

Evolution and importance of India-Africa relations; from Gandhi to Modi

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By Ambassador Anil Trigunayat

Historically, India has been part of Africa's movement of self-rule, growth story, development and capacity building which are marked by mutual respect and affection at the grass-roots level. Indian diaspora has been instrumental in the developmental journey of the continent over four-to-five generations. No wonder Africa gifted Mahatma Gandhi back to India transforming him from a mere Barrister to an intrepid fighter against injustice and colonialism. Even though India has stood for the cause of Africa since her own independence and even before that its concerted engagement has been somewhat ad hoc in nature until she decided to institutionalise the cooperation through India-Africa Forum Summits (IAFS) when specific targets were established and a SWOT analysis was done. Last IAFS witnessed the largest ever participation from 54 countries at the highest level when major announcements for Lines of Credits, Grants and Capacity Building programmes were announced. Moreover PM Modi

during his address at the Ugandan Parliament clearly outlined India's Africa Policy, probably first time articulated in public space.

Prime Minister Modi, while speaking at the Parliament in Kampala in July 2018 outlined his Africa vision through his ten guiding principles which include: Africa is among top priorities for India and momentum of cooperation will be sustained through regular exchanges; development partnership as per African priorities; preferential access to Indian markets for African products; assist in harnessing digital revolution in Africa; improve Africa's agriculture potential; fight climate change together; work together to keep oceans and maritime lanes free for all; Africa instead of becoming a theatre of competition should become nursery for its youth; and aspire and work together for a just, representative, democratic global order. These are ideal, achievable and collaborative policies that dictate a paradigm shift compared to other big powers who are trying to get into the 'Gold Rush' for exploitation by way of neo-colonialist approaches. India, meanwhile, has invested in the continent following a sharing and caring "model of cooperation... free of conditions," prioritizing the needs of the African stakeholders.

At the 3rd India-Africa Forum Summit 2015, Modi announced a \$10 billion lines of credit along with a \$100 million Indian Development Fund and \$ 500 million in Grants apart from 50,000 scholarships that marked a new approach to engagement with African countries. This not only helped finance the projects in African countries but have also contributed to capacity-building and education. India has been awarding thousands of scholarships to African nations under the ITEC and ICCR programme India is the fifth-biggest investor in Africa, with investments over the past 20 years amounting to \$54 billion, creating jobs for Africans.

India is keen to develop its energy security partnership with Africa for mutual benefit and convert it from a buyer seller to strategic partnership as a real stake holder. Africa's hydrocarbon sector has the capacity to feed Indian industrial growth. 2014 crude import statistics reflect that India sourced 16 percent of its consumption (32 million metric tonnes, or MMT) from Africa: 3 MMT from North Africa and 29 MMT from West Africa, primarily from Nigeria and Angola. Also for the first time India's oil imports from Africa rose from 15.5% to almost 26% in 2015. Hence hydrocarbons both in upstream and downstream have significant expansion possibilities.

Although India in the past, due to lack of a concerted strategic approach, lost out on key economic opportunities while ceding space to other countries including China. The fact that large number of African leaders and ordinary Africans were trained or educated in India created this positive critical mass that provides an exceptional edge to us. But goodwill for India , its benevolent outlook and non-intrusive benign outreach as well as like Japan, US, France, South Korea, Germany, UAE and Saudi Arabia wanting to find a collaborative trilateral partnership for and in Africa. There is a greater realisation that Africa for the Africans first rather than a mere resource target for the world would be the key for the re-entry into the African orbit.

In November 2016, Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Indian Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) in their Summit Joint Statement reiterated the resolve of the two countries to "develop industrial corridors and industrial network for the growth of Asia and Africa." India-Japan economic engagement with Africa, under the aegis of Asia Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), is based on the premise that the direction of global economic activities is indeed shifting towards the Indo-Pacific region. India and Japan as two democracies and robust economies are committed to evolve a sound economic, political and security architecture of the Indo-Pacific region. Collaboration in Africa and ASEAN are a natural corollary. The vision document clearly highlights that the AAGC would be based on four pillars: "enhancing capacity and skills; quality infrastructure and institutional connectivity; development and cooperation projects; and people-to-people partnership."

