



# The Elephant in the Corner? Reviewing India-Africa Relations in the New Millennium

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## Abstract

As countries of the ‘global South’ seek to challenge existing uneven architectures of economic, political and institutional power, now under different circumstances to those prevailing during the Cold War, relations between African countries and various ‘Rising Powers’ have drawn a great deal of academic and public attention. This scrutiny has been heavily tilted towards analysis of China’s African activities. This paper aims to partially redress this balance with an introductory review of India’s contemporary relations with sub-Saharan Africa. A number of analysts suggest that in the longer term, India may well achieve a more prosperous and stable economy than China, while in the shorter term, its economic and political profile may result in a more productive relationship for many different African countries, sectors and constituencies. But India will also bring its own challenges in its African commercial interactions, bilateral relations and through its part in shaping the multilateral polity and global economy. This paper therefore aims to critically review contemporary India–Africa relations on four broad thematic points.

1. Changing geographies of Indo–African relations;
2. Trade and foreign direct investment;
3. Development cooperation; and
4. Geopolitics and diplomacy. India’s confidence as a global political and economic actor is apparent in its African diplomacy and economic engagements, but claims to exceptionalism (relative both to Chinese and Western actors) in such relations are not as self-evident as some have asserted. Whether recent shifts in relations between African nations and India will work in the interests of less privileged citizens, workers and consumers in Africa and in India also remain unclear.

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## Introduction

The last few years have witnessed a surge of academic, policy and commercial interest in what appear to be significant changing global geographies of investment, trade, aid, economic growth and geopolitical power. An array of new terms and acronyms has burst upon the scene – notably the ‘Asian Drivers’, the ‘BRICs’ (Brazil, Russia, India, China), the ‘Rising Powers’ and (in terms of aid) the so-called ‘emerging donors’ (Institute of Development Studies 2006; Manning 2006; Mohan & Power 2009; Open University Asian Drivers Programme;<sup>1</sup> Wilson and Purushotaman 2003). Key issues include the implications and impacts of sustained high growth rates (although with new uncertainty accompanying the global financial crisis); growing energy competition; deepening trade deficits; and changing terrains of ‘soft’ and even, arguably, ‘hard’ power (Kurlantzick 2007; Nye 2005; Ramo 2005). New alliances are being formed, such as ‘IBSA’, a joint

negotiating platform set up between India, Brazil and South Africa; while old ones, like the G77, are being re-invigorated. South-South regional associations, bilateral agreements and diplomatic ties are flourishing. Thus, once again it seems, the countries of the South are mounting a challenge to the existing uneven architectures of economic, political and institutional power – this time under different circumstances to those prevailing during the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) of the 1950s and 1960s; or those articulated through the demands for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) in the 1970s (Braveboy-Wagner 2009). Having said that, as Armijo (2007) points out, there remain profound structural, ideological and political differences between poorer countries, however they are grouped. These differences in interests and in the relative power to pursue them, can act to undermine the plausibility (and even the desirability) of a united ‘southern’ platform; and opens questions about whether or not these labels can on occasion obscure more than they reveal. Oil-rich Libya has different interests in West Africa to oil-seeking India. The manufacturing giant of China can act as a direct competitor for struggling Lesotho. However, there is no question that many progressive actors around the world see potentially beneficial outcomes that could be leveraged by more assertive and organised ‘southern’ collectives.

Africa, a continent largely disregarded by the western powers over the 1990s, has re-emerged as a key arena within which these new geographies are playing out (Dowden 2009; Kraxberger 2005). African markets, but more particularly resources – above all oil, but also minerals, ores, timber, fisheries and even land – have been re-evaluated by potential producers, traders and investors around the world, producing a set of economic logics that have complex consequences when interwoven with other areas of concern, including geopolitics, security and development. The roles and impacts of a number of ‘new’ players in Africa have been the subject of considerable attention, although this is understandably heavily tilted towards analyses of China (Alden et al. 2008; Manji and Marks 2007; Mawdsley 2007, 2008; Mohan and Power 2008;<sup>2</sup> Taylor 2006; Tull 2006). The reasons for this uneven attention are first and foremost China’s significantly larger scale of economic interactions with the continent (Broadman 2007). But interest in Sino-African relations is also driven by the longer-standing location of China as an ideological competitor to the ‘West’; and now by the potential for China to mount a serious economic, diplomatic and even military challenge to the US (Chan 2008; Pan 2004).

