

India and Africa: bridging the gap between words and deeds

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Africa has re-emerged as an arena of great-power competition. Yet, India – despite deep historical ties, a large diaspora and shared post-colonial values – remains relatively underrepresented on the continent. This report examines India's comparative advantages, the structural and institutional gaps undermining its engagement in Africa, and the mismatch between rhetoric and outcomes. It concludes with recommendations for both Indian and African stakeholders to recalibrate and deepen this significant partnership in order to maximise mutual benefit.

Key findings

- ▶ Africa's global strategic importance has risen significantly in economic, political and security terms; however, India's engagement with the continent continues to lag behind other major global actors.
- ▶ Through its historical ties, normative and pan-Africanist positions on global issues, shared developmental constraints and ideals, India has a comparative advantage relative to other global competitors; yet it appears to have lost ground in translating these advantages into measurable impact.
- ▶ There is a persistent mismatch between the rhetoric of Indian stakeholders and policymakers and the material outcomes in Africa, as reflected in the comparatively limited scale and scope of Indian investment, trade and institutional engagement on the continent.
- ▶ Economic shortcomings, administrative misalignment, reputational concerns and risk aversion limit India's engagement in Africa, despite the presence of opportunities across multiple sectors.
- ▶ Leveraging regional anchor states for low-hanging initiatives can enhance delivery and scalability, while enabling co-shaped outcomes through active participation and collaboration by both African stakeholders and India. This would create proof-of-model concepts that can be replicated across the continent.

Recommendations

- ▶ Indian policymakers should articulate and adopt a coherent Africa strategy that balances normative alignment, pragmatism and delivery.
- ▶ Indian policymakers should vest interventions in regional anchor states such as South Africa, Kenya, Egypt and Nigeria that have agenda setting capacity and positive spillover into broader sub-regions to ease adoption and maximise impact.
- ▶ Indian stakeholders should ensure institutional alignment between diplomatic, development finance and private sector actors to create coordinated approaches.
- ▶ Both African and Indian stakeholders should work to rebuild confidence and reduce mutual risk aversion and reputational concerns through transparency and consistent standards.
- ▶ Both African and Indian stakeholders should prioritise low-cost, high-impact initiatives in areas where India has a comparative advantage and African states have need, such as health, education and digital finance.

Introduction

Africa has re-emerged as a central arena for global competition. With over 30% of known mineral reserves, the youngest median-age population and significant infrastructure and development financing needs, the continent has become a strategic priority for most major powers.¹ In recent years, this has translated into intensified efforts to consolidate influence by the United States, China, Russia, India, Japan, Turkey and the Gulf states across economic, political and security domains. China's Belt and Road Initiative, the US-led Lobito Corridor and sizeable investment inflows from Middle Eastern states such as Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) highlight the scale and diversity of this renewed engagement. These initiatives reflect a growing appreciation that Africa's development trajectory is central to global growth, supply chains and geopolitical leverage.²

That said, India appears conspicuously under-represented. Despite historical ties, shared post-colonial experiences and growing economic relevance as one of the world's fastest-growing major economies, India has not capitalised on its potential as a partner for Africa. While New Delhi was among the earliest and most consistent supporters of African independence and played a formative role in the early development of post-colonial states, the relationship has lost momentum. Although Prime Minister Narendra Modi characterises Africa as a 'top priority,' India's trade, investment and development finance footprint lags behind its East Asian and Middle Eastern peers.³

Nearly three million people of Indian origin live in Africa, with established communities across all 54 countries

Nevertheless, as India seeks to consolidate its leadership credentials within the Global South and African states pursue greater diversification in their external partnerships, there is scope to recalibrate this relationship. This policy brief argues that realising this opportunity will depend on targeted and sustained pragmatic engagements beyond shared values. First, it looks at India's strengths compared with other powers

and the benefits Africa has gained from its ties with India so far. It then identifies the shortcomings in the relations and their causes. It concludes with a discussion of recommendations on how relations can be recalibrated to maximise benefits to African states and how regional anchor states can play a role in such a reset.

India's comparative advantage: fraternal benevolence

Relative to other external partners, India has a distinct set of comparative advantages in engaging with Africa. Rather than size, wealth or colonial legacy, these derive from historical ties, common positions on global issues, similar developmental challenges and goals and a partnership seen as fraternal rather than paternalistic. This positions India as a choice complementary partner to African states seeking to diversify their external relationships while retaining political autonomy.

Historical and demographic links between India and Africa are long-standing and salient. Commercial exchange and settlement between Indian communities and Africa can be traced back more than 2 000 years.⁴ More recent migration during the colonial period entrenched Indian communities across the continent. Today, nearly three million people of Indian origin live in Africa, with established communities across all 54 countries.⁵ This diaspora is rooted in local economies and social structures, particularly in trade, manufacturing, healthcare and professional services. It also functions as an important conduit for commercial, cultural and diplomatic interaction between African capitals and New Delhi.

Further, these links have cemented and diversified forms of soft power exchange and diplomacy. In 2009, South Africa became the first country outside India to host Delhi's premier sporting event – the Indian Premier League. This move highlighted India's cultural influence in South Africa – anchored in the diaspora – and its appeal to broader African audiences. It also signalled a new mode of diplomacy, strengthening bilateral relationships through mass culture, sport and private networks.

Linguistic ties, especially with Anglophone African states, underpin these historical links. Shared use of English has reduced communication and administrative barriers in diplomatic, commercial and academic domains, making

relations that much easier. Though organic relations have emerged between India, Francophone and Lusophone countries, the common use of English has simplified relationship-building with India and Anglophone countries. Common legal frameworks, institutional familiarity and the smooth transfer of knowledge have allowed for more predictable engagement and quicker scaling and diversification of pathways.

