



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



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AFRICAN PULSE

This monthly publication surveys strategic and economic security related developments in Africa of significance for India and is authored by Amb. Ruchira Kamboj, Senior Fellow for International Security and Global Affairs. Your comments and feedback may be addressed to the author at ruchira@dpg.org.in. To subscribe, please [click here](#).

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Cover Images:

1. Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurating the opening ceremony of the 3rd India-Africa Forum Summit in New Delhi on October 29, 2015. Source: [India-Africa Forum Summit](#)
2. Dr S. Jaishankar during the launch of 4th India Africa Forum Summit Logo and Theme on April 23, 2026. Source: [X/@DrSJaishankar](#)
3. On June 2, 2026, the Government of India dispatched the second tranche of critical medical aid to Kampala, Uganda, to support the Africa CDC's Ebola response efforts. Source: [X/@AfricaCDC](#)

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African Pulse:

Beyond the Summit: India and Africa in a Changing Global Order

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Beyond the Summit: India and Africa in a Changing Global Order

by

Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj

Introduction

The much-awaited Fourth India-Africa Forum Summit, scheduled for end-May 2026, was postponed following the WHO's declaration of a public health emergency. The joint statement issued by the Government of India and the African Union was unequivocal: "The two sides agreed that it would be advisable to convene the Fourth India-Africa Forum Summit at a later date."

What this Means

At one level, the postponement was a setback. The Summit was expected to provide political direction and renewed momentum to a partnership that has steadily expanded across trade, development cooperation, digital public infrastructure, capacity building, health, education, and defence. It would also have offered an opportunity to articulate a more contemporary India-Africa agenda in a rapidly shifting global order.

At another level, however, the postponement is also a reminder of an important reality: strategic partnerships cannot depend solely on summitry. They are sustained through continuous engagement, institutional cooperation, implementation on the ground, and long-term alignment of interests. In that sense, the real test lies not in whether a summit is delayed, but whether the momentum of cooperation continues despite disruption.

Ahead of the Summit, External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar had been unequivocal: "The forthcoming Summit will shape the next phase of our partnership, one that is more ambitious, more inclusive and more future-oriented."

The imperative behind that vision remains unchanged. If anything, the delay should reinforce the need to sustain momentum. It is time to elevate this time-tested partnership to the next level, making it more operational, more diversified, and more resilient through concrete initiatives, institutional linkages, and sustained people-to-people engagement.

From Solidarity to Co-Production

India-Africa relations remain steady and positive, even if they continue to operate somewhat below their full potential. Historically, India's engagement has been strongest in Eastern and Southern Africa, regions connected by longstanding diaspora links, maritime geography and commercial ties across the Indian Ocean. Engagement with Western and Central Africa, while growing, has been comparatively less developed.

Since 2014, however, the relationship has acquired greater momentum. There have been approximately fifty high-level visits from India to Africa and nearly one hundred visits by African leaders and ministers to India. The diplomatic footprint has expanded significantly. India today maintains forty-six diplomatic missions across Africa, seventeen of which have been opened in recent years, largely in Western and Central Africa. African countries, too, maintain a substantial diplomatic presence in New Delhi, reflecting the growing importance both sides attach to the partnership.

Economically, India is today among Africa's leading trade and investment partners, ranking among the continent's top trading partners and investors. Yet, trade remains disproportionately concentrated in Eastern and Southern Africa. Several factors help explain this imbalance: complex supply chains, higher shipping costs, security risks associated with conflict zones, weak connectivity, and the fact that Eastern and Southern Africa are often viewed through the lens of India's Indian Ocean neighbourhood. Meanwhile, competitors such as China have invested across the continent with greater geographical spread, while countries such as Turkey, the UAE and France enjoy either geographical proximity or longstanding historical networks in parts of Western and Central Africa.

Conflict and instability further complicate the picture. From the Sahel and the Horn of Africa to parts of West and Central Africa, insecurity raises costs, disrupts supply chains, damages infrastructure, constrains market access and reinforces risk perceptions among investors. The result is a self-reinforcing cycle: instability discourages investment; limited investment constrains economic opportunity; weak economic outcomes reinforce perceptions of risk; and investment remains subdued. While India has extended nearly 190 Lines of Credit across Africa, its private sector remains relatively risk-averse and lacks the scale of state-backed overseas investment often associated with China.

Yet the direction of travel is unmistakably positive. The relationship today spans trade, development, security, technology, energy and global governance. The

challenge is no longer whether engagement exists, but how it can be scaled, diversified and made more transformational.

The most promising developments are those that move beyond traditional aid and capacity building towards co-production, co-development, co-innovation and co-manufacturing.

Knowledge and Human Capital

One of the most significant examples is IIT Zanzibar, the first overseas campus of IIT Madras. The model itself is noteworthy: academic excellence and curriculum design are provided by India, while infrastructure and operating costs are supported by Zanzibar. Students receive IIT Madras degrees while remaining rooted in Africa. This represents a genuine investment in African human capital rather than a conventional development project.

The same principle is visible in initiatives such as the Gandhi-Mandela Centre of Specialisation for Artisan Skills in South Africa and the India-Africa Institute of Agriculture and Rural Development in Malawi, which focus on vocational training, entrepreneurship, agro-financing and skills development. These projects help create local capabilities rather than long-term dependencies.

Technology and Digital Transformation

India's digital public infrastructure offers perhaps its greatest opportunity for scalable cooperation. Building on the Pan-African e-Network, which has long delivered tele-education and tele-medicine services, cooperation has expanded into digital identity, payments and public service delivery.