Rather overshadowed by all of the China-Africa analyses, have been recent interactions between different African countries and other non-western countries – including Brazil, Iran, Japan, Malaysia, Qatar, Russia, South Korea and Turkey (although see Ampiah 2005; Broadman 2007; Donnelly 2008; Goldstein et al. 2006; Institute of Development Studies 2006; Kaplinsky and Farooki 2009; Singh 2007). The subject of this paper is India, but we return to the broader issue of the ‘smaller’ players in the conclusion.

To turn to India then, a number of analysts suggest that it may well achieve a more prosperous and stable economy in the longer term than China, while in the shorter term, its economic and political profile may result in a more productive relationship for many different African countries, sectors and constituencies. But India will also bring its own challenges, in its commercial interactions, its bilateral relations and through its part in shaping the multilateral polity and global economy.<sup>3</sup> Certainly it is clear that while there are very good reasons to develop a better understanding of Sino-African interactions, it is a mistake to do so at the expense of exploring Indian-African interactions – or indeed, those of other smaller players. Governments, foreign policy analysts, businesses, civil society organisations and ordinary people – as consumers, workers and citizens – are having to accommodate to emerging shifts in global economic and diplomatic centres of gravity

(Arrighi 2005a,b; Bourantonis and Magliveras 2002; Bradford and Linn 2004; Langhammer 2005). India, as one of the two main 'Asian Drivers', a 'BRIC' country, a founder member of IBSA, a key player in the G77, and a significant voice at the WTO is very much at the centre of these challenges and opportunities.<sup>4</sup>

This review therefore aims to provide an overview of contemporary relations between India and Africa. As well as drawing upon secondary literature, the review is informed by a series of projects and papers to have emerged from a joint initiative between the British Association for South Asian Studies (BASAS) and the British Institute in Eastern Africa (BIEA). While there is a rich set of writings on the colonial and postcolonial politics of the highly diverse South Asian 'diasporas' within different African countries, this project aimed at evaluating more contemporary trends in relations between India and East Africa, and on the recent flows and interactions which have followed India's increasingly confident emergence as a global political and economic actor (Abraham 2005).<sup>5</sup> After a brief historical introduction, the paper reviews four issues of particular interest and change:

- 1 Changing geographies of Indo–African relations;
- 2 Trade and investment;
- 3 Development cooperation; and
- 4 Geopolitics and diplomacy.

### *Historical Relations*

Ties between peripatetic traders utilising the Indian Ocean monsoon winds to cross between South Asia and Africa have of course existed for centuries, a history constantly evoked by contemporary Indian and African diplomats and in the burgeoning corpus of cosmopolitan Indian Ocean studies (Bose 2006; Hawley 2008). Such linkages of rootedness and restlessness expanded during the period of European empires, particularly when Britain began to mobilise South Asian labour around its empire, not least in the Indian Ocean from the plantations of Mauritius and Natal to the Uganda Railway (Metcalfe 2007; Tinker 1974). From the 1920s Indian agitators in eastern and southern Africa (including Mahatma Gandhi) appealed, with mixed success, to the Indian National Congress (as well as British rulers in India, Africa and London) for political rights relative to various groups of white 'settlers'.

Poetical and prosaic India–Africa linkages burgeoned after Indian independence, particularly under the charismatic leadership of Prime Minister Jawarharlal Nehru. Indian politicians and writers highlight Indian solidarity with African struggles for independence, particularly through Nehruvian moral leadership of the Non–Aligned Movement (Chhabra 1989; Dubey 1989; INC 1979). For example, in 1967 India afforded diplomatic status and an Asian base to the African National Congress (Reddy 1987). Yet, for much of India's early post–Independence period, a certain regional introversion marked its foreign policy despite the assertion of Afro–Asian solidarity. For most of the post–colonial period India took a principled stand on South Asian diaspora in Africa, with Nehru and subsequent leaders instructing non–resident Indians that their loyalties should lie with their African homelands. The suspicion and hostility that some Africans of Indian origin have confronted – most violently and dramatically expressed in their expulsion from Uganda by Idi Amin in 1972 – is well known, but the ambivalence towards India this dissociation provoked in the Indian diaspora in Africa should also be highlighted. This has resulted in the gaze of many East African 'Asians' being cast to Britain and North America, rather than back to their ancestral homeland.<sup>6</sup>