Unsurprisingly, India's largest trading partners in Africa are primarily Anglophone countries – Nigeria, South Africa and Egypt, followed by Tanzania, Kenya and Ghana.⁶ Perhaps more than any power, India has also garnered credibility through its role in Africa's decolonisation and development in the early post-independence period. Following its own independence in 1947, India emerged as a vocal advocate for African self-determination and economic development. It was an early opponent of apartheid, severing trade relations with South Africa and imposing sanctions on then Rhodesia, while providing political and diplomatic support to liberation movements across the continent.⁷

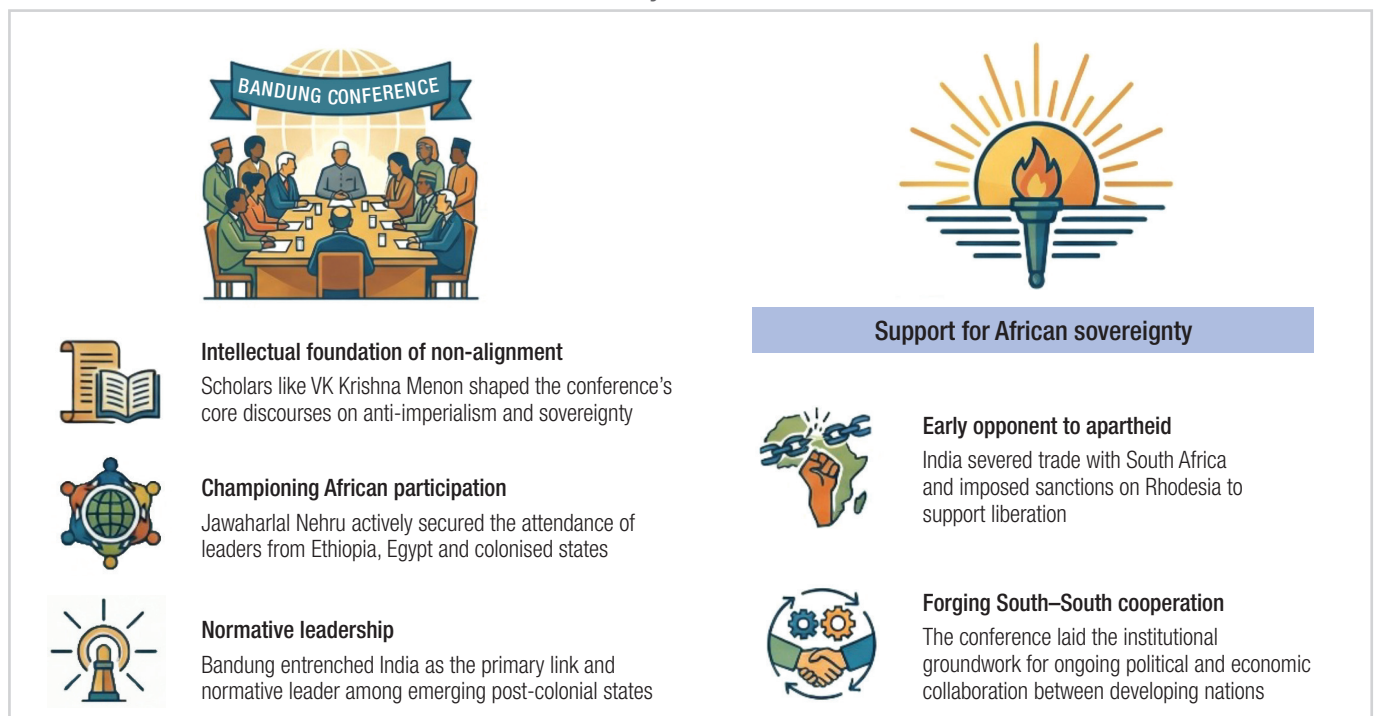
As a leading figure in the Bandung Conference of 1955, India was instrumental in advocating for African participation in what would later become the

Non-Aligned Movement. Though convened in Indonesia, India is considered the intellectual and diplomatic architect of the conference. Indian scholars such as VK Krishna Menon and KM Panikkar shaped discourses on anti-imperialism, non-alignment and Global South sovereignty, which undergirded the conference. In addition to forging consensus among the ideological camps present, Indian diplomacy under former prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru played a role in championing the attendance of African leaders such as Ethiopia's Haile Selassie and Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser. Perhaps most significantly, India advocated for the attendance of leaders from erstwhile colonised states.⁸

Following its own independence, India emerged as an advocate for African self-determination and economic development

Bandung would go on to shape India's leadership of the Global South entrenching India's role as a normative leader and link among post-colonial states, including in Africa. It also laid the political imperative and institutional groundwork for South–South cooperation.

Chart 1: India as the architect of Afro–Asian solidarity



Source: Generated with NotebookLM and redrawn by ISS, based on Assie-Lumumba (2015)

Contemporarily, Africa has featured prominently in India's renewed emphasis on the Global South and reform of multilateral governance structures. During its G20 presidency in 2023, India played a central role in securing the African Union's admission as a permanent member of the forum.⁹ India has also expressed support for African positions on United Nations reform, including the Ezulwini Consensus, which calls for permanent and non-permanent African representation on the UN Security Council.¹⁰

India's own developmental trajectory strengthens its comparative advantage as a partner. Having navigated a complex transition from a post-colonial, extractive, low-income, inward-looking economy to an industrialising and influential global actor, India offers experience that is both relevant and resonant for many African states. A frequently invoked comparison is that Africa is where India was 30 years ago; it is therefore well positioned to offer meaningful guidance. In the early 1990s, India's per capita income stood at about US\$1 000, a level comparable to that of several African economies today.¹¹ Moreover, challenges that continue to confront much of Africa shaped India's reform trajectory. These include rapid population growth, high levels of poverty and informality, infrastructure deficits and reliance on primary sectors.

A frequently invoked comparison is that Africa is where India was 30 years ago; so it's well positioned to offer guidance

While the Indian experience is neither directly replicable nor universally applicable, it provides a useful guide for managing the plurality of challenges facing Africa – industrialisation, governance reform and social inclusion – under conditions of constraint.

For Africa, India represents a compelling partner as the global order shifts towards multiplexity – overlapping centres of power and complex interdependence, rather than a single dominant power with clear patterns of dependence. Politically, India can help Africa balance other powers and strengthen its voice. Delhi's growing institutional heft positions it as an alternative to existing dominant powers and a reliable and lower-risk

partner for advancing African agendas globally. Economically, India's growth trajectory, deepening consumer market and diversified supply chains render it an increasingly attractive partner for trade, investment and cooperation. Sociologically, its shared challenge as an emerging market with a youth bulge creates opportunities for synergy in education, skills development and scalable solutions.

