

EDITORIAL

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India–Africa Relations: From Shared Heritage to Strategic Partnership

❖ Syllabus Mapping

- ✓ **GS Paper II – International Relations** (India and Africa, Groupings & Agreements, Global South, Effect of Policies & Politics)
- ✓ **GS Paper III – Economy, Science & Technology, Energy Security** (Digital Public Goods, Trade, Climate Cooperation)
- ✓ **Essay Paper** – Global South, Cooperation vs Competition, Strategic Autonomy

Context

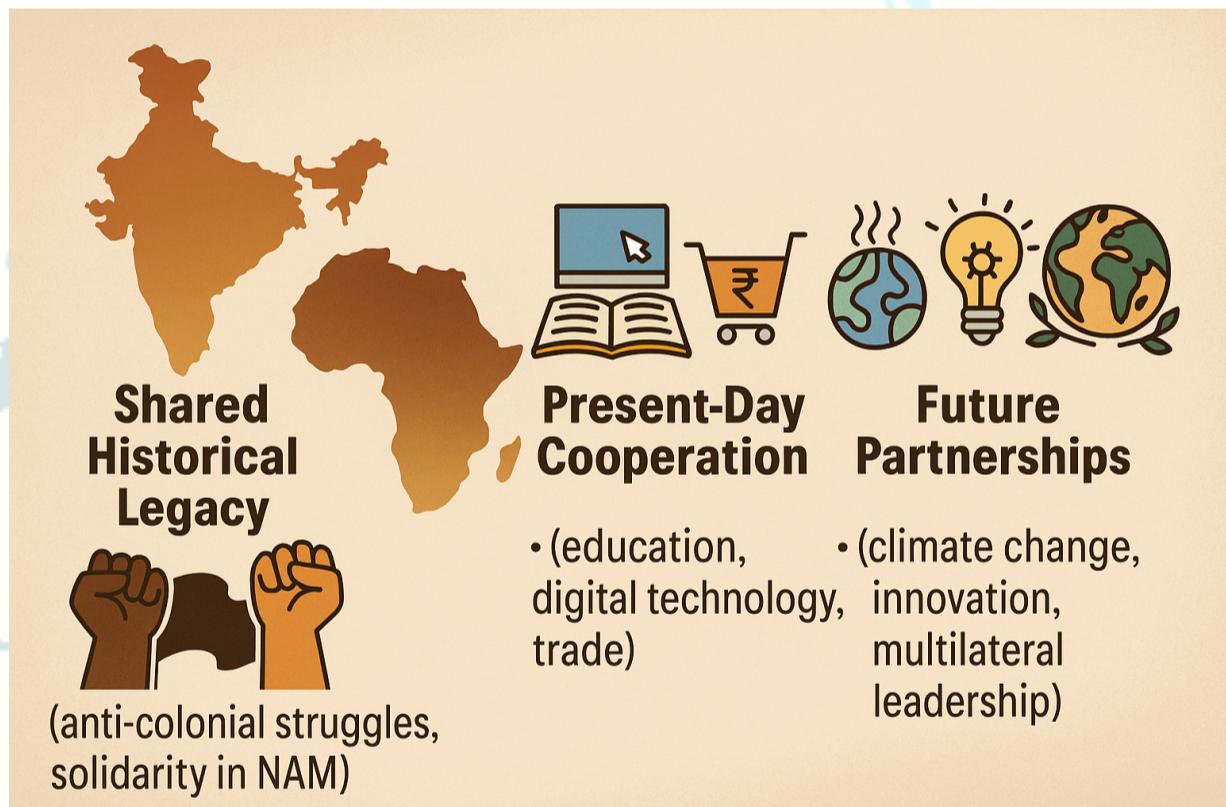
India's recent outreach to Namibia and other African states highlights a shift in India–Africa ties:

- From *paternalistic donor-recipient* model → to *equal partners in growth*.
- From *aid-based* → to *capacity-building, digital, and knowledge-driven collaboration*.

This paradigm focuses on:

1. **Shared historical legacy** (anti-colonial struggles, solidarity in NAM).
2. **Present-day cooperation** (education, digital technology, trade).
3. **Future partnerships** (climate change, innovation, multilateral leadership).

