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‘India-Africa Partnership: Achievements, Challenges and Roadmap 2023’ Report

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Why in News: the 20-member Africa Expert Group (AEG), established by the Vivekananda International Foundation, recently presented the VIF Report entitled ‘India-Africa Partnership: Achievements, Challenges and Roadmap 2023’.

Background

There is a slow realisation that Africa, a continent, accounting for nearly 17% of the world’s population today and reaching 25% in 2050, needs to be studied closely.

Because India’s rise as a global player is inevitably linked to the kind of partnership it enjoys with Africa.

The age-old relationship between India and Africa is an asset of considerable pride and strategic value. That this partnership is multi-dimensional and serves the interest of both parties is widely recognised.

Objectively speaking, it has progressed considerably in many respects in the past two decades, and especially in recent years. But simultaneously, serious introspection and objective appraisal is also essential for this partnership to realise its best potential

In the past 15 years and especially since 2014, India-Africa relations have developed steadily but more progress is achievable.

Africa in transition

The report examines the transitions unfolding in Africa: demographic, economic, political and social. From this blend of changes, stamped by the adverse impact of the pandemic and complicated geopolitics, emerges a continent that is set to transform itself.

It is slowly heading toward regional integration and is devoted to democracy, peace and progress, even as Ethiopia, Sudan, the Central African Republic and other countries continue to battle with the challenges posed by insurgency, ethnic violence and terrorism.

Superimposed on this landscape is the sharpening competition among at least half a dozen external partners such as China, Russia, the United States, the European Union, Japan, Trkiye and the United Arab Emirates for strengthening their relations with parts of Africa to ensure market access, gain energy and mineral security, and increase political and economic influence.

China stands apart, armed with a consistent and robust policy since 2000 to become virtually Africa’s biggest economic partner. An essay in the report aptly portrays China’s role as ‘the infrastructure developer’, ‘the resource provider’, and ‘the financier.’ It has invested enormously in Africa in terms of money, materials and diplomatic push.

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Since 2007, Chinese leaders have visited the continent 123 times, while 251 African leaders have visited China. The VIF report notes that India has a substantive partnership with Africa and a rich fund of goodwill, but it is “essential for New Delhi to review its Africa policy periodically, stay resilient by making the required changes, and place a razor-like focus on its implementation”.

Major Recommendations of the Report

The central part is ‘Roadmap 2030’, a set of nearly 60 policy recommendations that are designed to deepen and diversify the India-Africa partnership. They cover four areas.

1 Political and diplomatic cooperation

Political and diplomatic cooperation should be strengthened by restoring periodic leaders’ summits through the medium of the India-Africa Forum Summit; the last summit was in 2015.

Besides, a new annual strategic dialogue between the chairperson of the African Union (AU) and India’s External Affairs Minister should be launched in 2023.

Another recommendation relates to forging consensus among G-20 members on the AU’s entry into the G-20 as a full member. Action is now under way, following Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s recent communication to G-20 leaders requesting support for this proposal.

The expert group has also suggested that the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) should have a secretary exclusively in charge of African affairs to further enhance the implementation and impact of the Africa policy.

2 Defence and Security cooperation

The government needs to increase the number of defence attachés deployed in Africa, expand dialogue on defence issues, widen the footprint of maritime collaboration, and expand lines of credit to facilitate defence exports.

More can be done to increase the number of defence training slots and enhance cooperation in counter-terrorism, cyber security and emerging technologies.

3 Economic Cooperation

The largest number of recommendations relate to economic and development cooperation. India-Africa trade touching \$98 billion in FY22–23 is an encouraging development. This figure can go up if access to finance through the creation of an Africa Growth Fund (AGF) is ensured.

A special package of measures to improve project exports and build up cooperation in the shipping domain has been suggested. A special focus on promoting trilateral cooperation and deepening science and technology cooperation could pay rich dividends.

4 Socio-cultural cooperation

Socio-cultural cooperation should be increased through greater interaction between universities, think tanks, civil society and media organisations in India and select African countries.

Setting up a National Centre for African Studies will be the right step. Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) and Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) scholarships awarded to Africans should be named after famous African figures.

Visa measures for African students who come to India for higher education should be liberalised. They should also be given work visas for short periods

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5 Special Mechanism for implementing the roadmap

Finally, the report suggests a special mechanism for implementing the 'Roadmap 2030'.

This can best be secured through close collaboration between the MEA and the National Security Council Secretariat through a team of officials working under the joint leadership of the Secretary, Africa in the MEA, and a designated Deputy National Security Adviser.