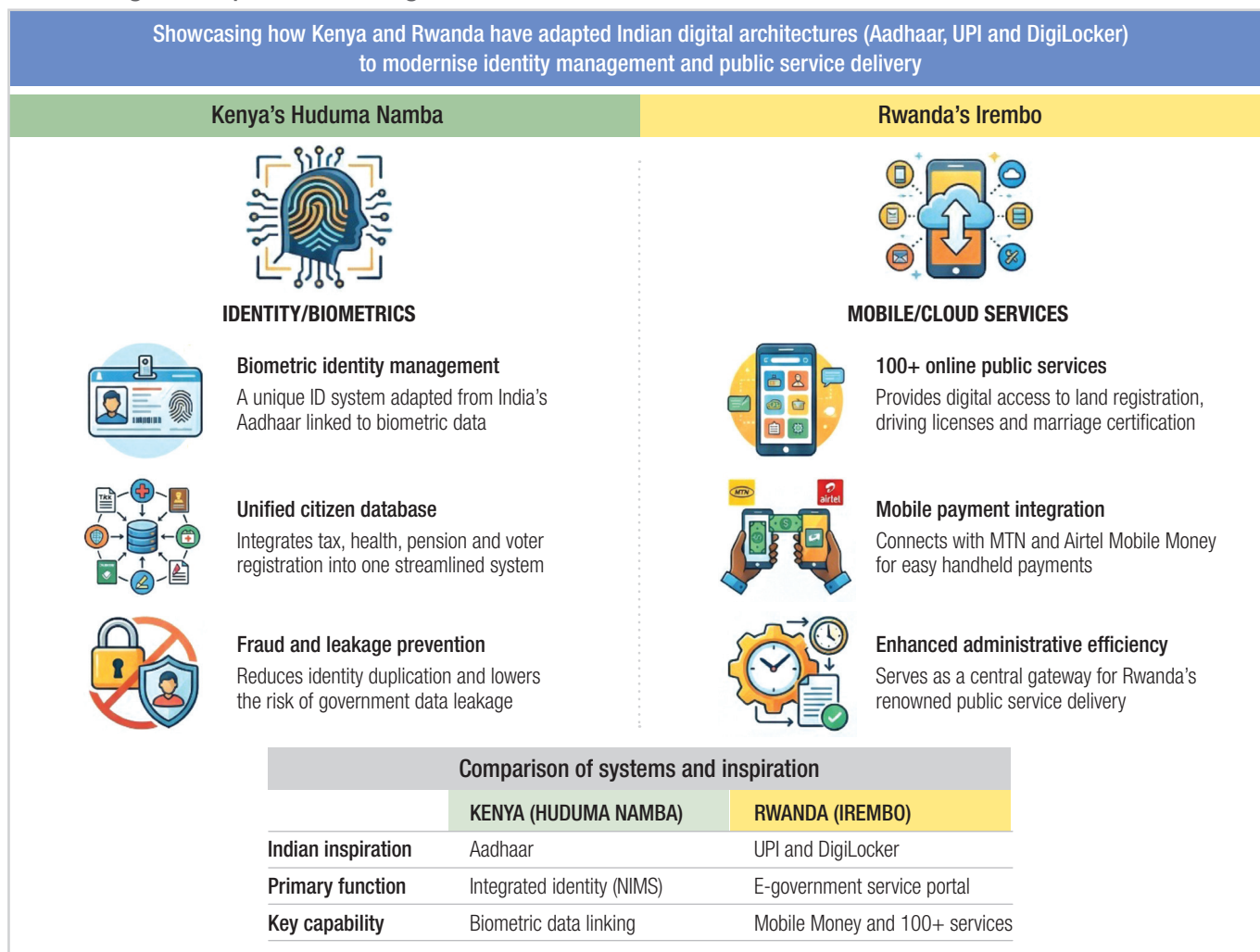
Benefits of cooperation: from pills to payments

Considerable cooperation between India and Africa has occurred over the past decade, with many of the most noteworthy outcomes concentrated in the digital domain. Drawing on its experience in building large-scale digital public infrastructure, India has supported the transfer of hardware, software and institutional models in areas such as digital identification, authentication, paperless verification, data storage and electronic payments. These interventions have been particularly relevant for African governments seeking to expand state capacity, improve service delivery and reduce administrative inefficiencies.

Kenya's rollout of the Huduma Namba National Integrated Identity Management System illustrates this dynamic. Adapted in part from India's Aadhaar system, Huduma Namba – or 'service number' in Swahili – assigns citizens a unique identification number linked to biometric and personal data. The system integrates multiple government databases – including tax, health insurance, pension and voter registers – thereby streamlining identification processes, reducing duplication and lowering the scope for fraud and data leakage. While the system has faced legal and governance scrutiny, it reflects the growing influence of India's digital governance architecture in African contexts.¹²

Rwanda's Irempo platform, meaning 'gateway' in Kinyarwanda, is a cornerstone of the country's e-government strategy. It incorporates features comparable to India's Unified Payments Interface and DigiLocker, enabling citizens to access more than 100 public services online, including birth registration, driving licences, land registration and marriage certification. Its integration with mobile money platforms – such as MTN Mobile Money and Airtel Money,

Chart 2: Digital blueprints – India’s governance tech in Africa



Source: Generated with NotebookLM and redrawn by ISS, based on NTU Singapore

partly operated by Bharti Airtel – allows users to make payments via handheld devices. As a result, Irembo is now a central cog in Rwanda’s public service delivery ecosystem, contributing to the country’s renowned administrative efficiency.¹³

India’s engagement in Africa’s health diplomacy has also been beneficial. Delhi has used its pharmaceutical manufacturing capacity and healthcare expertise to expand the supply of goods, services and training in emergency response through both public and private channels. This was particularly evident during the coronavirus pandemic when India emerged as a major supplier of vaccines, medical equipment and pharmaceuticals to African countries.

Under the Vaccine Maitri initiative, Indian producers supplied tens of millions of vaccine doses to more than

40 African states, alongside ventilators and personal protective equipment from firms such as Cipla and the Serum Institute of India.¹⁴ This support builds on a history of cooperation: India currently supplies an estimated 40 to 45% of Africa’s generic medicines, often at discounted prices,¹⁵ helping improve access to essential treatments.

Beyond pharmaceuticals, Indian private healthcare providers have expanded their footprint across the continent. Initiatives such as Dr Agarwal’s Eye Hospitals now operate in multiple African countries, delivering specialised eye care services in markets characterised by limited access to advanced treatment. At the intergovernmental level, the Pan-African e-Network Project – launched in 2009 in partnership with the AU – has supported healthcare provision and skills transfer through telemedicine and tele-education.

