



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



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Cover Images:

1. *The Thirty-Ninth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union (AU) concluded on February 15, 2026, at the AU Headquarters in Addis Ababa. Source: [African Union](#)*
2. *India Africa Forum Summit – IV logo: Source: [India-Africa Forum Summit](#)*
3. *On 9 September 2023, during the G20 Summit in New Delhi, the African Union was officially admitted as a permanent member. Source: [G20 India](#)*

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African Pulse:

Africa as a Strategic Priority: The 'Year of Africa Summits' and Its Implications for India

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Africa as a Strategic Priority: The 'Year of Africa Summits' and Its Implications for India

by

Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj

Executive Summary

The year 2026 represents a significant moment in global diplomacy, marked by an unprecedented concentration of high-level engagements with Africa. A wide range of actors, including India, France, Italy, Germany, Russia, Turkey, and the United States, are convening or have already convened summits with African partners within a single calendar year. This clustering is neither accidental nor routine. Rather, it reflects a deeper structural shift in international politics, as Africa emerges as a central arena for economic opportunity, strategic competition, and geopolitical alignment.

The convergence of these summits signals a shift from episodic engagement with Africa to sustained, and increasingly competitive, outreach. More importantly, it underscores the continent's growing agency: African states are no longer passive recipients of external initiatives, but active participants shaping the terms of engagement. The drivers are clear: access to critical minerals for the energy transition, the prospect of a \$6.7 trillion consumer market by 2030, and Africa's expanding diplomatic leverage.

African governments are also practising what might be described as 'à la carte' diplomacy, calibrating partnerships to specific needs: energy from one partner, infrastructure from another, security from a third, without seeking exclusive alignments. Understanding the forces behind this 'year of summits' is therefore essential to assessing both the evolving global order and India's role within it.

Summit Roll Call

India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS-IV), New Delhi, May 28-31, 2026

The long-awaited fourth edition of IAFS will likely be held from May 28-31 in New Delhi. This is India's flagship Africa diplomatic platform and has not been convened since 2015. It is expected to shape the next phase of the partnership, "one that is more ambitious, more inclusive, and more future-oriented". Continuity is likely across core areas such as trade, development, security, and critical minerals, even as the agenda evolves to reflect emerging priorities.

France-Africa Summit, Nairobi, Kenya, 2026

France's Africa summit breaks with decades of tradition. For the first time, it is being held in a non-Francophone country, Kenya, a symbolic acknowledgment that Paris's old sphere of influence in West Africa has eroded dramatically following coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Guinea. President Macron and Kenya's William Ruto are co-hosting, with India also reportedly involved in planning discussions, signalling a new triangular cooperation logic.

Italy-Mattei Plan Africa Summit, Ethiopia, February 2026 (completed)

Italy's Giorgia Meloni has made Africa central to her foreign policy through the Mattei Plan, a structured framework for European-African co-investment. The 2026 summit was notably hosted on African soil for the first time, a deliberate signal of partnership rather than patronage.

Under the Plan, Italy has actively pursued energy partnerships with North African countries such as Algeria and Libya, focusing on increasing gas supplies to Europe as an alternative to Russian energy. At the same time, the plan also emphasises investment in renewable energy and green hydrogen projects across Africa, particularly in countries such as Ethiopia. These initiatives reflect a dual approach, addressing immediate energy needs while also building long-term partnerships in clean energy transitions. More broadly, European engagement through initiatives such as the Africa-EU Energy Partnership aims to integrate African countries into global energy value chains while ensuring a stable resource supply for European markets.

Germany-Africa Business Summit, Ghana, November 2026

The 6th Germany Africa Business Summit will be convened in Ghana, bringing over 1,000 business leaders together. Germany is positioning itself as a serious alternative to China in infrastructure and clean energy financing across the continent.

US-Africa Business Summit, Mauritius, 2026, Mid-2026

The 18th US-Africa Business Summit moves to Mauritius, building on the previous edition which generated over \$4 billion in deals and convened 12 African heads of state. The focus is financial services, ICT, renewable energy, and critical minerals. Washington is increasingly viewing Africa through the lens of supply chain resilience as its rivalry with China intensifies.

Russia-Africa Summit (Third Edition), Fall-2026

Russia plans its third Africa summit in the autumn of 2026. Moscow's pitch is primarily political – non-alignment, sovereignty, rejection of Western conditionality – but its economic track record in Africa remains thin. Russian financial institutions

view the continent as a high-risk environment and business follow-through from earlier summits has been weak.

Turkey-Africa Summit (Fourth Edition), Libya, 2026

Turkey holds its fourth continent-wide summit. Ankara is proving nimbler than Russia: Turkish Airlines physically connects African cities, Turkish construction firms are visibly present across the continent, and Turkey has positioned itself as a reliable middle power with no colonial baggage.