Thus, India emerges as a **credible Global South partner**, distinct from Western aid or China's debt-heavy model.



Historical Foundations

1. India–Africa Forum Summit (IAFS)

- **Launched:** 2008 (New Delhi), later editions in 2011 (Addis Ababa) and 2015 (New Delhi).
- **Scale:** The 2015 edition was the **largest diplomatic gathering in India's history** (more than 40 African heads of state/government).
- **Purpose:** To institutionalize India–Africa dialogue at the highest political level, covering trade, security, health, and cultural linkages.
- **Current Status:** Not held since 2015 → many scholars say it **needs revival** to match China's FOCAC (Forum on China–Africa Cooperation, held every 3 years).
- **Significance:**
 - Elevated India from bilateral deals → **continental outreach**.
 - Showcased India's commitment to the **Global South**.
 - Helped India secure support in **multilateral forums** (UNSC reforms, WTO negotiations).

2. TEAM-9 Initiative (Techno-Economic Approach for Africa–India Movement)

- **Launched:** 2004 by India + 8 West African countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Senegal).
- **Focus:**
 - Extending **lines of credit** for small & medium projects.
 - Tech-based cooperation in **agriculture, transport, rural electrification, and water supply**.
- **Strategic Rationale:**
 - Created a **bridge with Francophone Africa**, where India had weaker presence compared to Anglophone states.

- Counterbalanced **China's early infrastructure push** in Africa.
- **Relevance Today:** Laid foundation for India's **concessional credit & capacity-building diplomacy**.

3. Pan-African e-Network Project

- **Launched:** 2009, in collaboration with the **African Union**.
- **Aim:** Provide **tele-education & tele-medicine** services to African nations using Indian expertise and ISRO satellite connectivity.
- **Achievements:**
 - Connected **48 African countries** with Indian universities and super-specialty hospitals.
 - Lakhs of students attended online classes; thousands received medical consultations.
- **Transition:** The project is now upgraded to the **e-VidyaBharti and e-ArogyaBharti (e-VBAB) Network Project (2018–present)**.
- **Significance:**
 - India's **first large-scale digital diplomacy project**.
 - Precursor to current initiatives like **UPI in Namibia, Digital ID in Togo**.
 - Reinforces India's niche as a provider of **affordable digital public goods**.

💡 Why These Matter

- They **demonstrate continuity**: India's Africa policy is not sudden, but part of a 20-year-long institutional journey.
- They highlight India's **comparative advantage** → education, technology, concessional finance, digital solutions.
- They show India's **strategic gaps** → e.g., IAFS needs revival to compete with China's regular FOCAC summits.
- They connect past experiments (**TEAM-9, e-Network**) with **current flagship diplomacy (UPI, ITEC expansion, Vaccine Maitri)**.

Geo-Strategic Layer in India–Africa Relations

(a) Africa in India's Indo-Pacific Strategy

- Africa is often left out in Indo-Pacific debates, which focus more on the U.S., Japan, ASEAN, and Australia.
- But the **eastern seaboard of Africa (Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Madagascar)** forms the **western boundary of the Indo-Pacific**, making it critical for:
 - **Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs):** Nearly **90% of India's trade by volume** passes through the Indian Ocean, much of it via African maritime chokepoints.
 - **Energy Security:** India imports oil and LNG from **Mozambique, Nigeria, Angola**.
- Including Africa in Indo-Pacific answers shows a **holistic strategic vision** and connects Africa with India's maritime and energy diplomacy.

(b) Africa as part of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region)

- SAGAR, launched by PM Modi in 2015, is India's vision for **Indian Ocean security and cooperation**.
- Africa fits naturally into SAGAR because:
 - East Africa sits on the **Indian Ocean Rim**.
 - Cooperation on **anti-piracy patrols** (off Somalia and Gulf of Aden).
 - Joint maritime security projects with **Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar**.
- This strengthens India's **maritime domain awareness** and aligns with Africa's own **2050 African Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIMS)**.