The project connects 47 African countries with 19 Indian institutions, facilitating remote consultations, training and capacity building.¹⁶

Another avenue of India's health diplomacy that has been particularly beneficial for Africa is medical tourism. According to the VIF public policy think tank, between 50 000 and 300 000 Africans travel to India each year for medical treatment, with key origin countries including South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria and Ghana. India is particularly favourable for Africans due to the affordability of quality care, shorter waiting times and accessibility due to slightly less stringent visa regimes.¹⁷

Finally, India has broadened its engagement to include humanitarian help, disaster relief and maritime security cooperation. In 2024, it provided flood relief to Kenya, cyclone relief to Mozambique and drought aid to Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi in response to El Niño-induced shocks.

There appears to be a gap between India's stated ambitions and the scale and material outcomes of its engagement

In the maritime domain, India's Security and Growth for All in the Region and Maritime Asia and Indian Ocean Strategic Approach for Regional Growth frameworks, led by the government, provide structured approaches to security cooperation with African coastal states. A central part of this engagement is the Africa India Key Maritime Engagement, which the navy leads. This exercise is aimed at enhancing interoperability, information sharing and coordination in addressing shared maritime security challenges. The inaugural drill, held off the coast of Tanzania in April 2024, brought together naval forces from nine African countries, marking a further step towards institutionalised security cooperation.¹⁸

Failure to consolidate: where India lags behind rivals

Despite these advances, questions remain over India's capacity and willingness to meaningfully prioritise Africa. There appears to be a gap between India's stated ambitions and the scale and material outcomes of its engagement. This critique is particularly salient given

India's economic scale – now exceeding US\$3.5 trillion in nominal GDP – a favourable geopolitical context and the apparent convergence of interests between India and African states. Notwithstanding these conditions, the relationship has struggled to translate potential into consistent delivery.¹⁹

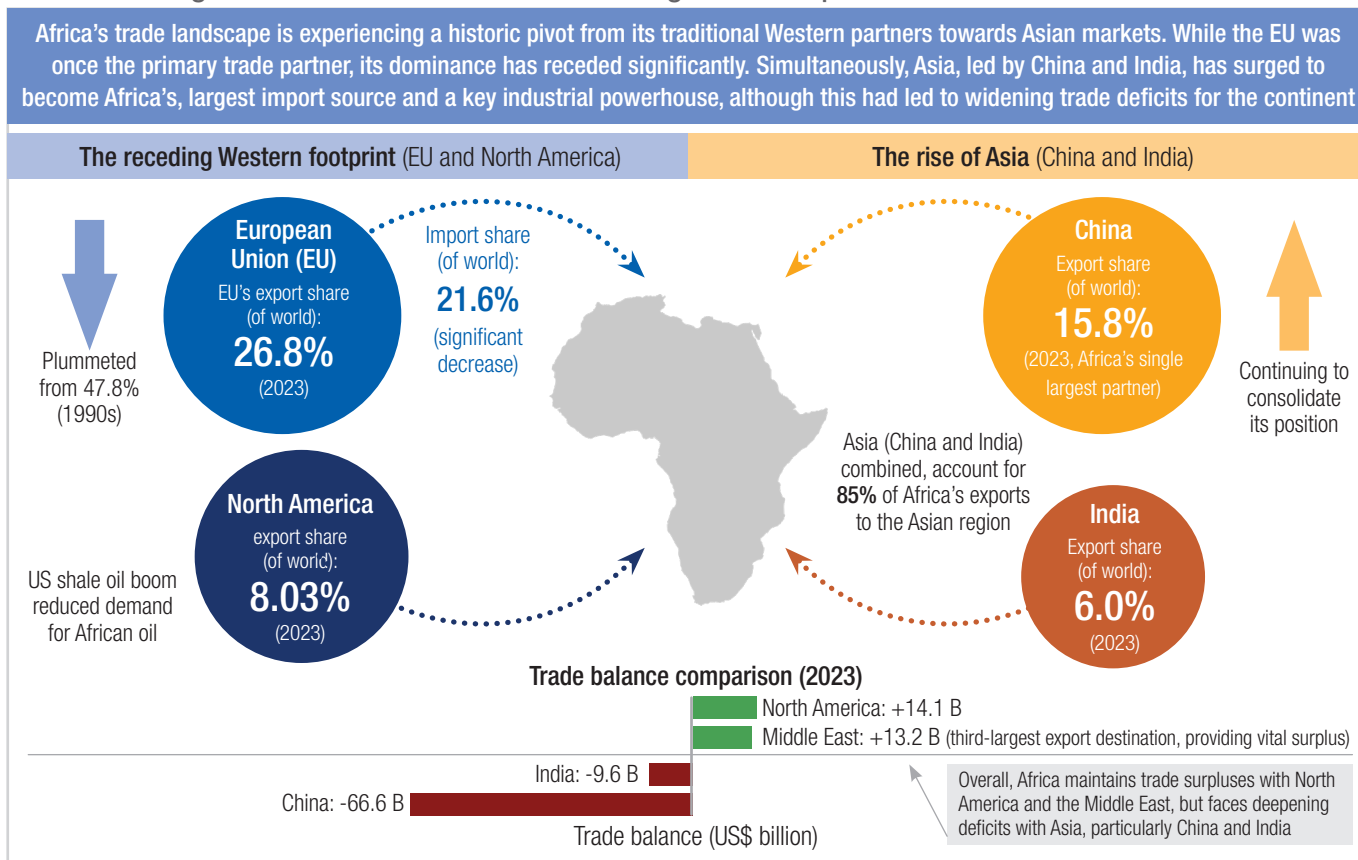
Such underperformance is most evident in the economic domain, notably credit provision, investment and trade. In terms of development finance, India extended about US\$4.7 billion in bilateral credit to Africa in 2023, a figure that lags considerably behind China's estimated US\$62 billion in lending during the same period.²⁰ A range of other external partners – including France, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Germany, Japan and the UAE – all extend more than US\$5 billion in credit to Africa, surpassing India.²¹ These disparities underscore India's relatively modest financial footprint in comparison to peers with comparable or narrower strategic ambitions.

A similar pattern emerges in foreign direct investment. Ernst & Young's Africa Attractiveness Survey found that the UAE led capital investment into Africa in 2023, followed by the United Kingdom and China.²² India's position is stronger in trade, where it ranked as Africa's second-largest bilateral trading partner by country in 2023, based on data from the World Bank's World Integrated Trade Solution database. However, India's trade volume with Africa is substantially lower than China's according to the Africa Export Import Bank. This highlights the degree of asymmetry in engagement by Asia's two major powers.²³

Several structural and operational constraints account for this. The absence of dedicated shipping routes and maritime corridors has led to relatively higher transit times and costs, compared to other markets. Second, Africa's fragmented maritime landscape has made for complex standards, customs procedures and barriers that continue to hinder Indian trade. These factors, financing gaps and high-risk premiums by insurers add further constraints to trade despite strong degrees of alignment in other domains.

