



President Kovind's Visit to Equatorial Guinea and the Kingdom of eSwatini (Swaziland): An Appraisal

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On his third tour to Africa, India's President Shri Ram Nath Kovind visited the Republic of Equatorial Guinea and the Kingdom of eSwatini (Swaziland) on 7-9 and 9-10 April 2018 respectively. The Indian President was accompanied by a high level delegation that included Minister of State Road Transport, Highways & Shipping, Chemicals & Fertilizers Shri Mansukh L. Mandavia, two members of parliament and senior government officials. Notably, his visit to both the countries was the first ever visit by an Indian Head of the State.

The visit came in the wake of India's rejuvenated policy for Africa. The policy looks for a new higher level of engagement with Africa at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels. The visit was focused on rejuvenating good and strong bilateral relations with its counterparts in Africa. Both, Equatorial Guinea and the Kingdom of eSwatini (Swaziland) have had friendly bilateral relations with India; and these relations are growing steadily with the continuous rise of India and its increasing capability to assist other developing countries. This issue brief attempts to assess India's relations with the two countries.

India-Equatorial Guinea: The Republic of Equatorial Guinea, both before and after its independence in 1968, has had a friendly disposition towards India. Given the distance between the two countries and their difficult economic and political realities, both countries did not interact much in the past, except at multilateral fora and international meetings like the United Nations (UN), NAM, etc. The relationship between the two countries was lying in the realm of principles and ideas, before it actually started taking shape on concrete grounds in the early 2000s. It was the discovery of oil in Equatorial Guinea and its emergence as an oil producing and exporting country in late 1990s and almost simultaneous beginning of India's post-liberalisation growth story that pushed for more official engagements between the two. India's demand for

energy and Equatorial Guinea's economy of oil & gas exports are complementary to each other. Currently, the country is the fourth largest natural gas supplier to India.ⁱ Primary exports from India to the country of about 1.2 million peopleⁱⁱ and a relatively small economy, are food products, cereals, meat, pharmaceuticals, machinery, apparel, etc. The following table (1) reflects trade between the two countries since the Indian financial year 2010-11:

Indian Financial Year	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Indian Exports (US\$ million)	11.42	17.15	21.31	17.24	15.01	17.53	11.24
Indian Imports (US\$ million)	0.12	206.02	524.83	301.82	749.38	457.30	797.85
Total Trade (US\$ million)	11.54	223.17	546.14	319.06	764.39	474.83	809.10

(Table 1: India's Trade with Equatorial Guinea)ⁱⁱⁱ

Towards increasing development cooperation with and assistance to the country, India provided a credit line of US\$15 million for a potable drinking water project in 2005 but, due to the non-submission of proper project plan and documents, it was not used and ultimately cancelled in 2012.^{iv}

In terms of bilateral summit visits/meetings, the President of Equatorial Guinea H.E. Mr. Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo met the Prime Minister of India during the Second Africa-India Forum Summit in Addis Ababa in 2011. This was the first ever high level meeting between the two countries, but outside India. Again, Mr. Mbasogo visited India to attend the Third India-Africa Forum Summit in 2015. Shri M.J. Akbar, Minister of State for External Affairs, went to Equatorial Guinea in August 2017 on the first ever bilateral ministerial visit from the Indian side.

President Kovind's visit to Equatorial Guinea in April 2018 was on the invitation of H.E. Mbasogo. To mark the historical importance of the visit H.E. Mbasogo conferred the medal of the Gran Collar de la Independencia, the highest civilian honour of the country, on the Indian President for his "contribution to the cause of development, security and world peace."^v

Moreover, the two countries signed three agreements reinforcing their mutual commitment to cooperation on various fronts. They signed the memorandum of understanding (MoU) on cooperation in the field of traditional medicinal systems, MoU for cooperation on medicinal plants, and an action plan for cooperation on information and communication technology (ICT).

The Indian President also announced his country's plan for opening an embassy in Malabo. He congratulated Equatorial Guinea for having been elected for its first stint in the United Nations Security Council for 2018-19. Acknowledging the existing trade between the two countries, the Indian President offered his counterpart his country's cooperation and sharing of experience in the fields of agriculture, mining, information technology (IT), geology, refinery, space, cyberspace, etc. Shri Kovind articulated the two countries' commonality of experiences in the history of colonisation and called the new generations to avoid colonisation in any new form. India, according to him, is ready to prove itself a "credible partner" for diversification of the Equatorial Guinea Economy.