Several African countries have signed agreements to adapt elements of the India Stack architecture. The Modular Open Source Identity Platform (MOSIP), developed in India, is already helping governments establish digital identity systems, while India's digital payments model is beginning to gain traction on the continent. These initiatives demonstrate how technology can be adapted to local needs while remaining affordable, scalable and sovereign.

Resilience and Sustainable Development

Africa and India share common vulnerabilities in areas such as energy access, climate resilience, food security and disaster preparedness. Cooperation through the

International Solar Alliance, the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure and the Global Biofuels Alliance reflects a growing effort to build collective resilience.

At the project level, India-supported solar and hydroelectric initiatives in countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sierra Leone, together with transmission partnerships in Kenya, demonstrate a shift towards long-term infrastructure development. The proposed Critical Minerals Circularity Initiative and India's growing interest in critical mineral assets in Zambia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania and Mozambique add a strategic dimension to this partnership, linking Africa's resource wealth with India's manufacturing and energy transition ambitions.

Security and Maritime Cooperation

Defence and security cooperation has also deepened considerably. India contributes approximately five thousand peacekeepers across UN missions in Africa and has expanded defence exports and training partnerships. Mechanisms such as the India-Africa Defence Ministers' Conclave, the Africa-India Field Training Exercise (AFINDEX) and the Africa India Key Maritime Engagement (AIKEYME) exercise have strengthened institutional defence cooperation.

Maritime security has emerged as a particularly important area of collaboration, encompassing counter-piracy operations, maritime domain awareness, information sharing, trafficking prevention and the protection of sea lanes. As both sides depend heavily on secure maritime commerce, this area offers considerable scope for further expansion.

Co-production and Industrial Partnerships

Some of the most compelling examples of the future partnership are emerging in manufacturing and industrial collaboration. India's pharmaceutical sector already supplies around twenty percent of Africa's pharmaceutical imports. Increasingly, however, Indian companies are establishing local manufacturing facilities and production bases across the continent. Similar opportunities exist in defence manufacturing, renewable energy equipment, critical minerals processing and agricultural value chains.

The India-Morocco defence manufacturing facility at Berrechid illustrates the direction in which the partnership could evolve: combining African location

advantages with Indian technology, expertise and industrial capacity to create mutual benefit for both sides.

Global Governance and South-South Solidarity

India and Africa increasingly find common cause in shaping a more representative and equitable international order. New Delhi has consistently supported Africa's rightful place in global governance institutions, most notably through its successful advocacy for the inclusion of the African Union as a permanent member of the G20 during India's 2023 presidency. India has likewise been an early and vocal supporter of Africa's demand for permanent representation in a reformed UN Security Council, backing the Ezulwini Consensus and Africa's call for at least two permanent African seats in an expanded Council. This convergence reflects more than diplomatic goodwill. It is rooted in a shared belief that global institutions must better reflect contemporary realities and give greater voice to the developing world. In this sense, India-Africa cooperation is not confined to development partnerships alone; it increasingly extends to joint advocacy for a more inclusive, democratic and representative system of global governance.

The broader lesson is clear. The next phase of India-Africa relations cannot be driven by trade, development assistance and capacity building alone. The emphasis must increasingly shift towards partnerships that create value jointly, build local capabilities, generate employment and foster innovation on both sides.

The direction of travel is therefore right. The challenge now is one of scale, consistency and geographical reach. Engagement must become more evenly distributed across the continent, particularly in Western and Central Africa, and more responsive to African priorities rather than donor-driven frameworks. Where co-development models have been attempted, they have generally yielded positive outcomes. The task ahead is to replicate and expand them.

Competitive Landscape

The urgency is heightened by an increasingly crowded strategic landscape. Africa today is a theatre of intense engagement involving China, the Gulf states, Turkey, the European Union, the United States, Russia, Japan and the Republic of Korea. Italy's Mattei Plan is gaining traction in the energy sector, while the recently concluded Africa Forward Summit announced €23 billion in investment commitments. The proliferation of summits and initiatives in 2026 reflects a growing recognition that

Africa will be central to future debates on demographics, resources, energy security, supply chains and global governance.

For India, therefore, the question is no longer whether Africa matters. The question is whether the partnership can evolve quickly enough from one centred on assistance and goodwill to one grounded in co-creation, co-production and shared prosperity.

Conclusion

Beyond historical goodwill, India's comparative advantage lies in demand-driven cooperation, lower political conditionalities, human resource partnerships, digital public goods, affordable innovation, training and institution-building. The ingredients for a stronger partnership are already in place. What is required now is greater consistency, diversification and resilience.

The postponement of the India Africa Forum Summit should not slow the real work of the partnership. Lines of credit, digital partnerships, capacity building, healthcare, education, defence cooperation and connectivity projects must continue uninterrupted. Relationships are ultimately sustained through continuity and delivery, not events alone.

At the same time, the partnership must evolve. The next phase of India-Africa relations cannot be confined to trade, development assistance and capacity building. It must increasingly be anchored in co-production, co-innovation and co-development across sectors such as manufacturing, digital public infrastructure, skilling, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, renewable energy and defence.

This shift is important because Africa is not a peripheral theatre in the emerging global order. Its demographic dynamism, critical mineral reserves, digital transformation, maritime geography and growing political influence will help shape the twenty-first century. India's engagement must therefore be strategic, long-term and future-oriented. The direction of travel is right. The task now is to scale it up, broaden its reach and build together rather than merely assist.



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