

India-Africa Relations Through the Current Crisis and Beyond



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India-Africa relations are at an all time high at present and the current global pandemic presents an opportunity to further strengthen our relations with the continent in various sectors and through various modalities. Working together during this global pandemic outbreak presents an opportunity for both sides to illustrate the power of South-South Cooperation in the provision of Global Public Goods (GPGs). India-Africa relations are guided by the principles laid down by Prime Minister Modi during his visit to Uganda, and these principles include commitments towards improving agriculture, increasing private investment flows based on local priorities, addressing climate change, helping the African nations to benefit from digital-led transformations, addressing the aspirations of the African youth and building a sustained partnership that seeks to work together for an inclusive world order. Leveraging these principles to guide India-Africa efforts in fighting the global pandemic will provide an example to the world of the power of developing countries in managing and overcoming adversities during the times of a crisis. As such the focus of the India-Africa partnership needs to be on four key areas when fighting the pandemic:

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Health

It is amply clear that the current pandemic is fatal among members who are of an advanced age and suffering from other conditions such as diabetes, cardio-vascular diseases, etc. Hence the surest way of combating the disease is by having a robust public health system for the elderly and those suffering from Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). Unfortunately many developing countries have experienced an increase in the percentage of elderly in their population with low awareness of NCD prevention. Apart from a robust public health system, there is also the need for a reliable pharmaceutical supply chain which ensures the health security of the population. Today many developing countries are dependent on a single supplier of Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) and this dependence on global value chains (GVCs) has cost them dear. The third aspect which is specific to the current crisis is the rapid genetic changes occurring in the virus. Combating this rapid mutation and creating vaccines tailor made for the genetic profile of the host are challenges that require the presence of advanced bio-technological skills. All of the above points, i.e. the need for a robust public health system for the elderly and those suffering from NCDs; the need for derisking the API supply chain and creating reliable pharmaceutical value chains; and the need for developing domestic

bio-technological capacities are areas that can be focal points for the India-Africa efforts at combating the pandemic. The modalities for the same can include sharing of best practices, creation of focused investment funds, capacity building programmes, collaborative research initiatives, and other initiatives that effectively address these areas.

Agriculture

The preventive measures to contain the spread of the pandemic include implementing a lockdown leading to a severe disruption in the domestic economies of all the implementing countries. In such situation the most vulnerable are the poorest of the population who suffer disproportionately in terms of food shortages, hunger, malnutrition, and similar issues. Combating this requires the presence of robust food security systems, distribution and storage infrastructure, as well as investments in improving agricultural productivity and nutritional quality. All these areas are suitable focal points for an India-Africa partnership in the agricultural sector targeted to mitigate the long-term impact of the pandemic on the poorest people in developing countries. Modalities in this area will need to include private sector outreach, collaborative development of technology suitable for local conditions, capacity building programmes, and other suitable initiatives.

Digital Technologies (including ICT based E-governance) Development Practices and New Frameworks

The need for reducing direct people to people contact during this crisis has necessitated the use of digital technologies for carrying out several tasks that were handled personally during pre-crisis times. Activities such as shopping, reading a newspaper, learning in a classroom, interacting with friends, meeting with colleagues, etc. are best handled using digital technology to ensure minimal risk of being infected while continuing with regular work. Apart from this, handling of the crisis itself can be done effectively using digital technology.

There are now a slew of apps that are designed to identify, manage, and disseminate information regarding the people infected with the pandemic. This helps in the ease of governance when it comes to the activities required of the public health system in implementing preventive and other measures for combating the pandemic. Hence the digital technologies must be a focus area for any India-Africa efforts aimed at the pandemic. In this the modalities to be used should be challenge funds, public private initiatives, capacity building programmes, collaborative technology research, and other sector-specific modalities.

Finally the pandemic is also a disruption to the global economic order. It has caused all the prevailing GVCs to collapse. The worst affected economies are also the ones which were prevailing suppliers or consumers in the old order. Major input suppliers like the Latin American economies, manufacturing centres such as China, financial centres such as the UK, and consumption powerhouses such as the USA and the EU are projected to experience massive unemployment and decline in economic growth for the near term. In such a scenario it is fairly obvious that global treaties regulating trade, investment, intellectual property, and domestic support may be temporarily overlooked. Moreover new sanitary and phyto-sanitary barriers may be introduced, new testing procedures and norms may be introduced, movement of people may be restricted, and new rules and standards may have to be negotiated globally. It is imperative that these negotiations if they occur are not skewed in the favour of particular countries but are inclusive and take into account the development needs of everyone at the table. India and Africa are still in a relatively favourable position with regard to the pandemic in terms of infections and deaths. However if their efforts in combating the pandemic overlook

the future economic developments, then this favourable position may be overturned. Hence the effort at combating the pandemic must also focus on the emerging narrative with regard to the future global economic architecture, and the procedures that will form a part of it. The modalities for this may be round tables, high-level meetings of experts, white papers, capacity building programmes, collaborative research and advisory, and other suitable measures.

As things stand the pandemic is a crisis situation. However, with cooperation between countries, it may also be an opportunity for making disruptive changes that may make for a more inclusive world in the long run. If India and Africa can partner together in the key areas as discussed they would not only be able to come out of this crisis successfully but also provide a shining example of the provision of GPGs to the world.

SOUTH AFRICA FIGHTS COVID-19 WITH INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGY

South Africa has been under lockdown till the end of April to stop the spread of Coronavirus. In this situation, technology is proving to be extremely useful in helping to combat the outbreak.

Contact tracing apps are becoming popular worldwide, and several countries are creating their own indigenous variants. Such an app uses Bluetooth and location technology to track people who are infected and notify those who were in close proximity to them in the last 15 days. Telkom, South Africa's biggest telecom company, has collaborated with Samsung to help the government in contact tracing.

About 1500 handsets have been distributed by Samsung to the provinces that have been hardest hit by the epidemic. Trackers will be connected free of charge using Telkom's FreeMe packages for the next 6 months and will fast track the government's ability to track and trace infected cases throughout the country.

GIS and location technologies are particularly useful in providing real-time visualisations and identifying hotspots. South African government has also approached private tech players that are involved in community mapping. For instance, the Vulnerable Communities Map uses publicly available data to identify and support vulnerable communities.

Source: Chaturvedi, A. (2020, April 21). How South Africa uses tech to fight COVID-19. *Geospatial World*. Retrieved from <https://www.geospatialworld.net/blogs/how-south-africa-uses-tech-to-fight-covid-19/>