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## Reinvigorating India-Africa Partnership: Some Critical Gaps

**Arunoday Bajpai**

### Abstract

India and Africa, the two sister continents share historical and cultural ties. Their common colonial experience, common struggle against subjugation initiated by Gandhi and their common aspirations to realize their destinies provided an ideological framework to forge their multidimensional partnership during cold war period. In the post-cold war globalized world, this partnership is faced with new challenges and opportunities. India needs a proactive involvement to address these challenges to consolidate this partnership.

**Keywords:** Ideological Framework; Globalization; Development Partnership; India-Africa Forum Summit; Strategic Cooperation.

India and Africa are not new to each other. Both are ancient civilizations and share historical and cultural ties. They are also known as sister continents, as their land masses were together and same millions of years ago, a point highlighted on the logo of the third India-Africa Summit, held in October, 2015 in Delhi. The Summit also highlighted India's eagerness to 'reinvigorate' its partnership with Africa, as the slogan encircling the logo reads: 'Reinvigorated Partnership- Shared Vision'. The Summit also provides an opportunity to review the evolution, status and the future prospects and challenges this partnership faces. Broadly, India's engagement with Africa in modern times may be divided into three periods: First period, from 19th century till India's independence; Second period from 1947 till the end of cold war; and third period since the end of cold war till present times.

In more recent history, India's engagement with Africa started during the peak of colonialism in 19th century. Their common colonial subjugation linked their fate as they were subjected to same kind of exploitation and racial discrimination. British rulers brought, in later half of the 19th century, many

Indians as indentured labourers to work in plantation and mines in their African colonies, particularly in South Africa. It is to address the grievances of Indian migrants that Gandhi went to South Africa in 1893, but his sojourn in South Africa gradually led to the evolution of peaceful resistance (*Satyagraha*) to address all forms of exploitation and discrimination. Voluntary migration to Africa continued also continued during this period. Though Gandhi came back to India in 1915, Indian Diaspora remained there and became an integral part of African societies. At present, Indian Diaspora is estimated to be 2.6 million strong and is spread to 46 countries, largely in South Africa, Mauritius, Reunion Island, Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique. Indian Diaspora in Africa constitutes 12 percent of total Indian Diaspora in world (Bhatia: 2015). Cultural bonds were strengthened by the reverse migration too. The Siddhis living in Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat States of India. It is these historical and cultural linkages, shared aspirations and values that form the backbone of contemporary multidimensional partnership between India and Africa. But more than that, this common colonial destiny laid the foundation of

ideological similarities between the people of two sides, which was more visible in the next phase of their engagement.

As India became independent in 1947, the external dimensions of her policy of Non-Alignment like emphasis on equality of nations, respect for their territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-interference in the internal affairs of nations, peace and disarmament, and opposition to colonialism, racialism and apartheid, evoked excitement and hope among the people of African countries. It was not mere a coincidence that a large number of African countries joined the Non Align Movement (NAM) and subscribed to its ideological framework. India was the first country to raise the issue of apartheid in the UN in 1946 itself. NAM led by India extended moral and material support to anti-colonial movements across Africa and raised the issue related to Africa's cause at different international fora. These efforts succeeded as 14 African countries got independence from colonial rule in 1960. Consistent efforts of India, NAM and international community led to the end of apartheid in South Africa in 1990. Among other things, the formation of AFRICA Fund in 1986 at the behest of India proved instrumental in this respect.

As newly independent countries of Africa moved on the path of development, India and NAM came forward to strengthen their development efforts by many initiatives like formation of UNCTAD and G-77 in 1964, demand for effective implementation of the NIEO (New International Economic Order, adopted by UNGA in 1974), devising mechanism of South-South Cooperation (SSC) and so on. At bilateral level, India set up mechanism of ITEC (Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation) in as early as 1964 to strengthen development partnership with other developing countries. The ITEC programme, which completed 50 years in 2014, focuses on customized human resource development in partner countries. The developing countries of Asia and Africa are the major beneficiaries of this Indian initiative. ITEC programme is essentially bilateral in nature, but in recent years it has conceived programmes in regional and sub-regional contexts in association with, among others, Economic Commission for Africa, G-77, G-15, Afro-Asian Rural Development Organization, African Union and Pan African Parliament (ITEC: 2015). These and similar other efforts made by India bilaterally as well as within the framework of NAM and other international mechanisms proved useful to develop and strengthen Indo-Africa partnership over the years. India too benefitted from this partnership and received valuable support from African countries

at different levels and times. India has been elected as the non-permanent member of the Security Council for seven times with the active support of African countries, which form the single largest group within the United Nations. The hallmark of this partnership was that it consolidated within the overarching framework of ideological symmetry and shared political vision between India and African societies. This framework continued uninterrupted till the end of cold war.