While India has been a consistent advocate of multilateral reform and South–South cooperation, tangible returns from these efforts have been limited. In recent years, New Delhi has promoted initiatives such as the India–Africa Forum Summit, the Coalition for Disaster

Chart 3: Shifting tides – the transformation of Africa’s global trade partners



Source: Generated with NotebookLM and redrawn by ISS, based on the Afreximbank African Trade Report 2024

Resilient Infrastructure and the Voice of the Global South Summit. It has also supported efforts to reduce over-reliance on the US dollar within forums such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa).

With the notable exception of securing the AU’s admission as a permanent member of the G20, these initiatives have produced few structural changes. Core global governance institutions – including the UN system and the Bretton Woods institutions – remain largely unchanged. Meanwhile, de-dollarisation appears driven more by pragmatic risk-management than by normative alignment.

Equally, India’s development model in Africa has struggled to compete with that of more visible, better resourced and more tightly coordinated competitors. As Sanusha Naidu of the Institute for Global Dialogue has argued, India’s Africa policy is characterised by a degree of opacity and strategic ambiguity. Naidu notes that India has yet to clarify whether its engagement is state-led, private-sector-driven or hybrid; what distinctive value it

offers beyond China; and how its soft power is intended to be projected and perceived.²⁴

In practice, while India has emphasised values, capacity building and concessional finance, outcomes have often been underwhelming and inadequately communicated. This is not due to an absence of financial commitment: since 2000, India has issued at least US\$12 billion in lines of credit to African countries.²⁵

Rather, implementation has been constrained by bureaucratic inefficiencies, weak coordination between development finance institutions and implementing partners and limited strategic communication. Responsibility for delivery is dispersed across multiple entities – including the Export-Import Bank of India, the Development Partnership Administration and various technical cooperation agencies – seemingly without a unified mandate or overarching framework.

This contrasts with more centralised and clearly branded models of engagement, such as China, where coordination between financing, implementation and

strategic messaging is largely aligned. It is, however, worth noting that a large portion of lines of credit remain underused by African recipients or have incurred sub-par completion rates.²⁶ Projects funded by Indian lines of credit such as the Zanzibar Water Supply Rehabilitation project in Tanzania, agricultural mechanisation service centres in Ghana, Ethiopia's Mekele Industrial Park transmission line, Nigeria's National Rural Broadband Network and potable water supply systems in Sierra Leone have experienced slow disbursement or extended implementation timelines. This is partly due to limited administrative capacity among borrowers.²⁷

Underpinning the under-delivery: finances and fears

Inadequate institutional coordination is only one of several constraints that have contributed to persistent under-delivery in the India–Africa relationship. Delhi's engagement with Africa is fundamentally shaped by its limited fiscal and financial headroom. India's external development budget amounted to about US\$720 million in the 2024/25 financial year, making it by far the smallest development allocation among the world's largest economies.²⁸

This is partly explained by India's increasingly tight public finances. The country recorded a fiscal deficit of around 4.8% of GDP in 2024/25, representing a moderate slippage from the sub-4% deficits that characterised much of the pre-pandemic period. At the same time, interest payments absorbed roughly 24% of government revenue, sharply limiting the scope for discretionary external spending.²⁹

These pressures have reinforced a strong inward orientation in fiscal policy. Domestic socio-economic imperatives – employment generation, welfare provision, infrastructure backlogs and electoral considerations – continue to dominate budgetary priorities, leaving limited political or financial space for large-scale overseas development or strategic investment. Unlike several of its peers, India also lacks the financial surpluses that have underwritten more expansive external engagement. It has run persistent current-account deficits for much of the past decade, constraining its ability to recycle trade surpluses or foreign exchange reserves into strategic assets abroad.³⁰

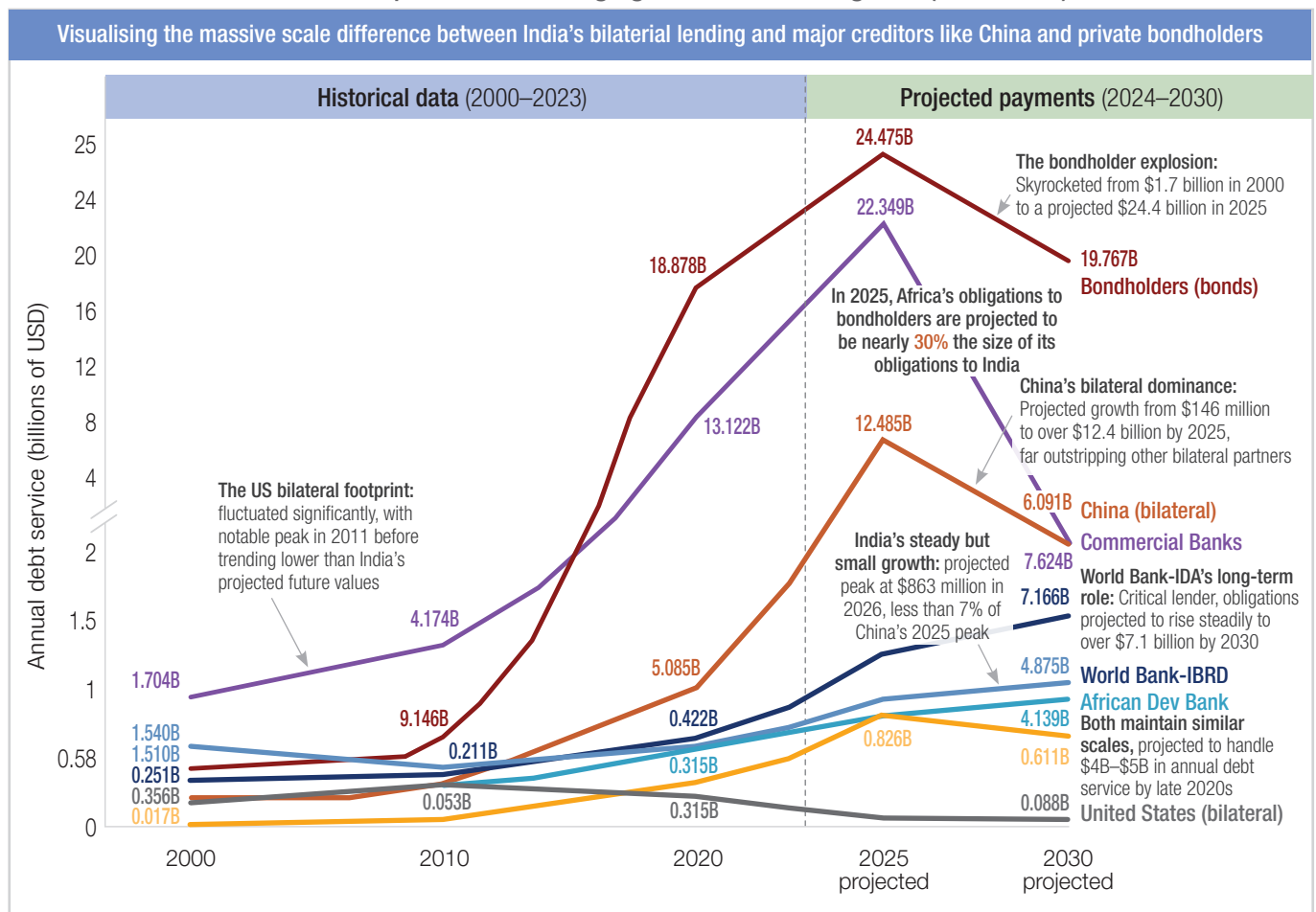
India's prioritisation of its immediate neighbourhood also detracts from its focus on Africa. Initiatives such as 'Neighbourhood First' mean India focuses mainly on nearby countries in East and South Asia as well as those around the Indian Ocean. This is because of national security and economic concerns including to counterbalance Chinese influence in a region where it would be particularly consequential if left unchecked. Consequently, India concentrates its credit and institutional weight in Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Myanmar, where it yields clear geopolitical returns. In contrast, African engagement is less of a priority and driven more by trade, diplomacy and shared values than urgent security concerns.³¹