Following the liberalisation policies of 1991, India's domestic and foreign agendas began to alter significantly. The ambitions of the Indian private sector rapidly developed, as did new approaches to engage the Indian diaspora, particularly under the nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) from 1998 (Lall 2001). As India's economic growth continued to astound the world, so did India's diplomatic locus extend towards Africa in new economic, as well as older political, senses. This reflected a broader 'strategic' interest in Africa amongst 'hegemonic' and other 'emerging' powers, in terms both of security and of course African resources. At the same time, a number of African countries have experienced some recovery from the disastrous years of the 1980s and early 1990s, and some have managed to establish more robust systems of politics and governance. They too have courted investment and the booming demand for resources has potentially positioned a number of African countries extremely well, assuming their elites and wider populations are able to leverage sustainable and just economic growth as a result (Kaplinsky and Farooki 2009). Bearing these contexts in mind, we consider four aspects of contemporary Indo-African relations.

### *Changing Geographies*

One significant geographical trend over the last few years has been India's growing interest in West Africa (Harris and Vittorini 2008; Singh 2007). Historically, India's primary relations with the continent have been with other former British colonies, now part of the Commonwealth, particularly in southern and eastern Africa. Thus, while India has had long linkages with Nigeria and Ghana, it has tended to have less diplomatic affinity and trade relations with the Francophone countries of West Africa. What has changed, of course, is the growing demand for oil and other resources, as well as the search for investment opportunities. A clear indication of this change in geographical focus was the launch of the 'Techno-Economic Approach for Africa-India Movement' (TEAM-9) initiative in 2004 by the Government of India together with eight West African countries: Burkina Faso, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Mali and Senegal. The scheme aims to improve food security, healthcare, telecommunications and transport through a technological focus. As Singh (2007) points out, all of the partner countries happen to be resource and energy rich (see also Beri 2005; Sheth 2007). At the TEAM-9 launch in 2004, India offered \$500 million in lines of credit to member countries, and these are very clearly aimed at enhancing India's commercial ties and opportunities, with funding 'tied' to the purchase of Indian goods and services (see below).

India's private sector is also gaining a greater foothold in West Africa. In October 2008 Indian corporate stalwart Mahindra & Mahindra for example, made a huge investment in collaboration with ZoomLion Ghana to build a tractor assembly plant and technology transfer centre in Kumasi, Ghana; while Tata have expanded their West Africa holdings in Senegal and elsewhere. In an interview with one of the authors, a senior official in the Indian Ministry of Commerce suggested that not only were East African countries being eclipsed by West African oil producers, but even Central Africa was becoming of more economic interest to India, given its rich resources. Consequently in March 2009 the inaugural India-Central Africa Trade Forum was hosted in Brazzaville in the Republic of the Congo. Unlike East Africa, however, South Africa has retained its centrality in India's contemporary economic designs in Africa (Alves 2007). This changing geography of India's commercial and diplomatic relations with Africa point to one of its key emerging concerns – that of energy security but also, like China and the West, a broader 'market seeking' appetite in emerging economic terrains.

*Trade and Investment*

There are three elements of India's trade and investment relations with different parts of Africa that we wish to briefly raise here (other than its changing geographical distribution, as noted above). These are increasing volumes; state support for the private sector; and the increasingly diverse nature and profile of India's state-led and private sector economic engagements with Africa.

It is estimated that trade between India and African nations grew from a value of \$3.39 billion in 2000 to \$30 billion for the year 2007, and India's trading relations with African countries look set to burgeon in the coming years. In January 2009 the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (Assocham) projected that India-Africa bilateral trade would grow to \$150 billion by 2012.<sup>7</sup> Since the liberalisation of the Indian economy in 1991 the rapid growth of the Indian private sector has become a source of great national pride (although it is domestically contested in terms of its uneven sectoral and geographical spread and its very different class rewards). In recent years Indian conglomerates have been able to assert themselves transnationally and with a certain swagger, as when Tata took control of the iconic British firms Corus in April 2007 and Jaguar in March 2008. Africa is now also very much an arena for Indian private sector strategy. In Liberia an influx of some \$1.5 billion from Mittal Steel (now Arcelor Mittal) for iron ore extraction, after the 2006 renegotiation of a controversial deal under the new Ellen Johnson Sirleaf administration, represented a major investment in Liberia's post-conflict economy. Mittal's Liberian ambitions have been dramatically downsized as a result of the credit crunch, yet such endeavours mark the ambition of many Indian multinationals in Africa, as elsewhere.

