



India's Partnership with RECs in Africa

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India has developed a three-layered cooperation with Africa through the traditional bilateral engagement with African states and multilateral engagement at the continental level through the African Union (AU), and at the regional level, India has engaged Regional Economic Communities (RECs). As a development partner, India has recognised the importance attached by the African leaderships to the process of regional integration, resulting in New Delhi's particular focus on the RECs in its current engagement with the continent.

Africa has more than 40 RECs and the AU has recognised eight of them. These major RECs include Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD), East African Community (EAC), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Southern African Development Community (SADC), Community of Sahelo-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) and Arab Maghreb Union (UMA).

Over the decades, these groupings have moved towards harmonisation of standards and rules as well as creation of common markets. These multilateral institutions have been working towards better movement of goods and services through enhanced infrastructure development and regional integration, along with the development of processing facilities, particularly in agriculture, mining and oil and gas.

This process of regional integration has an important bearing on the development of India's trade and investment relations with the African countries. The African RECs have demonstrated eagerness to engage with India's private sector to attract them for greater trade and investment opportunities. These RECs have also expressed their desire to sensitise Indian agencies on Africa's requirements in the field of capacity building, human resource development, food processing and agriculture.

The eight RECs, recognised by the AU, constitute an integral part of the India Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) structure, based on the decision taken at the AU Summit held in Gambian capital Banjul in July 2006. As per the Banjul Formula, the countries chairing these eight RECs were invited to the first IAFS held in New Delhi in April 2008. The three-layered engagement between India and Africa, including cooperation at regional level, was recognised under the IAFS process. The Action Plan of the 1st IAFS had certain components of development support allocated at the regional level. The Action Plan for the 2nd IAFS, launched on September 6, 2013, had several regional initiatives as well. India has proposed to establish 32 regional institutions, the locations of which have been decided in consultation with the RECs. Furthermore, New Delhi has supported the AU's efforts at promoting regional integration by extending a Line of Credit (LOC) worth US\$ 300 million for Ethiopia-Djibouti railway line.

As part of India's attempt to reinvigorate its linkage with the African RECs, New Delhi has so far signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) with EAC, COMESA, ECOWAS, SADC and IGAD under which discussions take place at official/ministerial levels. There has been a proposal for signing MoU with the ECCAS as well. New Delhi's engagement with these RECs becomes all the more significant, since there is a recent trend towards inter-regional connectivity across the African economic space. For instance, a free trade zone in eastern and southern Africa is likely to be completed in 2015. The Tripartite Free Trade Agreement, being negotiated among the SADC, COMESA, and EAC representatives, is estimated to benefit 600 million people living in 26 African countries, or half of the AU member countries, with a combined domestic product of about US\$ 1 trillion.

India's linkages with the regional groupings in Africa reached a decisive stage with the commencement of 1st India-RECs Meeting in New Delhi on November 14-16, 2010. While India had earlier engaged with some of the African RECs and had signed MoU with four of them, but on this occasion an initiative was taken to engage all of them together at one platform. Such institutionalised engagement has provided greater space for deliberations on the implementation of the India Africa Action Plan for the Framework of Cooperation and working out implementation procedures. The first India-African RECs Meeting was attended by the Secretary Generals of COMESA and EAC, the President of the ECOWAS, the Deputy Executive Secretary of SADC, Adviser in-charge of Political Affairs of CEN-SAD, the Director of Political Affairs of UMA and the senior officials.

The 2nd India-African RECs Meeting was organised in New Delhi on November 8-9, 2011. The meeting was attended by the Secretaries General of COMESA, EAC, and ECCAS, the Executive Secretary of IGAD and representatives from the SADC and the ECOWAS along with the senior officials from their delegations. The representatives of the RECs met with several Departments/Ministries/Agencies of the Indian Government engaged in implementing jointly agreed programme and projects. The delegations from the RECs visited Indian Agricultural Research Institute, Pusa and also participated in an academic interaction organised by the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), Sapru House. On 8 November 2011, a MoU on Economic Cooperation was signed between India and the IGAD. It was agreed that the periodic dialogue with the RECs would continue and appropriate action plans, including all decisions taken through the Joint Action Plan with the AU, would be pursued together.

The 3rd India-African RECs Meeting was held in New Delhi on August 20-21, 2014. The meeting was attended by the Secretary General of EAC, Executive Secretary of IGAD, Acting Secretary General of CEN-SAD, Assistant Secretary General of COMESA and Director of ECCAS. The RECs delegations called on India's Minister of State for External Affairs, General Dr. V.K. Singh (Retd.) on August 20, 2014. They interacted with several Departments/Ministries/Agencies of the Government of India along with some civil society organizations, business association, educational institutions and think tanks, such as Department of Agriculture Research and Educations, Barefoot College, Tilonia, The Energy and Resources

Institute, Confederation of Indian Industry, Telecommunications Consultants India Ltd. The representatives of the RECs also participated in an academic interaction organised by the ICWA, Sapru House. This meeting has an immense significance, since India is going to host the crucial 3rd IAFS on December 4, 2014.

India-African RECs Meeting processes have provided inputs into New Delhi's Africa policy and also streamlined initiatives in the form of training, financial assistance and LOCs. More importantly, it has projected that India is keen on taking feedback from different stakeholders and tailoring its initiatives as per their priorities and preferences. This has created an Indo-African synergy in political, economic and related domains. The attempts must be made to deepen the partnership in the infrastructure and capacity building projects, which would foster intra- and inter-regional economic connectivity in Africa.

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