

Opening Remarks

by

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at

Roundtable

on

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

at

Sapru House, New Delhi

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Distinguished Leaders and members of Delegations of Regional Economic Communities of Africa, Excellencies, Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), it gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to this interaction on 'India -Africa Cooperation: Role of Regional Economic Communities'. This is the second time that ICWA is hosting the interaction with representatives of Regional Economic Communities of Africa (RECs). The first interaction was held on 9 November 2011. This interactive meeting acquires special salience in the context of the forthcoming third India-Africa Forum Summit. The objective is to understand the current trajectory of India's engagement with the African Economic Regional Communities and generate new ideas to further enhance India-Africa cooperation.



(Ambassador Rajiv K Bhatia, DG, ICWA, in center, with leaders of Regional Economic Communities of Africa (RECs))

2. India and Africa nurture a historically cordial relationship, which has acquired renewed significance with Africa's resurgence in terms of its promising economic prospects, demographic dividend, quest for democracy, pursuit for regional integration and increasing role in the global affairs. These factors coincide with India's emergence as a significant global player, which has demonstrated its strong interest to partner with Africa in its growth.

3. In the recent years there has been a rapid progress in India-Africa relations, especially with the commencement of first India Africa Forum Summit in the year 2008. The historic IAFS process has not only provided an institutional framework of cooperation at three levels - continental, regional and bilateral but also has instilled a new momentum to the relations in a comprehensive scale. It has provided a blueprint for enhancing India's partnership with Africa across a wide spectrum of areas, including economic cooperation, science and technology, social development, economic infrastructure, energy and environment.

4. In this multifaceted and multilayered structure of India-Africa engagement, the Regional Economic Communities of Africa (RECs) play a significant role. Africa has a number of RECs; eight of them are recognized by the African Union. These include the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the 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).

5. These eight RECs, which form an integral part of India-Africa partnership structure, are recognized as key building-blocks for economic integration and key actors in ensuring political stability in their geographical areas in Africa. As the key implementing arms of the AU and development agents in their respective regions, they have enormous potential to promote inter-regional trade and trans-border social and economic cooperation, prevent and resolve violent conflict and respond to new and emerging challenges. They nurture the vision of a future that will ensure economic well-being, improvement of the standards of living and quality of life, freedom and social justice, and peace and security for the people of their respective region. They are striving to achieve these goals through increased regional integration and sustainable development.

6. In its mission the communities have achieved some success. They have shown concrete movement towards harmonization of standards and rules and towards creation of common markets. They are also working towards better movement of goods and services through

enhanced infrastructure development and the development of processing facilities, particularly in agriculture, mining, oil and gas. However, despite the success, they continue to face institutional and resource limitations. Therefore, they are looking for external assistance and partnerships on a mutually acceptable basis.

7. India recognizes the regional dimension of African development, and supports the regional integration process in Africa through various development initiatives. It considers the RECs as regional catalysts and has been focusing on intensifying its relationship with them. Significant progress has been made with regional groupings such as COMESA, SADC, ECOWAS, EAC and IGAD, and similar progress with the others are expected.

8. India has undertaken a range of regional cooperative initiatives under the IAFS process, keeping in view their developmental needs and requirements in the field of capacity building, human resource development, food and agriculture processing. These programmes include feasibility studies, consultation, development of regional capital and stock markets, food and health security, pilot projects on the establishment of micro, small and medium enterprises, hydroelectricity projects, ICT for development and joint projects in expansion of railway networks.

9. India has been working with the RECs closely to implement these programmes, initiated under the framework of India-Africa Forum Summit. With the engagement between India and African RECs gaining pace across diverse fields, the need for a continued dialogue with the RECs has become more pronounced. In this context, we look forward to hearing from the distinguished representatives of African RECs their thoughts on how we can, working together, shape and strengthen our relations on a mutually beneficial basis.

10. I sincerely hope that our dialogue today will foster a deeper understanding of each other's perspective and generate new ideas for enhancing India's cooperation with Africa at all levels.