There is considerable support from the Indian and various African governments for these growing economic inter-relations, and linkages are being carefully cultivated in elite fora. In April 2008 the 'India Africa Forum Summit' was held in New Delhi, which saw the participation of fourteen African heads of states, and the leaders of all eight African regional groupings. The Summit concluded with the announcement of the 'Africa-India Framework for Cooperation', which contained substantial promises to elevate the scope of Indian-African 'partnership for mutual benefit'. The Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, established a 'Duty Free Tariff Preference Scheme' under which India will unilaterally provide preferential market access for exports from the 50 'least developed' countries, 34 of which are in Africa. Singh also pledged over \$500 million in African development grants, as well as doubling India's lines of credit in Africa to \$5.4 billion by 2013. The renewed vigour of Indian economic endeavour is further apparent in the high-level business conclaves organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and the Export Import (EXIM) Bank in association with the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, the Ministry of Commerce, and the African Development Bank. At the first conclave in March 2005 the 'India-Africa Project Partnership' was launched and over \$14 billion worth of projects discussed. These conclaves were repeated in November 2005, October 2006 and March 2008. In 2008 some 131 projects principally focused on technology, agriculture, human resources and energy, and worth over \$10 billion, were discussed. The Vice-Presidents of Tanzania and Ghana, and 37 African Ministers were among the 925 Indian and African delegates in attendance.<sup>8</sup> The 5<sup>th</sup> CII-EXIM 'India-Africa Project Partnership' conclave was hosted in March 2009 in New Delhi on a similar scale, while regular regional events continue to occur in India and throughout Africa. The Indian Government has even supported some non-governmental engagement. In November 2008 for example, Indian Minister for External Affairs, Anand Sharma,

inaugurated a two-day international conference entitled 'Engaging with Resurgent Africa', organised jointly by Delhi think-tank, the Observer Research Foundation and Germany's public policy body the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. The event hosted a number of eminent African academics such as Ali Mazrui and James Shikhwati.

As the discussion above suggests, the western and Indian accusation that the might of the Chinese government lies behind many of its successful investment bids in Africa, while other partners rely on competitive but independent private sector initiatives, does not quite capture the real situation. Notwithstanding its private sector vitality and unquestionably different political economy, the Indian state (like western states) does indeed offer considerable support to its private sector. We would argue that entrepreneurial and business relationships have become newly central to underpinning and shaping India's aid and diplomatic agendas.

Overall, Indian trade and investment with Africa is clearly growing sharply, although with uneven geographical and sectoral spread (e.g. Nigeria and South Africa are by far India's most significant trading partners) and representing huge balance of trade differentials between India and its African partners. There is an increasingly diverse portfolio of Indian investment activity from countless small family firms and small and medium enterprises; through to large-scale bids by Tata, Essar and Bharti Airtel to penetrate telecommunications markets in Kenya and South Africa in 2008 and 2009; and the specialised vehicle production of Mahindra throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Indian conglomerate Tata alone has interests across a huge range of sectors from telecommunications, IT consultancy and steel in South Africa, soda ash production in Kenya, transportation in Nigeria, Ghana, Mozambique and Senegal amongst other places, to coffee and other agricultural interests in Uganda and Zambia. Moreover, a number of Indian state-led companies have also been prominent, notably in the energy sector in West Africa and Sudan. Yet such activity should not point to a single-minded official Indian obsession with energy security in its African diplomacy. Railway Technical and Economic Services (RITES), the consultancy arm of the Indian Railways, has been engaged in profit-making projects in sub-Saharan Africa for nearly two decades (Chhabra 1997). In 2001, for example, RITES secured a \$500 million contract to manage Malawi Railways, while in March 2004 RITES and the Indian Railway Construction Company Limited (IRCON) entered into a deal with the Sudanese government for a 'total revamp' of Sudan's network. RITES is currently involved in a large-scale project in Mozambique to secure coal passage to the port of Beira from where the coal can be exported across the Indian Ocean. This adds to a considerable RITES African portfolio in Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, Tanzania, Angola, Zambia and Botswana and is just one indicator of diversified India's burgeoning economic expansion in Africa and more globally.