As a part of India's commitment to capacity and capability building relevant to development of the country, setting up of an Entrepreneurship Development and Vocational Training Centre and an English Language Training Laboratory in Equatorial Guinea was also announced by the President of India. The country already has five annual slots for training and capacity building under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme as well as four scholarships through the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR). But, getting nominations for these slots from the Government of Equatorial Guinea has been difficult due to language and connectivity issues.^{vi} Similarly, it is also worth noting that the US\$15 million Indian line of credit (LOC) given to the country in 2005 had to be cancelled in 2012 as it was not utilised for lack of preparation of relevant documents, revealing a further need of capacity and capability building in Equatorial Guinea to utilise such LOCs in future.

In this context, President Kovind, emphasising on India's readiness and efforts for capacity building, also promised support and cooperation to achieve the articulated objectives of the Horizon 2020 programme for development undertaken by the Government of Equatorial Guinea. The leadership of both the sides agreed on the need for more and regular interactions and cooperate more on international issues and fora. In fact, the President of Equatorial Guinea expressed his support for an early adoption of India's proposed Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) by the United Nations (UN).

India-eSwatini (Swaziland): The renamed Kingdom of Swaziland as eSwatini has shown goodwill and cooperative approach towards India. The kingdom with a projected population of 1.14 million^{vii} in 2017 is a small landlocked country surrounded by South Africa and Mozambique. In terms of visits, there have been more Swazi official visits to India than vice versa. H.E. Mswati III, the King of eSwatini, first met the Prime Minister of India during the Second Africa-India Forum Summit in Addis Ababa in 2011. He visited India for the first time during the Third IAFS

Meeting in 2015. President Kovind's visit from India in April 2018 was a long overdue visit to the kingdom. And, it set a new benchmark in India-eSwatini (Swaziland) bilateral relations.

Both, the economy and the market of the country are small; and also main reasons for the small amount of trade between the two countries. India exports pearls, precious or semi-precious stones/metals, mineral fuels, bituminous substances, mineral waxes, vehicles, pharmaceutical products, apparel, machinery, etc. The imports from the country are pearls, precious or semi-precious stones, gold, machinery, organic chemicals, medical and similar equipment, electrical machinery etc. The two countries are still looking for ways of enhancing their economic and development cooperation. It is believed that the betterment and skilling of the human resources in the country would lead to more economic activity enhancing economic cooperation between the two countries. Therefore, India is currently focusing on capacity building and skill development in eSwatini (Swaziland) through its various programmes. It has been extending annual scholarships to the officials and students in the country through its well known ITEC programme (20 slots) as well as ICCR scholarships (12 slots).^{viii} The following table (2) outlines the India-eSwatini (Swaziland) trade from the beginning of the current decade:

Indian Financial Year (US\$ million)	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Indian Exports (US\$ million)	86.90	22.91	47.26	22.81	39.94	59.90	39.56
Indian Imports (US\$ million)	109.49	46.01	70.71	124.66	22.03	40.82	39.24
Total Trade	196.39	68.92	117.97	147.47	61.97	100.72	78.80

(Table 2: India's Trade with the Kingdom of eSwatini)^{ix}

The trade pattern between India and Swaziland has been fluctuating as it is based on inconsistent nature of demand and supply of goods and items from the country. The recent two spikes in the Indian imports from eSwatini (Swaziland) in the financial years 2010-11 and 2013-14 were due to different reasons. In 2010-11, there was a sudden surge in import of items with HS Code 27 (mineral fuels, mineral oils and products of their distillation; bituminous substances; mineral waxes) worth US\$42.64 million which came down to zero after that. The spike in 2013-14

was also due to onetime upswing in items imported in the category of HS Code 71 (natural or cultured pearls, precious or semiprecious stones/metals, clad with precious metal and articles thereof, imitated jewellery, coin) worth US\$104.29 million that also came down to less than half of it in the later years. The inconsistent nature of the demand and supply of goods between the two countries and the small size of the Swazi economy and market are the main reasons responsible for the fluctuating and small trade between India and eSwatini (Swaziland). The pattern of exports also is similar to that of the imports, i.e. inconsistent and fluctuating based on the immediate requirements of eSwatini (Swaziland). The 2010-11 surge in Indian exports (US\$86.90) to Swaziland was due to a onetime spike of US\$57.99 million in export of items in the category with HS Code 87 (vehicles other than railway or tramway rolling stock and parts and accessories thereof).

In the area of development cooperation, India has given a couple of lines of credit to the kingdom, which have been utilised in projects as mentioned in table (3). President Kovind in his maiden visit to the country also announced a new US\$10.40 million line of credit for a 'Disaster Recovery Site' for the National Data Centre, eSwatini (Swaziland).

