphasized on the need for regular visits and exchanges at the top level.

Shri Nagendra K. Saxena, in his remarks, highlighted that as the world population crosses ten billion mark, the world would need more natural resources and arable land, with which Africa is richly endowed. Citing the example of Tanzania, he emphasised that countries of the African continent have to strive towards self reliance and self sufficiency, and partner with countries with that goal in mind. Focussing on the importance of skill development, it was added that it is not just about employability and growth; it is also about the ability to skilfully and effectively manage international negotiations that are critical for the developing nations.

Discussions were also held on issues relating to extremist violence in Africa, nexus between conflict and food security. Participants agreed that intra-African trade needs to be strengthened. Role of World Trade Organisation (WTO) was also highlighted in strengthening RECs. With regard to discussions concerning Washington and Beijing Consensus, it was highlighted that there is an emerging African Consensus, which is propelling the African leaders to set their own national and regional priorities in terms of inviting foreign investments in specific sectors.

In his concluding remarks, Ambassador Rajiv K. Bhatia said that India and African countries have mutual respect and affection and there is mutual desire to deepen cooperation at all levels. It is imperative for them to 'fight disease, ignorance and hunger together.' Realisation of the goals, however, needs careful working. He added that in terms of resource development, India could be Africa's 'best partner', considering the vast pool of skilled human resources India has at its disposal. Ambassador Bhatia closed the session with the statement, "India has emerged as a power centre. It is no longer a third world country. It is guided by enlightened self interest- an idea that works best for both India and its friends including the countries of Africa... the Asian & African Century is not far, if India and Africa work tirelessly for it."

The Report is prepared by Dr. Rahul Mishra, Research Fellow, ICWA.