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India, African Can Together Build Sustainable Future

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India and Africa are crucial players in meeting the 169 global targets set out under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this is warranted by their huge geographic expanse and large proportion of people living below poverty line. The recently concluded India Africa Forum Summit (IAFS), therefore came at a strategic time and provided both sides with a great opportunity to formalise partnership agreements to collectively meet global goals set out in Agenda 2063, post-2015 Agenda (SDGs recently adopted by India and Africa) and the upcoming United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 21).

The previous two India-Africa Forum Summits, held in New Delhi (2008) and Addis Ababa (2011) saw intensification of development cooperation between India and 15 participating African countries. The first Summit of April 2008 resulted in the "Africa-India Framework for Cooperation" where seven main areas of cooperation were identified, which were also reiterated and enhanced at the Second Africa-India Summit. The framework emphasised on economic development by foreseeing cooperation in a number of economic areas, especially tourism and infrastructure.

In his opening remarks at the third summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi acknowledged the importance of India's partnership with Africa. He stated that our relationship is "beyond strategic consideration" as it is "driven by the aim of empowerment, capacity building, human resource development, access to Indian market, and support for Indian investments in Africa."

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During his address, the prime minister highlighted the following focus areas - human resource development, institution building, infrastructure, clean energy, climate change adaptation, agriculture, health, education and skill development where India and the African nations will continue to work together.

Climate change, which has become a global challenge, is one area where developing countries can join hands and approach global goals with local actions. During the summit, the delegates unanimously agreed to collaboratively address common issues in mitigating and adapting to climate change. India recently committed to a 33 percent cut in its emissions by 2030. Achieving this ambitious target will only be possible by shared R&D for cleaner technologies. At the same time, ensuring cleaner practices in all investment projects led by Indian companies operating in Africa will also help African nations in meeting their own emission targets.

Climate change acts as a stress multiplier for issues like extreme poverty, rainfall dependent agriculture, and natural disasters such as droughts and floods, which in themselves are some common problems faced by both India and Africa. In addition, Africa faces constraints in technological options, limited infrastructure, skills, information and links to markets which has increased its vulnerability to climate stresses.

Collaborating on overcoming agricultural vulnerabilities posed by the rapidly changing climate can help both sides in developing their respective disaster resistant and resilient strategies to ensure global food security.

Agriculture plays a vital role in the economies of both India and Africa. Over 60 percent of the rural households in India and 70 percent in Africa depend on agriculture as their principal means of livelihood. India, over the years and after the Green Revolution has made remarkable advancement in using technological interventions to improve agricultural outputs. We are now proactively developing solutions towards building a climate resilient agricultural practice across the country. Indian experience in the agriculture sector will be of relevance to the African countries which like us are highly vulnerable to climatic variabilities.

Under, the ministry of new and renewable energy (MNRE), the Indian Renewable Energy Programme has received increased recognition internationally in recent years, where many countries evinced interest in cooperation with India for promoting new and renewable energy. The ministry is currently honouring two bilateral cooperation frameworks with Africa, established through an MoU, the first on India-Rwanda Renewable Energy Cooperation and the second on India-Egypt Renewable Energy Cooperation. More such collaborations through knowledge-based interventions will encourage and promote effective public, public-private, and civil society partnerships.

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There is merit in partnering for development as also indicated by the prime minister, who said: "When I look at Africa's vision for itself, captured so eloquently in Agenda 2063 document, (a transformative 50-year development agenda which was initiated in 2013) I believe that our development goals and international aspirations are closely aligned."

India and Africa have had similar development path post colonisation and we surely can together build a sustainable future.

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