Sl. No.	Financial Year	Credit Amount (US\$ million)	Purpose	Date of signing of LOC by the recipient with Exim Bank	Value of contracts covered under the LOC by Exim Bank (US\$ million)	Disbursements so far by Exim Bank (US\$ million)
1.	2009-10	20.00	Information Technology Park	30.03.2011	20.00	20.00
2.	2011-12	37.90	Agricultural Development and Mechanisation of Agriculture	01.10.2012	36.81	34.29
3.	2017-18	10.40	Disaster Recovery Site for the National Data Centre, eSwatini	Not yet signed	--	--
Total		68.30				

(Table 3: Exim Bank of India Lines of Credit to the Kingdom of eSwatini)^x

King Mswati III conferred the 'Order of the Lion', the highest honour of eSwatini (Swaziland), on the Indian President in recognition and appreciation for his being the first Indian Head of State to visit the Kingdom, and also for Indian contributions in advancing eSwatini's (Swaziland's) development agenda. He was also given the honour of addressing a joint meeting of

the Kingdom's parliament in which President Kovind commended their efforts to transform eSwatini (Swaziland) into a developed country by 2022. He informed the Swazi parliament about India's plan to open an embassy in the Kingdom soon; and also construct their new parliament building. Two new bilateral agreements – an MoU on health sector cooperation and an agreement of visa-exemption for diplomatic/service passport holders – were signed during the visit.

President Kovind inaugurated the Information Technology Centre built with an Indian LOC in the Royal Science & Technology Park (RSTP) of the Kingdom and donated medicines and medical equipment worth US\$3 million to the Swazi Ministry of Health. He announced that India would help the country establish a Centre of Agricultural Excellence and also develop an irrigation system in the Lubuyane area of the Kingdom with a grant assistance of US\$400,000. Also, Smt. Savita Kovind, India's first lady accompanying the President, donated 500 blankets to the Philani Maswati Foundation and the Khulisa Umntfwana Project, two charitable initiatives patronised by the Queen Mother of eSwatini (Swaziland) for helping orphaned children and destitute elderly people.

An Appraisal

The brief above indicates a recent relative upswing in India's relationship with both Equatorial Guinea and eSwatini (Swaziland) in terms of high level and concrete engagements. Facts also reveal that real and concrete relationship between India and these two countries took-off after the launch of the India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) framework that has institutionalised high level meetings from the two sides since 2008.

Although the two countries are small in size, both geographically and economically, they are useful bilateral and multilateral partners. The Indian President, among other things, discussed the need of reforms in the global governance institutions, the urgency of adoption of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) proposed by India at the United Nations, need to focus on renewable energy, address the issue of climate change and global commons. Focusing on engaging small states regarding these issues is especially important from the multilateral perspective.

The primary focus of India in these two countries is capacity and capability building cooperation so that they can cater for their immediate and primary developmental needs like education and agriculture. For India, being one of the leading countries in certain aspects of science and technology, there is tremendous scope of cooperation in this field with the two countries.

Finally, in conclusion, although the visible and concrete engagements between the two countries are relatively recent, the relationships are on the right track and at a decent pace. Facts reaffirm the success of the IAFS framework in enabling India to engage systematically and regularly with the hitherto overlooked or lesser focused countries of Africa. The requirement for India, now, is to ensure the sustainability and continuity of this momentum.

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Disclaimer: The views expressed are that of the Researcher and not of the Council.

Endnotes

ⁱ November 2017 brief on India-Equatorial Guinea Relations, *Ministry of External Affairs*, India.

ⁱⁱ On the basis of World Bank Data for 2016 that estimated Equatorial Guinea's population in 2016 as 1.22 million.

ⁱⁱⁱ Data sourced from *Department of Commerce Databank*, India.

^{iv} November 2017 brief on India-Equatorial Guinea Relations, *Ministry of External Affairs*, India.

^v "India-Equatorial Guinea Joint Statement during the State Visit of President of India to Equatorial Guinea", *Ministry of External Affairs*, April 08, 2018, at <http://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29807/IndiaEquatorial+Guinea+Joint+Statement+during+the+State+Visit+of+President+of+India+to+Equatorial+Guinea>

^{vi} Briefs on India-Equatorial Guinea Relations, *Ministry of External Affairs*, India, in January 2016 & November 2017.

^{vii} See 'Swaziland Population Projections 2007-2030', Table 5B.11, p. 102. Available at <http://www.swazistats.org.sz/index.php/publications/49-swaziland-population-projections-2007-2030>

^{viii} These were the number of slots and scholarships available to Swaziland in the Indian financial year 2015-16.

^{ix} Data sourced from *Department of Commerce Databank*, India.

^x Data Sourced and clubbed together from Exim Bank and India-Equatorial Guinea Joint Statement during the State Visit of President of India to Equatorial Guinea.