

MP-IDSA *Commentary*

Japan-India-Africa Business Forum: A Collaborative Path to Sustainable Growth

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S*ummary*

The Japan-India-Africa Business Forum focuses on infrastructure development, industrial cooperation and capacity-building in Africa.

The fourth Japan–India–Africa Business Forum, which took place in Tokyo on 26 February 2025, explored opportunities to collaborate in supporting Africa's sustainable economic growth and development.¹ The forum was initiated in 2007 as a platform for enhancing business and economic ties between Japan, India and African countries. The forum aims to foster stronger trade relations, investment and business cooperation among these three regions, focusing on infrastructure development, industrial cooperation and capacity-building in Africa, with Japan and India playing a key role in driving these initiatives.

This year's event was co-hosted by Nikkei and Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) bringing more than 2,000 participants from 46 nations. The participants deliberated on ways in which Japanese and Indian investments in the African continent could support Africa's industrial growth, job creation and human resource development. The Indian side was represented by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar who highlighted India's deepening economic ties with Africa. Jaishankar stressed that the economic relationship between India and Africa had grown significantly, and there was a strong potential for even greater collaboration. He called for enhanced trade and investment flows, with a focus on mutually beneficial partnerships and emphasised the role of infrastructure development as a key area for cooperation.

At the event, the 'Japan–India Cooperation Initiative for Sustainable Economic Development in Africa' was launched which aims to explore pathways for Japanese and Indian companies to collaborate and establish business bases in African countries and further into the Middle East. The initiative's goals are to increase the concentration of Japanese businesses in India, with an emphasis on enhancing co-creation with Africa, boosting the development of integrated infrastructure to improve the investment base, and encourage more Japanese direct investment in Africa.

Key Drivers

The Asia–Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) was announced in 2017 which envisioned India and Japan's development agenda based on promoting sustainable and inclusive growth for countries of the 'Global South'. The symbiotic relationship between security and growth and the twin pillars of connectivity (infrastructure, institutional) and human resource development (capacities, skills, people-to-people linkages and sustainable development) provided the basis for India

¹ [“Japan-India-Africa Business Forum Held”](#), Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), Japan, 27 February 2025.

and Japan to announce the AAGC. It essentially married the twin policies of ‘Act East’ and ‘Free and Open Indo Pacific’ of India and Japan, respectively.

Unfortunately, after announcing the AAGC, a period of lull ensued due to reduced political will following the change in the Japanese government in 2020 under Yoshihide Suga, and Japan’s shifting political priorities. Suga’s leadership focused more on domestic policy, particularly dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and Japan’s economic recovery. During his tenure, Suga did not place as much emphasis on international initiatives like the AAGC. Suga’s successor, former Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, also focused on other pressing domestic and international issues, such as regional security, the economy, relations with the US and China, and Indo-Pacific security, which cumulatively sidelined the AAGC initiative.

Additionally, this period also saw Japan’s development projects focused largely on Southeast Asia. Through Official Development Assistance (ODA), Japan has funded the construction of highways, bridges, airports, railways and ports in the region. The goal is to improve transportation networks, facilitate trade and promote regional integration. For example, Japan’s assistance has been critical in the development of the MRT system in Singapore, the road systems in Thailand and railways in Indonesia.

Indian and Japanese private investors also differed on their long-term objectives in Africa. As noted by Ambassador Gurjit Singh, Former Chair of the CII Task Force on Trilateral Cooperation in Africa, Indian companies viewed the AAGC as a source of alternative funding to secure large projects in Africa as they did under the Lines of Credit (LOC) projects.² On the other hand, Japanese companies were more focused on expanding trade and capacity-building rather than investment for large projects on a trilateral basis. The initiative, once hailed as an alternative model of development to China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), became an afterthought, although track 1.5 consultations between India, Japan and Africa continued to be undertaken.

The Road Ahead

The 9th edition of the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) will be held in August 2025. The TICAD, established in 1993, marked the

² Gurjit Singh, “[India, Japan and the Asia Africa Growth Corridor](#)”, Gateway House, 17 January 2019.

beginning of Japan’s serious strategic engagement with Africa. As a key component of Japan’s Africa strategy, TICAD fosters a collaboration founded on high-quality infrastructure, human security and technical cooperation. The 4th India Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) could also be held later this year. In preparation for these events, both Japan and India periodically hold the Japan–India–Africa Business Forum for the private sector to deliberate on project opportunities and issues of mutual interest. The first IAFS was held in 2008 in New Delhi, the second was held in 2011 in Addis Ababa and the third one in 2015 in New Delhi.

India’s longstanding engagement with the African continent and Indian companies’ vast knowledge of African markets make New Delhi a natural bridge, whether geographically or in the industrial value chain, between Africa and Japan. Since the inception of the Indo-Pacific discourse, both India and Japan have been vocal proponents of including the Western Indian Ocean littorals (comprising 10 African coastal and island nations) and encouraging more African participation in multilateral frameworks in the broader Indian Ocean Region. Both New Delhi and Tokyo have reiterated their belief that the geographical region of the Indo-Pacific stretches from the eastern shores of Africa to the western Pacific.³

Given the current geopolitical landscape and concerns about China’s influence in Africa, India and Japan can further foster their partnership through the AAGC. Africa’s growing infrastructure market is becoming more competitive with an array of initiatives by international partners like China’s BRI, European Union’s ‘Global Gateway’ and the G-7’s ‘Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment’. Furthermore, new players like the UAE’s company, DP World, which has been heavily involved in the development of port, rail, road and logistics projects across African countries, have made Africa’s infrastructure market competitive.

Therefore, it could augur well for India and Japan’s strategic and business interests if they are able to capitalise on their respective advantages and offer the AAGC their knowledge in digital public infrastructure, telecommunications and the growth of green energy. Going forward, if India and Japan continue to promote triangular cooperation, uphold a people-centric approach and work on their respective strengths and complementarities, it could augur well for Africa’s development. Greater African agency on issues of global importance may help create a more inclusive, just and rules-based international order.

³ Elizabeth Roche, [“India’s View of Indo-Pacific Stretches from East Coast of Africa to West Coast of US: Shringla”](#), *Livemint*, 3 November 2020; Pratinashree Basu, [“Order Through Practice: Assessing Tokyo’s Free and Open Indo-Pacific Vision”](#), Observer Research Foundation, 1 August 2024.

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