Japan has been an active cooperation partner in Africa with its huge ODA assistance programme under the ambit of its resource and economic diplomacy that seeks to enhance export infrastructure to meet over \$100 billion financing deficit for infrastructure projects. Japan aims to promote high quality infrastructure partnerships and facilitate expansion to emerging markets. It has already pledged \$30billion under this initiative Japan is also expected to invest about US\$200 bn in the proposed growth corridor. Japan's Africa outreach is done primarily through the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD). Tokyo is concentrating on three important areas, in keeping with the focus of Japanese private sectors, including the Northern corridor, Nacala corridor, and the growth area in West Africa; resources and energy development; and urban development. Japanese

investment will be affected partially by using the Enhanced Private Sector Assistance for Africa (EPSA), conceived in partnership with the AfDB. In addition, Japan under the Abe Initiative 2.0 aims to nurture “manufacturing and maintenance service personnel” and capacity building of technical personnel in the field of natural resource development. Japan is pushing for collaboration with India to decrease market risks in Africa. Combining India’s experience and understanding of the African market with Japan’s technological know-how and funding capabilities will lead to a “win-win scenario” in realizing Africa’s growth opportunities. Besides the economic rationale, Japan also aims to garner African nations’ support for its ambitions at the UN Security Council which are broadly true of India. But this marriage has to address the work and efficient delivery ethics and ethos too to tango.

As for the US while making for a case for greater engagement by US in Africa and referring to recent Atlantic Dialogues in Morocco, Brookings in a commentary mentioned “ China, the European Union, and other new players such as India are rapidly expanding economic and trade ties in Africa. The continent is likely to present \$5.6 trillion of market opportunities and a population of over 1.52 billion consumers by 2025. Despite the growing potential, the United States has regressed. For example, after a few years of progress, U.S. exports in goods to Africa decreased from about \$38.09 billion in 2014 to \$22.28 billion in 2016. China exports to Africa have increased substantially, from \$13.22 billion in 2005 to \$103.19 billion in 2015.”

On December 13, 2018, US decided on a new Africa policy to counter Chinese influence and “predatory“ practices of China and Russia which is part of its global strategy. Speaking at the Heritage Foundation John Bolton, National security Adviser, accused it of wielding “bribes, opaque agreements, and the strategic use of debt to hold states in Africa captive to Beijing’s wishes and demands.” Russia, he alleged, is also “seeking to increase its influence in the region through corrupt economic dealings.”

Russia and China’s efforts across the African continent, he said, “stunt” its economic growth. Under the new “Prosper Africa” strategy, Bolton said, “we will encourage African leaders to choose high-quality, transparent, inclusive, and sustainable foreign investment projects, including those from the United States’ US is one of the largest provider of developmental assistance and to Africa it gave US\$ 8.7 billion in 2017. This is another matter that President Trump was quoted referring to Africa as a “shithole”.

Germany with its “ Compact for Africa in G20 and EU ” and Pro Africa Marshal Plan, France with its colonial linkages and cultural assimilation especially in West and Central Africa and Saudi Arabia and UAE with their “ Food Security” projects and proximity to Eastern and Horn of Africa apart from their engagements in North Africa are other major players that would like to ride the Indian train through mutually beneficial trilateral partnerships.

China has been in the lead for their Africa outreach for decades through their “Chequebook Diplomacy” with consequent debt traps for their local clients. But they still secured the early bird advantage which despite the realisation by Africans and prevailing good will for India will be difficult to dislodge They do have deep pockets and it was only in September last year at their China -Africa Forum (FOCAC) that the Chinese announced US\$ 60 billion in financial assistance aid to Africa while waiving loans to some countries. They are also learning in the process that the Chinese engagement being treated as “ne-colonialism’ has its downside and some examples of high indebtedness and discomfort of the host countries attested to the fact leading to some correction in their “ Cheque book diplomacy “approach which also has its limitations. No wonder many African leaders confronted the criticism of China accusing the west of their own misdeeds in the Continent for centuries . Whichever way one looks at it China is there to stay.

India will have to learn to coexist and collaborate even with the Chinese in Wuhan Spirit, if necessary, so that a win-win outcome for all stakeholders especially Africans remains the hallmark of their presence and partnership. China may not be averse to it. It could perhaps be on the pattern of Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) where Japan is a major partner and the US and others are exploring to collaborate even though this ambitious project as of now has much less to boast about but several projects in the pipeline in G2G and G2B matrix. The world recognises the African continent as that a mounting consumer base, and generally positive economic projections influence interest in the continent as a business and investment target .Likewise the trilateral multilateral partnerships have to be synched in such a way that “Africa First” remains the core lever of engagement for India’s goodwill and national interests to reap the benefits we seek to garner.

While India still continues to enjoy the affection and confidence of the Africans in general we shall have to mitigate race related incidents and violence against African students in India which in turn can damage that goodwill in no time at the grass root level. Likewise the trilateral or multilateral Perception Management has to be a priority at all times as we raise the stakes in the continent.

(The author is Distinguished Fellow Vivekananda International Foundation. Views expressed are his own.)

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