Equally, while India's capital markets are deep and liquid, they are overwhelmingly domestically focused. External leverage remains limited, public debt is largely domestically held and rupee-denominated, and India lacks dedicated policy banks with mandates comparable to those used by other major powers to deploy domestic liquidity offshore at scale. These structural features help explain why India has lagged behind China, the US and Japan, all of which benefit from more favourable fiscal dynamics, external surpluses or specialised institutional vehicles to support overseas economic statecraft.

High-profile controversies involving Indian expatriate business interests have coloured perceptions in key African markets

Beyond financial constraints, reputational challenges have also complicated India's engagement with African partners. A number of high-profile controversies involving Indian expatriate business interests have coloured perceptions in key African markets. Prominent business families, most notably the Guptas, Patels and the Adani Group, have been associated with allegations of corruption, regulatory evasion and governance failures. In South Africa, the Zondo Commission implicated the Gupta family in large-scale state capture and the systematic erosion of public institutions. In Kenya, Mansukh Patel was charged with manslaughter after a dam collapse that killed 48 people, following findings of negligence and misconduct. Meanwhile, Gautam Adani

Chart 4: Africa's creditor landscape – India's emerging role vs. the debt giants (2000–2030)



Source: Generated with NotebookLM and redrawn by ISS, based on analysis from ONE Data

has faced allegations of accounting fraud and stock manipulation linked to complex offshore structures.

Given the Adani Group's role as a major vehicle for Indian infrastructure investment throughout Africa, these allegations have had broad unintended consequences. Planned ventures in Mozambique, Kenya and Egypt have faced heightened scrutiny, delays or political friction. While such cases are not representative of India's broader commercial footprint on the continent, they have nevertheless strained local confidence and weakened claims that India's engagement is principled and development focused.

These reputational concerns have had other consequences. African stakeholders appear more risk-averse towards Indian firms, while Indian companies themselves often exhibit hesitation when assessing African markets. This has translated into inflated risk premium and conservative investment strategies.

Compounding this – at least from an African perspective – is uncertainty about what contemporary India represents internationally.

Whereas earlier phases of engagement were anchored in narratives of pluralism, secularism and South–South solidarity, India's current political trajectory has raised concerns. African policymakers are particularly worried about a shift towards religious nationalism and greater centralisation of power.³² For some, this has fuelled unease about long-term alignment with Africa's own pluralistic and modernising aspirations.

Collectively, fiscal constraints, institutional limitations and reputational headwinds have narrowed the scope of India's Africa engagement. In the absence of clearer strategic articulation, stronger delivery mechanisms and renewed confidence-building with African partners, these factors are likely to continue limiting the depth and effectiveness of the relationship.

Recalibrating the relationship: anchor states and agency

Despite these constraints, the India–Africa relationship can be recalibrated for greater mutual benefit.

The first port of call is the establishment of a single coherent and recognisable Africa strategy with key institutional anchors and regular engagement. China has the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation and Japan has the Tokyo International Conference on African Development; India is the only major power vying for influence in Africa without such a platform. Attempts have been made to establish one through the India–Africa Forum Summit and the Ten Guiding Principles for India–Africa Engagement. However, these principles have seldom been put into action, while the summit has been held irregularly, compounding India’s diffuse approach to Africa.

A strategy ought to lay out core principles and targets that marry India’s advantages and Africa’s strategic needs. Further, it must identify key role-players and synergise diplomatic, financial, political and security structures towards the achievement of the established goals while ensuring consistency with private-led initiatives. According to Sharinee Jagtiani of the Nanyang Technological University, Delhi should drive a ‘multi-actor Africa policy’ that involves key entities on both sides, sets the agenda for the public and private sector and establishes principles of engagement with people of Indian origin. It should also revitalise existing but underused frameworks, such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association, as a springboard for cooperation.³³

In setting the agenda, the strategy must identify low- and high-hanging fruit. In this respect, immediate, low resource, high-impact and marketable wins must be prioritised; followed by longer-term, higher cost structural investments that require more substantial economic and institutional cooperation.

The most immediate opportunity lies in filling the health gap left by the drawdown of the US Agency for International Development. According to the Institute for Security Studies, the agency allocated US\$12.7 billion in aid to sub-Saharan Africa, with much of this going to HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, maternal and child health and nutrition interventions.³⁴ In the absence of new

funding, the aid withdrawal could push nearly six million Africans into extreme poverty and lead to four million deaths from premature and preventable causes.

India is well positioned for such intervention. With Delhi already having the world’s largest and affordable healthcare capabilities, it has a distinct comparative advantage. It could mobilise institutions such as Serum and Cipla under a unified initiative aimed at short-term critical vaccine and medicines production and delivery to highly affected areas.

