



The African Union at 20

For Prelims: Countries in African Continent, Minerals of Africa, Horn of Africa, International Institutions

For Mains: India Africa Relations and Agreements, Significance of Africa in Indian Economy, Presence of China in Africa, Challenges for Africa

Why in News?

The African Union is celebrating its 20th Anniversary on 9th of July 2022.

What Do We Know About African Union?

- **About:**
 - The African Union (AU) is a continental body consisting of the 55 member states that make up the countries of the African Continent.
- **Formation:**
 - In 1963, the Organization of African Unity was founded by the independent states of Africa. The organization aimed to promote cooperation between African states.
 - The 1980 Lagos Plan of Action was adopted by the Organization of African Unity. The plan suggested that Africa should minimize reliance upon the West by promoting intra-African trade.
 - **In 2002, the Organization of African Unity was succeeded by the African Union,** which had as one of its goals to accelerate the "economic integration of the continent".

What has the African Union Achieved in 20 Years?

- **African Continental Free Trade Area:**
 - It was established in 2018 by the [African Continental Free Trade Agreement \(AfCTA\)](#).
 - AfCFTA seeks to create a single continental market for goods and services, with free movement of business persons and investments, and thus pave the way for accelerating the establishment of the Continental Customs Union and the African customs union.
 - The AfCFTA preliminary work is on steps such as incremental tariff reduction, elimination of non-tariff barriers, supply chains and dispute settlement.
 - It is expected to boost intra-African trade by about USD35 billion by the end of 2022.
 - The larger market area will likely attract investment for continental infrastructure development.
 - The increased trade will create jobs, enhance Africa's global competitiveness, improve social welfare and position Africa for greater industrialisation.
- **Diplomatic Achievement:**
 - AU has established a permanent mission in Beijing, China, to strengthen economic, commercial and cultural ties with Africa's largest trading partner.
 - This consolidates Africa's global profile and ability to speak with one voice on world affairs.

▪ **Women's Economic Financial Inclusion:**

- AU championed a 10-year continental declaration aimed at **gender equality** and **women's empowerment** that was introduced in February 2020.
- This declaration, called the **Decade of Women's Financial and Economic Inclusion**, sees African leaders commit to taking action for gender inclusion towards sustainable development at national, regional, and continental levels.

What are the Challenges the African Union is Facing?

▪ **Unconstitutional Hold on Power:**

- Africa has seen a troubling resurgence of **military coups** and leaders using unconstitutional means to cling to power.
 - There have been at least 32 coups and coup attempts since 2013.
- Five out of the seven coup attempts since 2020 succeeded.
 - The coup leaders in the five countries — Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, Mali and Sudan — violently suppressed pro-democracy protesters.
- The death toll from the suppression of anti-coup protests in Sudan, for instance, is over 100. Over 18 million Sudanese are threatened by **food insecurity**.

▪ **Disregard for the Rule of Law:**

- An increasing number of democratically elected and legitimate governments are cracking down on **civil society organisations**.
- The governments are squeezing out institutions that should hold them accountable and are silencing the media.
- They arrest activists and enact laws that restrict civil society organisations and their activities.

▪ **UNSC:**

- The **UN Security Council** is yet to give Africa at least two permanent seats.
 - Over two-thirds of the council's agenda concerns Africa, yet the continent is excluded from permanent representation.

How has Indian African Relations Been?

▪ **Social Infrastructure:**

- The India-Africa social infrastructure (education, health, skills) cooperation is multidimensional, comprehensive, and involves national, state, and subnational actors working toward augmenting African institutional and individual capacities.

▪ **Common Geo-Political Interests:**

- India and Africa have common interests on international issues, **UN reforms**, **counter-terrorism**, **peacekeeping**, **cybersecurity**, and **energy security**.

▪ **Economic Cooperation:**

- India's economic engagement with Africa is substantive.
- In the last decade and a half, trade between India and Africa has multiplied and diversified—bilateral trade of USD63.3 billion in 2018-19 made India the third-largest trading partner for the continent.

▪ **Support in Fight Against Covid-19:**

- Under the **e-ITEC initiative**, India has shared **Covid-19** management strategies, training webinars exclusively to train healthcare professionals from Africa by Indian health experts.
 - India is also sending consignments of essential medicines, including **hydroxychloroquine (HCO)** and paracetamol, to many African countries in addition to doctors and paramedics.

▪ **Recent Development:**

- India's first high-level visit in Africa for 2022 took place and following developments took place:
 - India announced the Phase-II upgradation of Entrepreneurship Development and Technology Centre (CEDT) in Dakar, built with Indian grant assistance.
 - India also offered a Special **ITEC** English proficiency course for Senegalese public servants.
 - India announced a Special training programme for a batch of 15 Senegalese diplomats at Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Services.

- **Both sides signed three MOUs:**
 - [MoU on cooperation in Youth Affairs](#)
 - [Cultural Exchange Programme \(CEP\)](#)
 - [Visa waiver Agreement for diplomats/officials](#)

What are the Possible Opportunities in India Africa Relations?

- **Addressing Food security:** Agriculture and food security can also be a fulcrum for deepening ties.
 - Africa has a major chunk of the world's arable land but produces a very small percentage of the global agri-output.
 - India has proven expertise in the agriculture sector, being the top producer of much agricultural produce.
 - Thereby, India and Africa both can cooperate in ensuring food and nutritional security for each other.
- **Combating Neo-Colonialism:**
 - China has been actively pursuing Chequebook and donation diplomacy in Africa.
 - However, Chinese investment is seen as neo-colonial in nature as it focuses on money, political influence, hard-infrastructure projects and resource extraction.
 - 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.
- **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.

Way Forward

- The AU should deal decisively with member states that undermine the rule of law within their territories.
 - The rule of law is essential for sustained and inclusive economic growth, [sustainable development](#), and the eradication of [poverty](#) and [hunger](#).
 - The rule of law enables people, business and commerce to flourish.
- African leaders should address the problems which military leaders use as the pretext for coups in African states — **mainly corruption, misrule and insecurity**. Solving these problems would deny the military an excuse to interfere in civilian matters.
- Instead of cracking down on citizens and civil society, states should use their natural resources to grow their economies and empower citizens.
 - **Collective economic strength** will improve Africa's standing as a global actor.
- The AU must also be firm and consistent in dealing with constitutional violations.
 - Recent examples show that perpetrators simply defy calls to restore constitutional order.

Source: [DTE](#)