The third phase of Indo-Africa partnership begins with the end of cold war and the intensification of market based globalization process. India's domestic as well as external policies were subjected to many trials and tribulations in view of these global shifts. India initiated liberal economic reforms to integrate with the globalized economy and toned up her foreign policy to adjust with the new global realities. India had to pay attention to other areas to shore up her relations with the US, European countries and countries of South-East Asia. Thus, in 1990s India could not pay due attention to her engagement with Africa due to her own readjustments. And India had to bear the cost as she was defeated in General Assembly in her bid for non-permanent member of Security Council because African countries supported Japan in place of India. India got only 40 votes against Japan's 142 votes.

Africa too could not initially cope with the new forces of globalization but gradually it asserted to take the ownership of its development process. The launching of NEPAD in 2001 as a collective development mechanism for Africa's development is a case in point. It is an African Union strategic framework for pan-African socio-economic development in the twenty-first century. NEPAD is a radically new intervention, spearheaded by African leaders, to address critical challenges facing the continent: poverty, development and Africa's marginalization internationally. NEPAD is premised on taking full control of their development agenda by African countries and, to work more closely and effectively with international partners (NEPAD: 2015). The Organization of African Unity (AOU), a pan-African organization formed in 1963 to promote unity among African countries, was overhauled in 1999 vide the Sirte Declaration calling for the establishment of an African Union, with a view, inter alia, to accelerate the process of integration in the continent to enable it to play its rightful role in the global economy while addressing multifaceted social, economic and political problems compounded, by certain negative aspects of globalization. African Union has drawn up an ambitious long term development plan for Africa,

known as 'Agenda 2063' (AU: 2015). These initiatives demonstrate Africa's desire to command and guide its own destiny and other external partners may join in within this framework. Further, African countries have shown rising growth trends in recent years. In recent years African countries have experienced high economic growth. The average annual growth rate of real output has increased from 2.6 percent in 1990-2000 to 5.3 percent in the period 2000-2010. Further according to the World Bank, seven out of ten fastest growing economies in the world during the last decade are from Africa. Despite Africa's relatively strong economic performance in the recent years many countries in the continent are grappling with several developmental challenges such as high unemployment, lack of economic transformation, food insecurity, environmental degradation etc (Beri: 2015). These challenges provide scope for India to strengthen her partnership with Africa in coming decades.

#### *New Initiatives*

It should be noted that both Africa and India responded to the forces of globalization in different ways at different times, which weakened the ideological symmetry underlying their multidimensional partnership during cold war era. This ideological symmetry was the unique characteristics of Indo- African engagement. The post-cold war Indo-African engagement appears to be merely a commercial and economic enterprise without any ideological high ground. It was in this background that India talks of '*reinvigorating*' its partnership with Africa. It began with the establishment of IBSA Dialogue Forum (India, Brazil, South Africa) in 2003, among other things, as a forum of south-south cooperation, spearheaded by three regional economic powers from three continents. The IBSA Fund facility, a development mechanism of IBSA, launched a few poverty alleviation and development programmes in some developing countries such as Guinea Bissau, Cape Verde, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Cambodia, Haiti, Palestine, LAO PDR, Vietnam and South Sudan. The programmes range from promoting food security, health, education, capacity building, rural electrification and others. The initial enthusiasm has petered out and its actors are now focused on other groupings like BRICS. The challenges IBSA faces are: non-prioritization of IBSA trans-governmental relations by some members, persisting tariff barriers, and intra-bureaucratic limitations and overlapping activities with the BRICS (Soule-Kohndou: 2013). The visible lack of cooperation continues to haunt IBSA (IDSA: 2008).

India launched the Techno-Economic Approach for Africa-India Movement' or TEAM-9 initiative in 2004 in eight West African countries: Burkina Faso, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Mali and Senegal. The scheme aims to improve food security, healthcare, telecommunications and transport through a technological focus. At the TEAM-9 launch in 2004, India offered \$500 million in lines of credit to member countries. India has initiated the Pan-African e-Network in Africa in 2004. This scheme aims to provide facilities for tele-education, tele-medicine and network video conferencing for heads of state in all 53 members of the AU. The network will also connect 53 learning centers, ten super-specialty hospitals (three of which are in India), 53 other hospitals and five universities (two in India). Similarly, India is also developing close relations with eight regional economic communities (RECs) of Africa like Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa COMESA); East African Community (EAC); Southern African Development Community (SADC); The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); Community of Sahel Saharan States (CENSAD) and others.