A second opportunity lies in education and human capital development. Thousands of Africans study in India annually, drawn by its affordability, English medium of instruction and quality of education. Yet there is scope to maximise impacts in education. For one, extending partnerships between Indian educational institutions and their African peers and linking these to local job opportunities or remittance pathways for those employed abroad could help create virtuous talent-resource cycles. Equally, it could establish an ecosystem of African professionals with a connection to India while still contributing positively to the continent, such as an India–Africa Think Tank. The infrastructure to expand education and human capital development already exists.

Low resource, high-impact and marketable wins must be prioritised; followed by higher cost structural investments

Delhi runs the India–Africa Maitri Scheme, which sets aside a predetermined number of scholarships and training opportunities for each African country, ensuring equitable access across the continent. Furthermore, under the so-called South–South Cooperation, India has committed 15 000 scholarships to students and professionals in Africa to pursue online learning. Meanwhile, the Pan-African e-Network Project tele-education platform has provided qualifications to more than 20 000 African students.³⁵ With India’s vast technological capabilities and growing connections with Africa, these opportunities can be scaled at relatively low cost.

A third opportunity lies in security cooperation. Changes in defence priorities and military budgets in the US and

Europe have left significant security vacuums in flashpoint areas of the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and Central and East Africa. While Turkey and Russia have selectively filled some gaps in places such as Libya, Somalia, Mali and Niger, their capacity, capabilities and long-term commitment to the continent remain in doubt. With its defence manufacturing base, large troop contingent, naval reach and peacekeeping record, India is well placed to intervene.

In this regard, the existing Maritime Asia and Indian Ocean Strategic Approach for Regional Growth framework could be extended beyond maritime issues to include land-based ones. These could include capacity building, coast guard and army training, peacekeeping support, counterinsurgency help and disaster-response coordination. Security partnerships could even create new trade and industrial opportunities in defence, including the exchange and production of arms, surveillance systems, vehicles and radar systems, providing alternatives to Western, Chinese and Russian systems.

A fourth opportunity lies in partnerships focused on mineral beneficiation. African states are increasingly inclined towards beneficiation as a vehicle for industrialisation and value addition. Consequently, demands for local beneficiation are now at the heart of contemporary mineral agreements, from Botswana and Zambia to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Despite these aspirations, value addition is constrained by technical and skills shortcomings. Much of the continent lacks the machinery, energy infrastructure and skilled workforce to carry out beneficiation at scale and at manageable cost. India, meanwhile, faces acute mineral shortages and a dependence on Chinese imports.

However, it does have significant expertise in metallurgy and cost-effective processing. This presents the opportunity for joint ventures in beneficiation, with Africa providing the raw materials and India providing the technical backbone. A template already exists in Botswana's diamond sector. At least 20 Indian companies have established processing units there,³⁶ leading to reduced costs, easier and cheaper access to resources, increased value addition, employment and skills transfer. Indian stakeholders could adapt this model to other mineral ventures in Africa.

The fifth opportunity lies in collaboration in trade and finance using digital tools. These tools could help solve technical gridlocks in initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area. India's Unified Payments Interface, biometric ID system, electronic customer verification and digital document locker offer ready-made solutions for challenges with trade rules, verifying product origins, security and payments that have slowed the Free Trade Area's implementation and growth.

Furthermore, integrating Africa's Pan-African Payment and Settlement System with India's Unified Payments Interface would speed up the shift towards increased use of local currencies, through the real-time settlement afforded by the Indian platform. This, in turn, would reduce dollar dependency and transaction costs that often undermine the competitiveness of African exports.

In affecting such partnerships, anchor states could provide templates for seeding and scaling interventions. Initiatives – whether in healthcare, technology, defence or extractives – could be piloted in anchor states with established regulatory, financial and technical capacity before being extended regionally. There are four ready anchor states: South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya and Egypt.

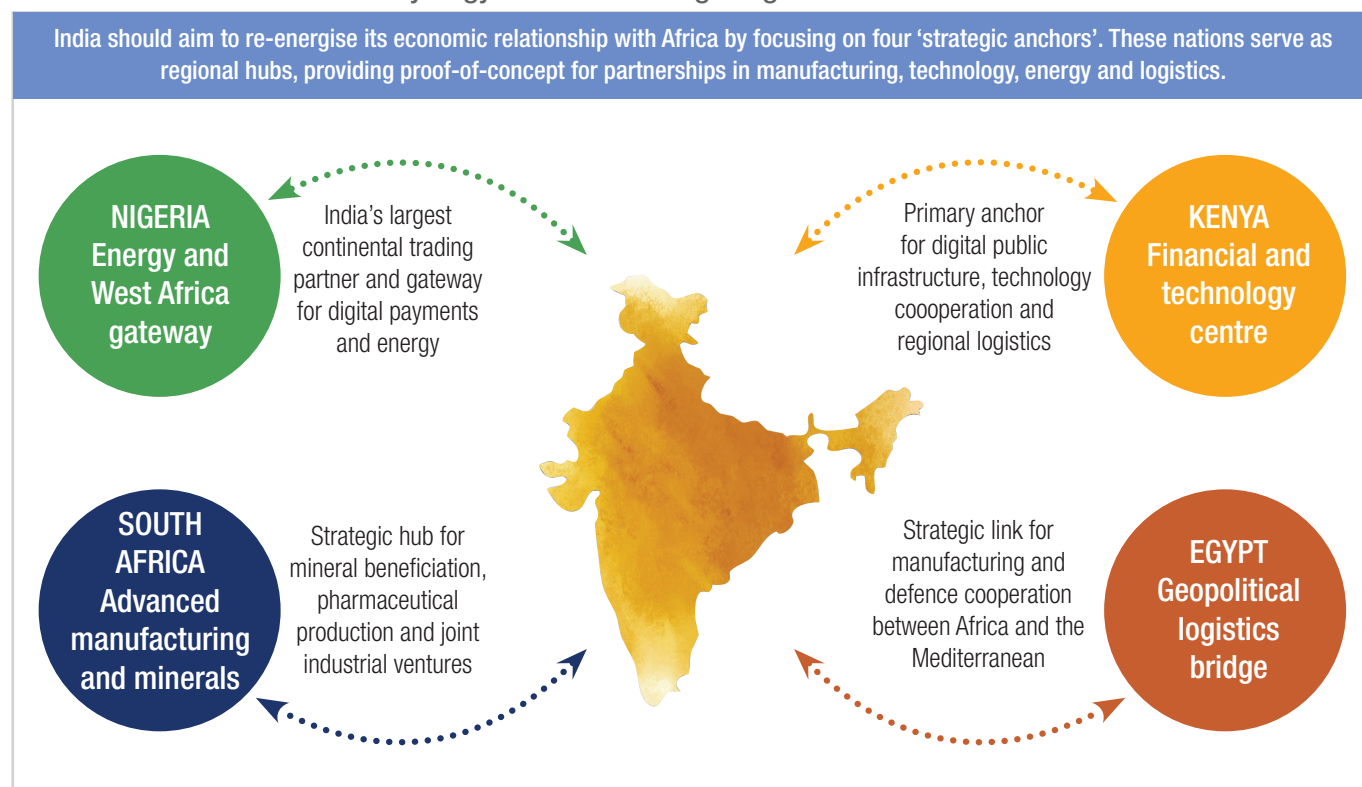
Indian stakeholders could adapt the existing diamond sector joint venture in Botswana to other minerals in Africa