(c) Counteracting China's "String of Pearls"

- China has expanded its presence in Africa under the **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**:
 - A **military base in Djibouti (2017)**.
 - Heavy investments in ports like Mombasa, Lamu, and Hambantota (linkages to East Africa).
- India's response:
 - Partnering with African navies for **capacity building and training**.
 - Deepening defence ties through the **India–Africa Defence Dialogue (IAFD)**.
 - Exploring **trilateral cooperation** (e.g., India–Japan–Africa) in infrastructure and energy projects.
- This positions Africa as a **strategic partner in balancing China's influence in the Indo-Pacific**.

Drivers of Transformation in India–Africa Relations — Detailed Explanation

1) Civilizational & Emotional Connect

What it means: A shared **anti-colonial legacy**, long history of **Afro-Asian solidarity** (Bandung, NAM), and a people-centric philosophy—“**Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam**”—underpin today's partnership.

How it operates (mechanisms):

- **Symbolic → Strategic:** India's early support to **liberation movements** laid moral capital; today it converts to trust for **developmental partnerships** (education, health, digital).
- **Global standing:** India's push for the **African Union's entry into G20 (2023)** signals recognition of Africa as a **system-shaping actor**, not merely a beneficiary.
- **Diaspora bridges:** A ~3 million Indian diaspora in East & Southern Africa fosters **cultural familiarity**, trade networks, and **soft power**.

2) Educational & Capacity Building

What it means: Moving from aid to **capability expansion**—echoing **Amartya Sen's** idea that development is about **expanding capabilities**.

How it operates:

- **ITEC:** Fully-funded **short/medium-term training** in administration, ICT, finance, public policy, health; ~40,000 Africans trained in the last decade → creates **alumni networks** who “speak India.”
- **Institutions in Africa:** IIT Zanzibar as a **flagship** for high-end STEM capacity.
- **Student flows:** 23,000+ African students in India → future elite linkages, **norm diffusion** (democratic institutions, rule of law, digital governance).

Why it matters:

- **Low-cost, high-trust** instrument vis-à-vis big-ticket loans.
- **Human capital multiplier** → long-term growth and state capacity.

3) Digital Public Goods & Tech Partnership

What it means: Export of **open-source digital rails** (interoperable, low-cost) that avoid vendor lock-in—distinct from **Western Big Tech** or **China's Digital Silk Road** model.

How it operates:

- **Payments:** UPI in Namibia → **financial inclusion**, faster government transfers, MSME empowerment.
- **Identity & Governance:** Aadhaar-like ID (Togo, 2021) via open-source MOSIP → foundational ID for **e-KYC, subsidies, pensions**, voter rolls.
- **Health & Telemedicine:** Hub-and-spoke **tele-consults**, remote diagnostics, and training; reduces **distance + cost** barriers.

4) Trade & Economic Integration

What it means: From commodity trade to **value-chains, standards, and services**.

How it operates:

- **Trade levels:** ~USD 103 bn (last decade trend; crossed USD 100 bn in 2024–25). Still below **China's USD 250+ bn**, indicating **expansion headroom**.
- **DFTP:** Duty-Free Tariff Preference scheme gives **LDCs** tariff-free access—**jobs + export diversification** in Africa.
- **Private sector anchors:**
 - **Bharti Airtel** (telecom in 14 African countries) → digital backbone
 - **ONGC Videsh** (Sudan, Mozambique) → **energy security**
 - **Tata & Mahindra** (auto assembly) → **manufacturing ecosystems**
- **AfCFTA (2021):** The **world's largest FTA**; offers India a single regulatory market to plug into **regional value chains** (pharma, agro-processing, IT/ITES, logistics, healthcare).

5) Strategic & Security Cooperation

What it means: From **UN peacekeeping** to **maritime security** and **defence capacity-building**.

How it operates:

- **UN Peacekeeping:** ~5,000 Indian personnel in African missions → **credibility in conflict management**.
- **Maritime security:** Djibouti Code of Conduct & Jeddah Amendment (Western Indian Ocean) → counter-piracy, information sharing, **SAGAR** alignment.
- **Training & Dialogues:** India–Africa Defence Dialogue (IAFD, 2022); training in NDA/IMA/DSSC; exercises (e.g., **IBSAMAR** with South Africa & Brazil) build **interoperability**.
- **Geo-strategy:** East African littoral is the **western rim of Indo-Pacific**; **SLOCs, chokepoints, energy lines** all pass here.