### *Development cooperation*

The last few years have witnessed a growing interest in so-called 'non-DAC' donors<sup>9</sup> (Grimm et al. 2009; Kragelund 2008; Manning 2006) or NDDs, which include Brazil, China, Korea, India, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, Venezuela and the United Arab Emirates. The growing literature on the NDDs represents array of positions and discourses, although some of the official debate is set within a problematically un-reflexive endorsement of the existing western-dominated aid architecture, which acts in these accounts as a model for the NDDs (Woods 2008).

As with other areas of analysis, the overwhelming focus of attention has been directed towards China (e.g. Brautigam 1998; Brautigam 2009). However, there are a number of

excellent overviews of India's 'development cooperation' activities (see Agrawal 2007; Jobelius 2007; Price 2005; Singh 2007). After its South Asian neighbours, a number of African countries have traditionally been the second largest 'recipients' of India's development cooperation, with the main vehicle being the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme, which started in 1964. ITEC focuses on providing short training programmes in areas as diverse as small and medium-scale industries, rural credit programmes, food processing, textiles and women's entrepreneurship; while IT and computing skills represent an increasingly large share of the training available and in demand. The scheme runs in 156 countries, and through it the Indian government offers about 3000 placements, of which upwards of 1000 are offered to African governments. In Africa, ITEC is bolstered by the Special Commonwealth African Assistance Programme (SCAAP), while a third programme, the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR), promotes an array of cultural interactions and tours. It has been calculated that since its inception more than \$1 billion has been channelled through ITEC.

Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC), like other forms of Indian (and other NDD) development cooperation, resists the language of 'donor' and 'recipient', which is identified with neo-imperialist hierarchies and damaging conditionalities. Instead, India asserts the claim of 'partnership for mutual benefit'. In 2007 for example, India helped promote the creation of the Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) in ECO-SOC which, unlike DAC, represents a grouping of donors *and* recipients, and which 'seeks to identify mutually acceptable principles and priorities' (quoted in Chanana 2009, p. 12).

The focus on skills and training in part reflects the Government of India's relatively limited financial capacity, which means that it simply cannot provide large grants and/or loans on the scale of many western countries (or increasingly, China). But this role also reflects the expertise and high quality provision available in many Indian universities, training centres and institutes. For example, in July 2002 the Indian cabinet approved an initial \$100 million for the Pan-African e-Network, and it was launched in July 2007 in Addis Ababa. The scheme aims to provide facilities for tele-education, tele-medicine and network video conferencing for heads of state in all 53 members of the AU. The network will also connect 53 learning centres, ten super-speciality hospitals (three of which are in India), 53 other hospitals and five universities (two in India). In these endeavours, India asserts its expertise in creating 'knowledge economies' for sustainable development in the context of low-income societies. India is also able to capitalise on its role in producing cheaper pharmaceuticals, and 'Triple A technology' (affordable, available, adaptable) that are better designed and suited to particular African markets than those of western competitors. Other forms of development assistance include debt write-offs – Jobelius (2007) reports that India recently cancelled \$24 million of debt from Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda, Ghana and Zambia (although this is a trifling sum compared to some of China's debt write-offs). India also makes substantial contributions to food aid and peace-keeping personnel through multilateral institutions, especially the United Nations.

However, one of the more important changes in India's development cooperation over the last few years has been the growing provision of concessional 'Lines of Credit', managed through India's EXIM bank (although it is debatable whether these would count as official aid under DAC criteria: see Sinha 2009). Most commentators suggest that Indian aid has become increasingly strategically deployed in support of 'soft power' (such as persuading countries to vote for India to have a permanent place on the UN Security Council) and in support of commercial relations as trade and investment objectives,

bilateral aid flows have grown in volume, number and share. Agrawal (2007) reports confidential interviews with senior members of the Government of India who acknowledge that in some cases these funds are little more than an export subsidy scheme. This growing strategic impetus can erode goodwill and mutual benefit – both Chanana (2009) and ‘DN’ (2003) argue that India needs to be aware that it is potentially opening itself up to the same criticisms it has often directed at its own major donors.

