Concept Note

Background

India and Africa share deep-rooted civilisational ties, historical solidarity and a common legacy of anti-colonial struggles. Yet, their contemporary significance extends far beyond these historical ties. Today, India-Africa relations are increasingly shaped by shared development aspirations, economic complementarities, technological transformation, geopolitical convergence and a shared commitment to a more representative and equitable global order.

The relationship has acquired renewed strategic importance at a time when Africa is emerging as one of the principal centres of global economic, demographic and geopolitical change. Africa is no longer simply a recipient of development assistance or a source of commodities. Its growing markets, young population, natural resources, strategic location, digital transformation and expanding regional integration make the continent an increasingly important contributor to the future of the global economy.

For India, Africa is consequently not only a development partner but an important partner in building a more representative Global South and a more balanced international system. The next phase of India-Africa engagement must go beyond traditional state-led frameworks. It must deepen economic linkages, expand technological and innovation partnerships, address shared

development and security challenges, and strengthen people-to-people connections to foster greater societal understanding and long term collaboration. This context provides the rationale for a High-Level Policy Dialogue focused on the future of Africa and the next generation of India-Africa partnership.

The timing of this High-Level Policy Dialogue is particularly significant, as it will serve as a precursor to the forthcoming Fourth India–Africa Forum Summit (IAFS-IV), which is expected to provide fresh impetus to India's engagement with Africa. The Summit's theme "***IA SPIRIT: India-Africa Strategic Partnership for Innovation, Resilience, and Inclusive Transformation,***" reflects the need to move the relationship towards new areas of cooperation while consolidating existing partnerships.

The High-Level Policy Dialogue which is being organised by DAKSHIN – RIS in collaboration with Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India will focus on India's three important pillars on which it has been engaged with Africa over decades.

The first pillar is political solidarity. The first pillar is political solidarity. Rooted in shared principles of sovereignty, equality and mutual respect, political solidarity has been a cornerstone of India-Africa relations. Over the decades, it has evolved into closer cooperation in multilateral forums and a shared commitment to a more representative and equitable global order. A significant milestone was the African Union's admission as a permanent member of the G20 during India's G20 Presidency in 2023. India has also consistently supported greater African representation in a reformed United Nations Security Council and worked with African countries to strengthen the collective voice of the Global South.

The second pillar is development cooperation. India's model has increasingly emphasised demand-driven, locally owned and capacity-building-oriented cooperation rather than a donor-recipient relationship. Indian development assistance in Africa has included infrastructure, agriculture, power, transport, health, education, ICT, skill development and institutional capacity building. India has extended 196 Lines of Credit worth around US$12 billion to 42 African countries, covering projects in sectors ranging from power and infrastructure to agriculture, industry, transport and technology.

The third pillar is trade and investment. India is one of Africa's top five trading partners, with bilateral trade reaching approximately US$93.7 billion in FY 2025-26. Indian companies have accumulated around US$80 billion in investments in Africa between 1996 and 2025, with significant activities in energy, mining, telecommunications, manufacturing, agriculture and services. These figures demonstrate that India-Africa relations have already developed substantial economic depth. The challenge now is to convert this relationship into a more integrated partnership capable of supporting Africa's structural transformation.

The Dialogue will cover the following themes:

1. New Global South Strategic Partnership

The recently concluded BRICS Summit emphasised for a new agenda for the Global South. Hon'ble Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi called for 3R Framework (Representation, Responsiveness and Rule-making), to strengthen the voice and role of the Global South in shaping global governance. To shape up the next phase of India-Africa relations, one must break away from traditional, state-centric diplomacy to embrace a decentralised, multi-stakeholder ecosystem. To build a resilient and modern alliance, the partnership should be driven by a dynamic coalition of governments, businesses, universities, think tanks, development finance institutions, civil societies, technology companies, youth leaders, and the vibrant diaspora. By promoting institutional linkages, Indian and African universities and think tanks can co-develop cutting edge research on defining global issues, including the operationalisation of the AfCFTA, critical minerals supply chains, digital public infrastructure rollout, security, and public health systems. Joint research must also confront pressing developmental realities like climate adaptation, maritime connectivity, security, rapid urbanisation, and youth employment. Security cooperation between India and Africa is vital for addressing shared challenges such as terrorism, piracy, cyber threats and transnational crime, while safeguarding maritime trade routes in the Indian Ocean. Through defence training, intelligence sharing and joint capacity building, both sides can strengthen regional stability and support African priorities for peace and security. Such cooperation also creates a stronger foundation for trade, investment and sustainable development. Shifting from a top-down bureaucratic model to an inclusive, knowledge-driven network ensures that the India-Africa relationship is grounded in evidence-based policymaking, grassroot innovation, and authentic Global South cooperation, making it highly adaptable to the complexities of the modern world.

2. Food, Agriculture and Rural Transformation

The partnership between India and Africa holds the potential to reshape global food security by shifting from traditional agricultural assistance to comprehensive structural transformation. While Africa possesses immense agricultural potential, its growth is heavily restricted by bottlenecks in productivity, irrigation, logistics, finance, and market access. India's own developmental journey offers a scalable, low-cost blueprint to overcome these hurdles. At the core of this transformation is the deployment of digital ecosystems, such as replicating India's e-NAM platform to eliminate predatory middlemen and using UPI-style digital payment footprints to grant unbanked smallholders access to formal credit. Furthermore, India's expertise in climate-resilient agriculture, including drought-resistant seeds, low-cost micro-irrigation systems, and affordable small scale mechanisation, provides immediate solutions to Africa's climate vulnerability and infrastructure gaps. Beyond production, the creation of robust India-Africa agricultural value chains is critical.