Various factors inform their selection. First, they provide entry points into North, West, East and Southern Africa, supporting scalable engagement. Second, each country is a leading regional power with significant political influence, market size and good connectivity, allowing bilateral engagement to generate broader sub-regional benefits. They are also key multilateral players, which aligns with India's approach to building coalition in global governance. Lastly, their relative development and institutional capacity allow them to absorb complex cooperation projects and share the benefits with neighbouring countries.

South Africa

South Africa's institutional strength, financial markets and industrial base render it a strategic anchor for

Chart 5: India–Africa economic synergy – the four strategic regional anchors



Source: By author, generated with NotebookLM and redrawn by ISS

Southern Africa. It is a well-tailored hub for advanced manufacturing, mineral beneficiation and pharmaceutical production. India's existing commercial footprint and diaspora provides a foundation for joint ventures that can generate regional spillover while reinforcing African-led reform agendas.

Nigeria

As West Africa's largest economy and Africa's most populous state, Nigeria functions as a gateway to West Africa in trade, energy and security. It is already India's largest trading partner on the continent and a major producer of oil and gas. Deepening cooperation with Nigeria would allow Indian initiatives in pharmaceuticals, digital payments and defence training to scale across the Economic Community of West African States region.

Kenya

Kenya's role as East Africa's financial, logistics and technology hub makes it a suitable anchor for digital public infrastructure, technology cooperation and health interventions. As East Africa's most interconnected economy, engagement seeded in Kenya can support

broader integration across the East African Community and the Horn of Africa regions.

Egypt

Egypt occupies a favourable geopolitical position linking Africa, the Middle East and the Mediterranean basin. Its industrial base and strategic location make it well suited for partnerships in manufacturing, defence cooperation and trade logistics, particularly for North and East Africa.

Conclusion

The relationship between Africa and India, though underperforming, has significant potential. Although constrained by India's financial limits, policy ambiguity and reputational concerns, these challenges are circumnavigable given the match between India's strengths and Africa's needs. Indeed, if India aligns its strategy and expands cooperation in health, education, security, minerals and digital finance, it can re-energise the relationship. This can be supported through initiatives anchored in key regional partners, providing proof of concept and positive spillover effects.

Notes

- 1 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, World Population Prospects 2024, 2024, https://population.un.org/wpp/assets/Files/WPP2024_Summary-of-Results.pdf.
- 2 Council on Foreign Relations, A 'New Scramble for Africa'?, 2023, www.cfr.org/articles/new-scramble-africa.
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Dheshigen Naidoo and Manisha Gulati

The 2025 G20 Summit is the first held in Africa. Hosted by South Africa, it is the fourth consecutive Global South G20 presidency, taking place alongside Brazil's hosting of the 30th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP30). Could this combination of a multilateral (G20) and multilateral (COP30) hosted by global south countries re-energise the climate action agenda and unlock climate finance for Africa and the developing world?

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African Growth and Opportunity Act

Mutually assured construction

Ronak Gopaldas



The African Growth and Opportunity Act of 2000 is a trade agreement between the United States (US) and Africa. The current agreement ends in 2025, necessitating discussions on renewal and changes to the structure. This report highlights the agreement's key outcomes, challenges and opportunities. It also looks at the extent to which the agreement promotes the US agenda to the detriment of the ideological and political autonomy of African states.

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India–Africa relations

The role of the private sector

Amanda Lucey, Mark Schoeman and Catherine Grant Makokera

Summary

India is becoming an increasingly important economic partner for African countries. Its ties with Africa can be traced to a strong, shared history based on the principles of South–South cooperation, people-to-people linkages and common development challenges. The third India–Africa Forum Summit, which is taking place in October 2015, will allow India–Africa ties to be strengthened further. This forum is one platform used by India in its economic diplomacy with Africa. To enhance relations in areas such as trade and investment, it is critical that the private sector is involved. This paper examines ways in which various stakeholders can enhance private-sector relations between India and Africa.

THE THIRD INDIA–AFRICA Forum Summit (IAFS III) is planned to take place in New Delhi in October 2015. It is expected that all of the African Union (AU) member countries will be invited to participate in the summit. This marks a different approach from the first two meetings, which were attended by only a representative group of African leaders, mainly from the least developed countries. The focus of the interactions to date at these summits has been on increasing the ties between India and Africa in several areas, including trade, investment, food security, information and communication technology (ICT), peace and security, and good governance. Indian and African leaders have acknowledged the roles played by people-to-people linkages. Business is seen as a key driver of economic relations in particular, but civil society also has an opportunity to play a greater role. The IAFS III provides a platform for greater levels of engagement between important South–South partners. Given its high profile and the institutional processes that are developing around the summit, it could arguably provide a useful focus for stakeholders based both in India and African countries with an interest in pursuing a people-centred African perspective on issues of global governance.

This paper contributes to a better understanding of the role played by the private sector and civil society in the interactions between India and Africa. A number of researchers have identified the importance of effective state–business relations for economic growth and development.¹ The international-development and policy community increasingly recognises that private-sector

About the author

Ronak Gopaldas is a political economist, 'pracademic', writer and speaker. His work focuses on the intersection of politics, economics and business in Africa. He is currently a director at Signal Risk, a research fellow at the Centre for African Studies at NTU, a visiting fellow at the London School of Economics and a faculty member at GIBS. He was previously head of country risk at Rand Merchant Bank, where he worked for almost a decade.

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