Africa CEO Forum, Rwanda, May 14-15, 2026

The continent's premier private sector summit gathers 2,500 CEOs, ministers, and investors in Kigali, the city that has become Africa's Davos equivalent. This is the business community's forum, not a government-to-government exercise, and it is increasingly where real deal flow originates.

Powering Africa Summit, Washington DC, March 19-20, 2026 (completed)

The 11th Powering Africa Summit brought together US government initiatives, African energy ministers, and private sector investors with an explicit focus on critical minerals and energy infrastructure investment strategies.

Why Africa, and Why Now?

1. At the heart of this intensified engagement is a single question: access to critical minerals. Africa holds a substantial share of global reserves of cobalt (the Democratic Republic of the Congo alone accounts for over 70 per cent of global supply), as well as lithium, manganese, nickel, platinum group metals, and rare earth elements, all indispensable for emerging technologies such as electric vehicles, renewable energy systems, and advanced electronics. As countries accelerate their transitions towards green energy and digital economies, securing reliable access to these resources has become a strategic priority.

This emphasis was evident at the Powering Africa Summit, where critical minerals featured prominently, including in the event's subtitle. Reports by international organisations have also increasingly highlighted Africa's potential not merely as a supplier of raw materials, but as a future participant in higher-value segments of global supply chains. This has, in turn, positioned the continent as a focal point of competition among

major powers seeking to diversify supply chains and reduce dependence on dominant actors, particularly China.

2. Energy security constitutes a second major driver. The disruptions caused by the Ukraine war have forced countries, especially in Europe, to rethink their energy dependencies. Africa's oil and gas reserves, combined with its renewable energy potential, offer viable alternatives. Initiatives such as Italy's Africa-focused strategy under the Mattei Plan illustrate how European engagement with Africa is now closely tied to the need for energy diversification and long-term stability. In this context, Africa is not merely a partner but a strategic buffer against future energy shocks.
3. A third factor shaping this engagement is the China dimension. Over the past two decades, China has established a significant presence in Africa through infrastructure investments, loans, and development projects under the Belt and Road Initiative. While this engagement has contributed to infrastructure development, it has also generated concerns about debt sustainability and asymmetrical economic relationships. These concerns, in turn, have created space for other actors to expand their presence by offering alternative models of partnership.

The European Union, for instance, has sought to position itself as a sustainable and standards-based partner through initiatives such as the Global Gateway, which focuses on infrastructure, digital connectivity, and energy investments in Africa. Similarly, the United States has prioritised private-sector-led engagement through platforms such as the U.S.-Africa Business Summit, emphasising trade and investment opportunities. Russia, on the other hand, has focused more on political and security partnerships through its Russia-Africa Summit, while Turkey has expanded its footprint through trade, construction, and defence cooperation, including its Turkey-Africa Partnership Summit.

China's deep footprint has catalysed a more competitive, multi-partner engagement in Africa, expanding the strategic space for other global actors.

4. Beyond resources and competition, Africa's demographic trajectory adds another layer of significance. With one of the fastest-growing populations in the world, the continent is expected to become a major consumer market in the coming decades. Its consumer and business spending is expected to hit USD 6.7 trillion by 2030. By 2050, one in four humans will be African. The AfCFTA, operational since 2021, is creating a single market of 1.4 billion people with a combined GDP approaching USD 4 trillion. This makes it an attractive destination for trade, investment, and industrial partnerships. Countries engaging Africa today are, therefore, positioning themselves for long-term economic engagement rather than short-term gains. This trend is already visible in initiatives such as the Germany-Africa Business Summit, which focuses on fostering private sector investment and industrial cooperation, and the U.S.-Africa Business Summit hosted in Mauritius, which aims to connect African markets with global investors. These platforms highlight how external actors are increasingly viewing Africa not only as a source of raw materials but as a future centre of consumption, production, and innovation.

5. African nations have also shed the passivity that once characterised their engagement with major powers. They practise what analysts have described as "à la carte" diplomacy, calibrating partnerships to specific needs, drawing energy from one partner, infrastructure from another, and security support from a third, without committing to exclusive alignments. The African Union's inclusion as a permanent member of the G20 under India's 2023 presidency marked a significant recognition of this growing agency.

Summits now offer African leaders tangible diplomatic leverage: visibility, competitive financing options, and the ability to engage multiple partners on favourable terms. William Ruto, once critical of externally driven engagement formats, has since positioned Kenya at the centre of several such initiatives, including high-level convenings in Nairobi. That evolution is telling.

Africa's political weight in global governance also cannot be overlooked. With over 50 countries, the continent represents a significant voting bloc

in international institutions such as the United Nations. Typically, at least three members of the African Union serve as non-permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, constituting a substantive presence within the Council on African issues. Engagement with Africa thus carries clear diplomatic dividends, enabling countries to build coalitions and strengthen their standing within the Global South.