By adapting India's successful dairy cooperative models and establishing localised agro-processing zones, African nations can stop exporting cheap raw commodities and instead process high value finished goods locally. This strategic alignment ultimately connects African producers with advanced processing, smart logistics, and global markets, turning subsistence farming into a sustainable engine of economic growth.

3. Health: From Pharmaceuticals to Health Systems

Health security represents a critical pillar where India's robust capabilities and Africa's healthcare requirements are highly complementary. India has firmly established itself as an indispensable global provider of affordable, high-quality pharmaceuticals, life-saving vaccines, medical devices, and specialised healthcare services, strengthening institutional relationships across the African continent. However, the future opportunity extends far beyond trade. The next frontier of India-Africa health cooperation must strategically pivot from a market-supply dynamic to an ecosystem-capacity building model. This transformation can be realised by establishing local pharmaceutical manufacturing hubs within Africa to secure the production of essential medicines, deploying cutting edge medical technologies, and leveraging digital health innovations like telemedicine to bridge the rural-urban healthcare divide. Furthermore, by sharing expertise in hospital management, clinical skills, and nursing and allied health training, India can help fortify Africa's medical workforce. Integrating institutional knowledge in health insurance systems, preventive healthcare protocols, and holistic wellness models like traditional medicine and Ayurveda will create a resilient, self-sustaining framework. Ultimately, this partnership aims to co-develop Africa's domestic health architecture, moving from commercial reliance to true, long-term health sovereignty.

4. Digital Transformation and Digital Public Infrastructure

Digital transformation stands as one of the most consequential frontiers of modern India-Africa cooperation, offering a direct mechanism to leapfrog conventional stages of development. While early initiatives like the Pan-African e-Network established a foundational baseline for ICT cooperation, the future opportunity lies in the scaling of next-generation Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI). India's highly successful operational experience with its "India Stack"-encompassing digital identity, instant payments, and data-enabled public delivery systems-provides an open-source, affordable, and highly adaptable model for African nations striving to accelerate universal financial inclusion and modernise government service delivery. The true paradigm shift occurs when these foundational digital rails are systematically layered to create a unified digital ecosystem spanning digital health, online education, smart agriculture, and paperless digital governance. India and Africa also have a vast knowledge on traditional medicines, global potential of which is still untapped. India has now emerged as a hub for Ayurvedic treatment, and this is an area where through cooperation India and Africa can benefit tremendously. Crucially, this partnership moves away from technological dependency, prioritising absolute African

ownership, robust local data governance frameworks, enhanced cybersecurity, and massive grassroots digital skill-building. By deploying open, interoperable, and non-proprietary systems, this strategic tech alignment ensures that African nations can rapidly build tailored, secure digital economies that foster local innovation and cement long-term digital sovereignty.

5. Building Sustainable Trade and Investment Relations

Economic engagement between India and Africa is undergoing a profound structural shift, moving away from purely transactional trade toward deeply integrated, sustainable investment partnerships. While bilateral trade volumes have historically centered on raw commodities and finished consumer goods, the future of India-Africa economic diplomacy lies in industrial co-development, value addition, and shared prosperity. Achieving true sustainability requires diversifying trade baskets, correcting trade imbalances, and channelling investments into high-growth sectors such as manufacturing, green infrastructure, renewable energy, and digital economies. By leveraging frameworks like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and India's Duty-Free Tariff Preference (DFTP) scheme, both regions can drastically reduce trade barriers and create smoother cross-border corridors. Furthermore, a sustainable economic model must prioritize local job creation, technology transfer, and the development of robust small and medium enterprise (SME) ecosystems within Africa. By shifting focus from extracting raw resources to boosting local manufacturing capabilities and integrating into Africa-India supply chains, the India-Africa trade corridor can evolve from a buyer-seller relationship into a resilient, long term strategic alliance designed for mutual economic sovereignty.

6. Connectivity: Linking India and Africa

Geography gives India and Africa a natural, enduring strategic relationship anchored by the Indian Ocean. While historic ties have centered on traditional trade routes, the modern economic integration of both regions requires looking beyond basic shipping lines to build an interconnected maritime and digital ecosystem. The future agenda must focus on a comprehensive matrix of port infrastructure, shipping logistics, industrial corridors, and regional value chains. Crucially, countries along Africa's eastern and southern coasts possess immense potential to serve as strategic gateways, linking the continent's internal markets with the broader Indian Ocean economic system. This maritime network is further amplified by mega-regional infrastructure projects, such as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) and wider Indian Ocean connectivity initiatives. By linking African economies to these global pathways, the partnership can create seamless trade loops connecting Africa, India, the Middle East, and European markets. This strategic alignment transforms the Indian Ocean from a transit body of water into a vibrant, multi-modal economic highway that drives local value-addition, reduces supply-chain vulnerabilities, and secures mutual maritime and economic sovereignty.

7. Africa's Future: From Resource Endowment to Economic Transformation

The future of Africa cannot be understood through the traditional narrative of poverty, aid and underdevelopment. Africa is entering a period of profound transformation. The continent possesses enormous natural resources, a rapidly expanding consumer market, a young population, growing urbanisation, entrepreneurial dynamism and increasing digital adoption. At the same time, Africa faces significant challenges in infrastructure, energy access, food security, employment, health, education, financing and climate resilience. The central policy challenge is therefore not simply how to increase Africa's exports, but how can Africa move from being predominantly a supplier of raw materials to becoming a major centre of manufacturing, services, innovation and value-added production?