



DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

**TIME FOR A NEW INDIA-AFRICA
DIGITAL COMPACT**

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TIME FOR A NEW INDIA-AFRICA DIGITAL COMPACT

Context

- **India and Africa** have been strengthening their collaboration on **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)**, recognizing its potential to drive socio-economic development.

Africa's Evolving Digital Partnership

- **Africa Day**, commemorated on May 25, marks the formation of the **Organisation of African Unity in 1963**, symbolizes its pursuit of unity, independence, and sustainable development.
- Africa prioritizes digital innovation for socio-economic progress, particularly through the **African Union's Digital Transformation Strategy (2020-2030)**.
- Currently, **85% of African countries** have national ID systems with digital features.
 - ♦ Over **70%** collect biometric data for authentication.

India's Role: From Infrastructure to Innovation

- India's engagement with Africa has long combined **state-led financing** and **capacity-building**, supporting infrastructure, training, and concessional credit lines.
- Over time, India's approach has evolved, increasingly incorporating **social enterprises** and **technology-driven solutions** that are both **adaptable and community-oriented**.
- India's distinctive value lies in promoting DPI as a **digital public good**, offering a **non-surveillance, open-source alternative** to proprietary or state-controlled models. Its approach emphasizes **state collaboration** over mere technology transfer.

Recent Partnerships: India-Africa Digital Cooperation

- **Technology-Centric Model:** India is transitioning to a **technology-centric development model**, extending beyond traditional aid to digital co-creation.
 - ♦ **Pan-African e-Network** launched in 2009, which used **satellite and fibre-optic infrastructure** to deliver telemedicine and tele-education services.
- **Governance-Centric Model:** India is collaborating with African countries on **DPI ecosystem**, including *Aadhaar*, *UPI*, *CoWIN*, and *DIKSHA (for education)*, and engaging with African nations to **co-develop governance solutions** tailored to **local needs**.
- **Development-Centric Model:** These examples reflect Africa's growing interest in **India's open, scalable, and affordable DPI models**.
 - ♦ **Togo (2021):** Partnered with International Institute of Information Technology Bangalore to implement a national digital ID system using open-source platforms.
 - ♦ **Zambia (2023):** Collaborated with the Centre for Digital Public Infrastructure to advance its *Smart Zambia Initiative*.
 - ♦ **Namibia (2024):** Signed an MoU with India's NPCI to build a UPI-style instant payment system.
 - ♦ **Ghana:** Linking its domestic payment system with UPI to enable seamless transactions.
 - ♦ **Zanzibar:** **IIT Madras' First Overseas Campus** in Zanzibar signals a deeper alignment of education with digital development, including **AI and Data Science**.
- Additionally, **India, Brazil, and South Africa**—members of the **G20 Troika**—have jointly emphasized the **importance of DPI** in bridging global inequality and accelerating progress toward the **United Nations SDGs**.
 - ♦ Their declaration highlights the **need for open, modular, interoperable, and scalable digital systems** that prioritize inclusivity and adaptability.

Challenges To Transformation

- **Infrastructure Deficiency:** Many African nations lack widespread broadband access, with **only about 22% of the population** using **mobile internet** services despite broader coverage.
 - ♦ **Energy infrastructure** is a critical constraint; powering digital ecosystems requires investments in sustainable and reliable energy systems.
- **Affordability Issues:** The cost of mobile data remains high, making digital access difficult for lower-income populations.
 - ♦ The **digital divide** remains the largest globally, shaped by high data/device costs and rural-urban gaps.
 - ♦ A persistent **gender gap** hinders equitable access to digital tools and literacy.
- **Digital Literacy Gaps:** A lack of technical skills prevents many from fully utilizing digital tools.
- **Regulatory & Policy Barriers:** Inconsistent policies across African nations hinder seamless digital integration.

Way Forward: Strategies For India-Africa Mutual Growth

- **Prioritizing Capacity-Building and Skill Development:** Initiatives such as the **Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program** and the **Pan-African e-Network Project** have strengthened local capacities in education, healthcare, and digital infrastructure.
- **Ensuring Ethical and Inclusive Digital Growth:** India's approach focuses on **co-development rather than imposing rigid frameworks**.
 - ♦ By collaborating with African governments on policy alignment, data protection, and cybersecurity, India can help ensure that digital transformation is transparent, secure, and respects local governance structures.
- **Strengthening Infrastructure and Connectivity:** India has invested over \$12 billion in **concessional credit**, completing more than 200 infrastructure projects across Africa, including railways, power generation, and rural electrification.
- **Encouraging Sustainable and Inclusive Digital Trade:** India is Africa's fourth-largest trading partner, with bilateral trade reaching \$100 billion.
 - ♦ By integrating African economies into India's digital payment systems, India can facilitate financial inclusion and cross-border trade.

Source: TH

Mains Practice Question

[Q] How can India ensure that its digital engagement with African nations remains mutually beneficial, ethical, and sustainable?

