

Different messages, different methods

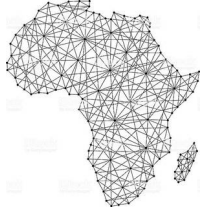


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How India and China are developing their engagements with Africa

Africa's global outreach was once driven by its engagement with the developed world. But this is changing as not only are African countries seeking other partners but emerging powers in Asia are also growing in self-confidence and seeing this as an opportunity to tap into. As the visits to Africa by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping this week underscore, both India and China are shaping new narratives of engaging with Africa. Ahead of the 10th Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (BRICS) Summit in Johannesburg (July 25), Mr. Modi visited Rwanda and Uganda while Mr. Xi's itinerary included Senegal and Rwanda, with a stopover in Mauritius.

Taking up the baton

This is Mr. Modi's second trip to mainland Africa after his visit to Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania and Kenya in 2016. In the last four years, there have been 23 outgoing visits to Africa by the President, the Vice President and the Prime Minister. While Uganda has seen Prime Ministerial-level visits from India in 1997 and 2007, Mr. Modi's visit to Rwanda is the first ever Prime Ministerial visit to the fast-developing East African nation with which India elevated its ties to that of a strategic partnership last year.

Mr. Xi's visit, his first to Africa after being re-elected in March, comes weeks after the first China-Africa Defence and Security Forum last month in Beijing, which saw a host of African defence ministers and army chiefs in attendance.

For both China and India, bolstering economic ties are of paramount importance though Africa's trading patterns with the Asian giants still remain rather traditional; Africa exports raw materials and imports manufactured goods. While India-Africa trade grew from \$11.9 billion (2005-2006) to \$62.66 billion (2017-2018), it is still no match to China, which is now Africa's largest trading partner (\$166 billion in 2011). The Indian private sector has yet to take full advantage of the investment climate in Africa.

Differences in approach

While trade and investments are only part of the story, Indian engagement lays emphasis on the long term — enhancing Africa's productive capacities, diversifying skills and knowledge, and investing in small- and medium-sized enterprises. China's approach is more traditional — resource-extraction, infrastructure development and elite-level wealth creation.

Both India and China are laying emphasis on infrastructure and connectivity projects in priority regions of the world as the next phase of economic globalisation. In China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), East Africa and the Indian Ocean Region are key focus areas.

India's cross-border connectivity with Eastern African countries and Indian Ocean island countries is a natural extension of New Delhi's desire to foster more robust people-to-people connections, increase investment-led trade and business opportunities, and strengthen bilateral partnerships. India is also seeking to reinvigorate its cultural links with East Africa under the rubric of Project 'Mausam', an initiative of the Ministry of Culture, which seeks to revive lost linkages with the Indian Ocean 'world' (East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia). India's African cross-border connectivity has three primary forms: maritime-port connectivity under the government's Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) and the SagarMala initiative; digital connectivity under the Pan African e-Network project on tele-education and tele-medicine (launched in 2004), and air connectivity in the form of direct flights from Indian cities to African destinations.

India, Japan and many African nations have also launched a trilateral initiative, the Asia Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), to develop 'industrial corridors', 'institutional networks' for the growth of Asia and Africa, and to promote development cooperation. Where the AAGC is a consultative initiative between three equal partners (India, Japan and Africa), the BRI is more of a top-down, unilateral approach to secure Chinese interests, which would eventually traverse continental Asia to reach Europe.

Military ties

Africa features significantly in the security and geo-strategic considerations of both India and China. India's security and defence cooperation with Africa is mainly limited to maritime cooperation in the form of anti-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia, deployment of Indian forces to UN peacekeeping missions in Africa, regular shipping visits, and joint-naval patrolling in the Western Indian Ocean Region. These are mainly with Tanzania, Kenya, Mozambique, and the Indian Ocean island countries Mauritius, the Seychelles, Madagascar and Comoros.

China supports Africa's military transformation by providing equipment, advanced technology, and independent capacity-building in security — and the China-Africa Defence and Security Forum is an important development.

It is inevitable that as the centre of gravity of global politics and economics shifts to the Indo-Pacific region, emerging powers like India and China will begin to play a larger role in Africa. There are significant differences in their approaches, and the challenge for them would be to develop partnerships with African nations in a way that makes Africa a part of their growth stories to.

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