#### *India-Africa Forum Summit*

In order to give boost to Indo-African partnership with high level consultation, India initiated the mechanism of India-Africa Forum Summit in 2008. This is a multi lateral summit where Heads of government of invited African countries and Indian leaders review the progress of ongoing programmes of the partnership and decide new measures for strengthening India-Africa partnership. China has already launched such summit ahead of India. The first India Africa Forum Summit was held in April, 2008 in New Delhi. Fourteen African Heads of State and the leaders of all eight African regional groupings participated in this Summit. It adopted the Africa-India Framework for Cooperation, which contained measures to elevate the scope of Indian-African partnership for mutual benefit. The Second India-Africa Forum Summit was held in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia on 24-25 May, 2011. The Summit advanced the process of high level consultation initiated in 2008 for developing mutually beneficial partnership between India and Africa. The Second Summit adopted two documents: 'Addis Ababa Declaration' and the 'Africa-India Framework for Enhanced Cooperation.'

The Third India-Africa Forum Summit was held in Delhi on 26-29 Oct, 2015 where for the first time delegations from all the 54 countries participated

and 42 of them were represented by their heads of government/state. The focus of the summit was the ideological and cultural similarities, common aspirations and strengthening multifaceted development partnership. It was projected as a celebration of the close partnership between Africa and India, acknowledgement of their shared history, their struggle against colonialism and apartheid and jointly accepting the challenges of the globalizing world. It underlined that a vibrant India and a resurgent Africa have a vision of a close partnership, anchored in the principles of equality, mutual respect and mutual benefit (IAFS: 2015).

The main theme of this summit was “*Partners in Progress: Towards a Dynamic and Transformative Development Agenda*.” The four day Summit produced the two documents: The Delhi Declaration 2015 and Indian-Africa Framework for strategic Cooperation. The Delhi Declaration 2015, a 34 point document, highlights the common concerns and shared vision of Africa and India as well as some common areas of cooperation. The ten areas identified for cooperation are: *economic, industry and trade, agriculture, energy, Blue Economy (Ocean resources economy), infrastructure development, education and skill development, health, peace and security, and cooperation in multilateral for*. Underlying the fact that India and Africa together constitute one-third of humanity, the Delhi Declaration demanded collective actions to put in place more democratic global governance structures; a supportive international environment to address the special development needs of African countries under newly adopted Sustainable Development Agenda; inclusion of principle of ‘common but differentiated responsibility’ in global climate change agenda; a comprehensive reform of the United Nations system, including Security Council, to make it more regionally representative, democratic, accountable and effective. However, the Declaration fell short of India’s desire to get open and outright support of African countries for its claim as permanent member of Security Council (MEA: 2015). Indian-Africa Framework for Strategic Cooperation, a long 52 point document, is the modified version of the similar frameworks of the cooperation adopted at the earlier Summits, with the difference that the cooperation has been raised to the ‘Strategic’ level. It links India’s development partnership with African Union’s ‘Agenda 2063’, which will be based on the principles of equality, friendship, mutual benefit and solidarity within the framework of South-South Cooperation, taking due cognizance of the development priorities of African societies. It underlines the fact that both Indian and African societies are multi-ethnic and multi-religious and

share common societal values, which cement the centuries old bonds of friendship. It presents the detailed programme of cooperation between India and African countries in the 10 areas identified in the Delhi Declaration (MEA: 2015a).

### *Critical Analysis*

The post- cold war phase of Indo-Africa partnership has many bright spots as both have tried to reinvigorate their mutually beneficial partnership in the present era of globalization. Many commentators and scholars have underlined the complementarities and the resulting positive dimensions of the emerging Indo-African partnership. During the third India-Africa Forum Summit 2015, both sides agreed to upgrade this partnership to the ‘strategic’ level. Noted Indian diplomat Shyam Saran remarked that this partnership reflects the philosophy of the modern concept of a ‘*development compact*’ working at five levels: trade and investment, technology, skills upgrade, lines of credit (LOC), and concessional grants (Saran: 2015). He argued that Africa is the continent of the future and India is a major emerging economy. With China entering a phase of lower growth rates and more domestic oriented economic strategies, India and Africa together may well become the engines of growth for the entire world. India can contribute its capital, skills and technological capabilities to sustain Africa’s growth. Africa in turn can support India’s growth through mutually beneficial resource partnerships and easier access to each other’s expanding markets (Saran: 2015a). A study by Arora and Chand (2015) has elaborated this ‘development compact’. It remarks that different facets of the development compact add colour and substance to the burgeoning partnership between India and Africa, the two growth poles of the world. The diversity of this multi-faceted engagement includes capacity building, technology sharing, investment, trade and development finance. It has identified power, clean energy, knowledge and innovation and livelihood programme as the key areas of future Indo-Africa development partnership.