6. Equally important is the shift in Africa's own approach. African countries are asserting their preferences and negotiating partnerships on their own terms. This shift aligns closely with the African Union Agenda 2063, which sets out a long-term vision centred on industrialisation, economic diversification, and self-reliance. The agenda places strong emphasis on African ownership of development processes, including the need for value addition within the continent rather than the continued export of raw materials.

As a result, African states are prioritising partnerships that support local capacity-building, technology transfer, and sustainable development outcomes. This has important implications for external actors, who must align their engagement strategies with African-defined priorities rather than impose externally driven models. In this sense, Africa is no longer a passive recipient of global interest, but an active negotiator shaping the terms of its engagement.

Taken together, these examples illustrate Africa's growing centrality as a site of engagement, with different actors advancing distinct models of partnership.

India-Africa Forum Summit IV: Opportunities and Expectations

Against this backdrop, the India-Africa Forum Summit IV (IAFS-IV) assumes particular importance. As India's principal platform for engagement with Africa, the summit provides an opportunity to consolidate relationships, expand cooperation, and position India within this increasingly competitive landscape.

One of India's key strengths lies in its political positioning in Africa. Unlike many other actors, India's engagement has historically been framed in terms of partnership rather than patronage. Official statements have consistently emphasised shared historical experiences, particularly the legacy of

colonialism, and a commitment to mutual development. This framing allows India to position itself as a credible and trusted partner within the Global South.

At a more practical level, the summit offers opportunities to strengthen economic ties. Expanding trade and investment will be essential, particularly as African markets continue to grow. India can leverage its private sector capabilities to deepen its presence in sectors such as infrastructure, digital technology, healthcare, and education.

At the same time, access to critical minerals and energy resources will be vital for India's own economic and industrial ambitions, particularly in areas linked to manufacturing, clean energy, and emerging technologies. This also creates an opportunity to show a more future-oriented India-Africa partnership, aligned with the priorities articulated by the political leadership.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of India's approach is its development partnership model. Unlike some other actors, India emphasises demand-driven cooperation, capacity building, and technology transfer. This includes initiatives in training, education, and skill development, which are often aligned with the needs identified by African partners themselves. Importantly, this model is characterised by the absence of political conditionalities, which enhances its acceptability.

Despite these strengths, India's position must be understood within a broader competitive environment. China continues to dominate infrastructure investment, while European actors bring financial resources and regulatory frameworks. Russia and Turkey, meanwhile, are expanding their engagement in the security and political domains.

India's comparative advantage lies in its credibility and mode of engagement rather than scale. Its engagement is often perceived as less intrusive and more respectful of sovereignty. However, this also presents a challenge: as engagement intensifies, India will need to scale up and accelerate its efforts to remain relevant, particularly in strategic sectors such as energy and critical minerals, while ensuring more efficient implementation.

Project execution must move faster and become far more outcome-driven. There is a need to scale up implementation capacity and adopt sharper, deal-making agility, closer to a corporate mindset. In an increasingly competitive environment, a slow-moving or lacklustre posture will simply not secure opportunities.

Africa's key constraints remain capacity, skills, and finance, and even when capital is available, deploying it efficiently and profitably is often a challenge. Strategic partnerships with established Indian businesses across sectors can bridge these gaps, creating a win-win model that combines African opportunity with Indian execution capability.

Conclusion

The year of Africa summits is indicative of a broader transformation in global politics. Africa is no longer viewed as a peripheral region but as a central component of future economic and geopolitical configurations. It is emerging simultaneously as a resource hub, a market, and a diplomatic partner.

This growing agency also explains why multiple powers are engaging Africa simultaneously, each attempting to align with African priorities while advancing their own strategic interests. The clustering of Africa-focused summits in 2026 marks a shift from engagement to competition, underpinned by structural changes in the global economy and geopolitics. Africa's importance is being driven by its resources, demographic potential, and political influence, while its growing agency ensures that partnerships are negotiated rather than imposed.

For countries like India, this transformation presents both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, it opens space to build long-term partnerships aligned with India's broader vision of a multipolar world. On the other, it requires navigating an increasingly crowded and competitive landscape while maintaining a distinct and credible approach.

Against this backdrop, the upcoming India-Africa Forum Summit IV represents a critical moment. It offers an opportunity to translate longstanding goodwill into tangible outcomes and to position India as a key partner in Africa's development trajectory. Success, however, will depend not only on sustaining India's distinctive approach, but also on adapting it to the demands of a rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape.

Ultimately, the question is not whether Africa will remain central to global politics, it clearly will, but how effectively India can engage with it in a manner that is both strategic and sustainable.



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