6) Health & Humanitarian Diplomacy

What it means: **Low-cost, high-impact** assistance that creates **trust and legitimacy**.

How it operates:

- **Vaccine Maitri:** Timely **Covid-19 vaccine** support → strengthens **health sovereignty** in partner countries.
- **Oncology & Equipment:** Bhabhatron (radiotherapy), ambulances, field equipment → **lifesaving capacity** in underserved regions.
- **Pharma ecosystem:** Affordable **generics** (HIV/AIDS, TB, NCDs) → India called “**Pharmacy of the Global South**.”

Why it matters:

- Health is **non-contentious, people-facing**, and showcases **equitable development**.
- Underpins **SDG-3** (Good Health & Well-being) and **soft power**.

🚀 Pathways to Strengthen India–Africa Ties

1. Financial & Debt Diplomacy

- Champion **multilateral debt relief** → counter China's opaque loans.
- Push **transparent concessional credit**.

2. Expand ITEC & Skill Partnerships

- Training in **AI, green energy, agriculture**.
- Promote "*Made in Africa with Indian support*".

3. Deepen Digital Partnerships

- Digital literacy, internet infrastructure, **affordable fintech (UPI)**.
- Mentor **African tech startups**.

4. Agri-Tech Cooperation

- Precision farming, drones, AI for soil & crop analysis.
- India's **Green Revolution lessons** can support Africa's food security.

5. Climate & Energy Transition

- Invest in **solar, hydro, wind projects**.
- Climate adaptation → water, agriculture, disaster resilience.

6. Strategic Industrial Zones

- Promote **SEZs & industrial parks** linked with AfCFTA.
- Support Africa's **value chain integration**.

7. Flexible & Region-Specific Diplomacy

- Tailor engagement: Horn of Africa ≠ West Africa.
- Build **sub-regional strategic partnerships**.

8. Champion Africa in Global Forums

- UNSC reforms, WTO reform, climate negotiations.
- Global South solidarity → **India as Africa's amplifier**.

🔑 Conclusion

India's Africa policy is evolving from **transactional diplomacy** to a **trust-based developmental partnership**. As PM Modi stressed: "*India's priority is not Africa; India's priority is Africans.*"

If India can **combine values with viability** (heritage + investment + technology + multilateral advocacy), it will secure a **leadership role in the Global South** and counterbalance external players.



UPSC Mains Practice Question

1. *India's engagement with Africa has shifted from a donor-driven model to a partnership-driven approach. Critically analyse this transformation, highlighting opportunities and challenges in India–Africa relations.*
2. *Discuss the strategic importance of Africa in India's Indo-Pacific and SAGAR vision. How does it help counterbalance extra-regional influences like China's "String of Pearls"? (250 words)*
3. *India played a key role in Africa's inclusion in the G20. Critically evaluate how this move strengthens India's leadership in the Global South. (250 words)*
4. *Evaluate the role of Indian private sector players such as Airtel, ONGC Videsh, Tata, and Mahindra in shaping India–Africa economic integration. How can AfCFTA be leveraged for mutual benefit? (250 words)*

Comparative Perspective		
Player	Approach in Africa	Implications
China	Infrastructure loans, ports, military base (Djibouti)	Fast but debt-heavy
West	Conditional aid, migration control	Seen as paternalistic
India	Digital public goods, education, skill-building	Sustainable, but needs scale



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5. *Digital public goods like UPI and Aadhaar-like ID projects are being exported to Africa. How do these initiatives strengthen South-South cooperation while ensuring digital sovereignty? (250 words)*
6. *Examine the scope of India-Africa defence cooperation in the backdrop of peacekeeping, maritime security, and counter-terrorism in the Sahel region. (250 words)*
7. *"The foundation of India-Africa relations lies in shared history and civilizational values." Discuss how diaspora, Gandhian legacy, and people-to-people connect act as cultural diplomacy tools in contemporary times. (250 words)*



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