These hopes are substantiated by facts also. India-Africa bilateral trade has increased from merely \$967 million in 1990-91 to more than \$ 72 billion in 2014-15 (GOI: 2015). Indian investment has increased to \$1.3 billion over last two decades, mainly in infrastructure and energy sector. India has already concessional credit to African countries to the tune of \$ 7.4 billion to finance their development programmes of their choice and has announced another \$10 billion concessional credit during the

third India-Africa Forum Summit 2015. So far India has awarded 25000 scholarships to African students over the years and many of the present day African leaders are India-educated (Guha: 2015). India offered 50000 additional scholarships during 2015 summit of India-Africa Forum to encourage Africans to study in India (Campbell: 2015). Besides, around 27 lakhs Indians have been living in different African countries cementing economic, cultural and political ties between the two peoples.

Yet, amidst valid hopes and impressive facts, the Indo-African partnership suffers from many critical gaps, which need to be addressed.

**First**, the cold war era may be described as the 'golden period' of Indo-Africa relations, not because of large amount of trade or investment, but because of the ideological symmetry and a shared vision between the two, which acted as architectonic framework to the entire gamut of their multidimensional engagement. India stood with African countries in their fight against colonialism and apartheid as a reliable source of strength. This element is missing in the post-cold war Indo-African engagement as India has shied away from Africa's political challenges like strengthening democratic process, political instability, terrorism, building human rights regime and so on. This has created an '*ideological dis-junct*'. The signs are already visible: African countries not supporting India in 1996 in the elections for the non-permanent seat of Security Council; hesitant to endorse in straightforward manner India's claim for permanent membership of SC in 2015; or their equally strong desire to develop close development partnership with China; or demanding five year framework of India-Africa Forum Summit in place of present three year framework and so on. The lesson is that India needs to carefully diversify her engagement from commerce and investment to other challenges of African countries to enhance her goodwill and social capital in Africa. The beginning has to be made in more urgent areas. There has been a growing convergence between India and Africa on peace and security issues. Africa like India has a long coast line and is concerned about the threats such as piracy, drug trafficking and security of sea lanes. In recent years India has deployed its Navy in the Gulf of Aden in the Indian Ocean region in a bid to deal with the piracy challenge (Beri: 2015). Other domestic political challenges may be taken at later stage. There is recognition of India's vast political capital, emerging from its experience in fighting colonialism and apartheid in Africa, which may be mobilized for promoting democracy, security and stability in Africa (Pham: Retrieved 2015).

Second, India's development partnership experience in Afghanistan and South Asia demonstrates that more than the amount of aid is important the domestic sensibilities of the recipient nations impacted by such partnership. Ironically, national feelings are on rise even in this era of globalization. It is very easy to invoke national feelings, when it comes to external engagement. Thus, going by our own agenda is a risky option. India needs to dovetail her development partnership with African development efforts and priorities most notably the '*Agenda 2063*', which is their collective and long term development vision (Guha: 2015). The content and activities of India's ITEC programme and other development partnership mechanisms should be flexible and diversified to reflect the African development priorities as well as contemporary realities. A resurgent Africa is on the way to assert the ownership of her development process also.

**Third**, it should be noted that India is not the sole development partner of Africa, nor it enjoys primacy in political concerns of African countries as was the case during the fight against colonialism and apartheid. Besides traditional development partners like UK, US, France, Russia, the new development partners like Japan and China have come to dominate African landscape in recent years. Though, all of them are ahead of India in terms of investment and trade, China is viewed as potential competitor to India's trade and investment in Africa. With \$ 200 b bilateral trade and three times more investment than India, the resource hungry China has considerably diversified and expanded her economic and development presence in Africa (Campbell: 2015). With her own constraints, India is not likely to beat these partners in financial terms, but it has strong points elsewhere. The key for India is to focus on human resource development and share Indian experiences in the fields, which suit African countries (Guha: 2015). India may not do more in comparison to China, but she can do *better* than China. India may share her experience, skills and products in the areas like health, education, computerization, cyber security, e-banking, solar energy, management of democratic institutions and processes, project management, small scale industries and so on. The potentials in energy, pharma, agriculture and mining need to be further explored for a much more dynamic relationship. In the field of energy and mining, the dynamics of engagement need to be versatile enough to take into consideration India's energy security and Africa's economic development (IDSA: 2015a). Africans are getting wary of China's hunger for natural resources of Africa, flooding of cheap Chinese goods in African markets and mega projects

with little relevance to the poor and marginalized people of Africa. Thus equally important is to dispel India's image as emerging economic power, which keeps an eye only on Africa's resources and markets.

Fourth, there is a tendency among policy makers in India to draw ambitious programmes of development partnership with Africa like the Indian-Africa Framework for Strategic Cooperation, which was finalized during the third summit of India-Africa Forum in 2015. However, there is little attempt to seriously review the success or failures of past programmes or to ensure the timely and effective implementation of the programmes at hand. Announcing more and doing less is not suited to the goodwill and sincerity India wants to generate in Africa at this juncture.

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