



India's African Diplomacy

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This article is based on **“The story of Indian diplomacy in Africa”** which was published in The Hindustan Times on 19/05/2021. It talks about the new opportunities in India-Africa relations.

Under the vaccine-maitri diplomacy, the Indian government aimed to become one of the major global suppliers of Covid-19 vaccines, pledging deliveries to many developing and underdeveloped countries.

With this pledge, India directly targeted neighbours in South Asia as well as providing 10 million vaccine doses to the African continent.

Although the devastation wreaked by the second wave of Covid-19 in India has led to much criticism of the government's vaccine-maitri diplomacy, this will have a forward-looking effect on India's African diplomacy.

India-Africa Relations

- **Strong Foreign Policy Linkages:** India's foreign policy ideas after Independence impacted African decolonisation movements.
 - India's role in organising the 1955 Bandung conference marked the first time that Asian and African countries came together to denounce imperialism and colonialism.
 - Further, with the subsequent pioneering of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), India established many links to African nations.
- **Strong People-to-People Connection:** Historically, Indian traders travelled regularly to the East African coast, forming relationships with local inhabitants in ports leading to the establishment of Africa-based family businesses, some of which exist even today.

This combined with the presence of an influential Indian diaspora has meant that India has meaningful, and positive, relationships with many African countries.
- **Battling Chinese Influence:** Because of the social capital India has in Africa, acquired through the historical, political, economic and people-to-people ties, its presence is welcomed by African countries in a way that China's is not.

Chinese Challenge In Africa

- Yet, despite these achievements, India's immense social capital among African nations has not matched this in material ties, and China's economic and investment presence in Africa has been outstripping India's for many years.
- China's economic footprint in Africa dwarfs that of India, with over 10,000 Chinese firms operating on the continent and China becoming Africa's largest trading partner.
- With the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects, China is essentially trying to offer an alternative authoritarian model of development to African countries.

Way Forward: Opportunities In India-Africa Relations

- **India, as a Balancer:** China has been actively pursuing chequebook and donation diplomacy in Africa. However, Chinese investment is seen as neo-colonial in nature.
 - India's approach, on the other hand, is one that focuses on building local capacities and an equal partnership with Africans and not merely with African elites concerned.
 - In this context, though Africa has been actively engaged with China, it wants India to act as a balancer and net security provider.
- **Enabling Strategic Convergence:** Both India and Japan share a common interest in forging a partnership for Africa's development through the **Asia-Africa Growth corridor**.
 - In this context, India can leverage its global status to establish Africa on the strategic map of global politics.
- **Becoming Voice of Developing World:** Just as India and Africa fought colonialism together, both can now collaborate together for a just, representative and democratic global order that has a voice for around one-third of humanity that lives in Africa and India.
- **Preventing Global Rivalries:** In recent years, several global economic players have strengthened their engagement with African states, with an eye to rising economic opportunities, including in energy, mining, infrastructure and connectivity.
 - As global engagement in Africa increases, India and Africa can ensure that Africa does not once again turn into a theatre of rival ambitions.

Conclusion

India has an intrinsic interest in helping Africa achieve progress. However, had India's investments in Africa kept any kind of comparable pace with that of China, it could have made deeper inroads today.

Drishti Mains Question

Though Africa has been actively engaged with China, it wants India to act as a balancer and net security provider. Comment.