While India is far ‘below the radar’ compared to China in terms of its development cooperation efforts (Mawdsley 2009), it is a significant player in some countries and together with other NDDs, will mount an increasing challenge to the current ideological and institutional dominance of the DAC donors. Given the failings of the present system, this may well be to the advantage of India’s partner countries, although commercial and strategic imperatives will almost certainly come into tension with South–South mutual interest on occasions.

### *Diplomacy and geopolitics*

India is also somewhat below the radar in terms of external political scrutiny of its African dealings, including from its own usually vibrant civil society and well-developed media. China has been lambasted over its engagement with a number of ‘pariah’ or repressive states, notably Zimbabwe, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and (until recently) Angola; yet India has been engaged in similar economic endeavours largely without parallel international or indeed significant domestic political fallout. A fact that was simply ignored in reporting of 2008 India Africa Forum Summit for instance, was India’s significant investment in Sudan, despite criticisms of China for doing the same (see Large 2008). In 2003 OVL, the overseas arm of India’s state-owned energy company, ONGC, acquired 25% of the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company alongside fellow stakeholders China National Petroleum Corporation and Malaysia’s Petronas. Discussing the 2008 India Africa Summit, Vines and Sidiropoulos (2008) talk of India’s ‘quiet role’ in Africa – while some would see India as ‘out-bid’ by China in Africa<sup>10</sup>, its lower profile can in some respects serve it well.

Overall, Indian policy makers have been careful not to cause offence to African leaders, some of whom can be accused of political repression. This has meant *de facto* Indian silence on issues in African nations that have been domestically contested, and drawn the attention of organisations like *Global Witness* and *Human Rights Watch*. In November 2008, for instance, India became the single largest foreign investor in Ethiopia with nearly \$4 billion in private sector investment. Like other investors in Ethiopia, India has, however, been conspicuously silent on the authoritarianism of Meles Zenawi’s government, which revoked the pardon of Birtukan Midekssa, head of the opposition Unity for Democracy Justice Party in December 2008,<sup>11</sup> one in a string of politically repressive official deeds since the controversial elections of 2005 (Aalen and Tronvoll 2009; Abbink 2006; Hagmann 2006).<sup>12</sup> India’s growing links, though the TEAM-9 scheme, to Idriss Deby’s administration in Chad and Equatorial Guinea under Obiang Nguema, to name but two, has involved no discussion of the considerable political repression in these nations.

So while China has been forced to defend its policies of ‘non-interference’, India it seems has maintained a low profile (while in the meantime various western firms and countries continue to take a ‘soft line’ with the dubious regimes with which they do business). However, one could argue that India (like China) is simply being true to its heritage of championing ‘non-aligned’ sovereignty in the developing world. Any assertion

of democratic didacticism in Africa from 'the world's largest democracy' implies a superiority within which the rhetoric of India-Africa 'equal partnership' cannot sit (although see Pham 2007). Interestingly though, Indian politicians and business leaders have repeatedly attempted to draw a difference between their engagement with Africa not just with the West, but with China. This often relies on the rhetoric of a shared heritage of 'anti-colonialism' to emphasise intrinsic Indian sympathy for (homogenised) 'African nationalism'. India's support for the anti-apartheid struggle in southern Africa is frequently used to demonstrate India's tradition of specific intervention on behalf of Africans in this regard. China's parallel claims to anti-colonial solidarity are dismissed by many within the Indian administration and media as disingenuous and self-serving in the face of its evident ambitions in Africa, while Indian engagement is viewed – sometimes rather uncritically – through a lens coloured by past notions of the Nehruvian moral high ground. Yet as Varun Sahni points out 'India's foreign policy has always exhibited a dichotomy between principle and practice: an ideological opposition to formal institutionalised discrimination in the international system – such as UNSC permanent membership and nuclear weapon status in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty — has gone hand-in-hand with a pragmatic willingness to seek the best possible deal for India within a hierarchical international system that is not egalitarian' (Sahni 2007, p. 23). While the genuine belief amongst many Indian diplomats in the tenets of 'South-South' cooperation is important, India's geopolitical ambitions and economic/energy imperatives are largely the *raison d'être* for its contemporary African activities.

The numbers of Indian troops acting as UN peacekeepers in Africa is often cited as a modern avatar of India's concern for African peace and global multilateralism (Beri 2008), although local discontent hit the headlines in light of accusations of the illegal activities of Indian peacekeepers in eastern Congo in late 2008. Yet, as Indian investments grow in scope and penetration, it is likely that 'undemocratic' means will have to be employed to protect capital, certainly if wealth is not distributed locally – risks that have been demonstrated in the Niger Delta so dramatically in the last two decades. In this regard, perhaps, future Indian and Chinese activities will not be entirely dissimilar from each other or indeed, other foreign actors working in Africa. Finally, does India have the ability (or indeed desire) to become involved in the quagmire of debates on 'good governance' in Africa when issues of communal conflict, uneven economic growth and poverty dominate the domestic political agenda? In short, India will have to deal with the realities of its African ambitions at home and in different African regions, and acknowledge how these circumstances might stymie ubiquitous aspirational discourses of 'mutual benefit'.

### Conclusions

India's economic growth is facilitating a new phase of 'South-South' engagement, including in its relationships with African countries. The wider context is one in which India constitutes a key challenger to the uneven architectures of power, forged through colonial appropriation and maintained through the post-1945 structuring of geopolitical and economic power. Through regional trade agreements, carefully cultivated bilateral relations, and its activism in older and newer political associations, India is playing its part in what will be significantly shifting geographies of power. Whether these shifts will work in the interests of less privileged citizens, workers and consumers in Africa and in India, and indeed beyond, is less sure. As other commentators have suggested, in part this will depend on the ability and willingness of Africa's leaders to harness these new avenues of growth and diplomacy towards equitable and sustainable growth. There are certainly

examples of African agency and progressive intent, as the example of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's 2006 renegotiation of the Arcelor Mittal iron ore contract in Liberia demonstrates. But there are also concerns that the benefits of these burgeoning relationships are being creamed off by minority elites. One major research area that is attracting close attention is the extent to which the various 'rising powers' will differ from the West (for better or worse, past and present) and each other in their relations with different African countries. India's increasingly strategic motivations and goals may indeed have mutually benefit for African countries, sectors and peoples, but the rhetoric should not conceal possible tensions too. In this respect, the work on Indo-African relations has some catching up to do with that on China-Africa. The last 2-3 years have seen increasingly sophisticated theorising and just as critically, empirical, field-based studies which test it (e.g. Carmody 2009). Comfortable assumptions about Indo-African relations also need to be tested – is 'diaspora' always a positive presence and bridgehead for new capital? Will India act in ways different to those of other external interests in Africa? What consequences will India's direct and indirect impacts on Africa have for different interests and groups? Will Indian solidarity and respect for sovereignty strengthen or indeed undermine progressive political forces in different African countries? How does a wider consideration of other external actors – of which India is just one – contribute to a better understanding of African and global political economy? As this review suggests, while much excellent work has been published, more detailed research work is required.

### *Short Biographies*

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### *Notes*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://asiandrivers.open.ac.uk/index.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Also see special edition 'China in Africa: A relationship in transition' *European Journal of Development Research*, 21 (4), 2009.

<sup>3</sup> The Open University Asian Drivers Programme (see note 1) sets out a detailed elaboration of the direct/indirect framework, and is an extremely useful way of conceptualising the impacts of China, India and indeed others in Africa.

<sup>4</sup> Although one should bear in mind that India still has more people living in poverty than does sub-Saharan Africa, even if relative figures are lower. India has made progress in poverty reduction, but thus far its model of growth and claims to growing world status are tempered by its shocking levels of poverty.

<sup>5</sup> Of course, the subject of the various South Asian 'diasporas' across Africa is highly relevant to contemporary relations (although not always in stereotyped or assumedly positive ways: see McCann, G. 'Ties the bind or binds that tie? India's contemporary African engagements and the political economy of Kenya', in progress).

- <sup>6</sup> Just as one should note the diversity of (sometimes competing) actors within the Indian administration and on the ground in respect to Africa, one should also highlight diversity in local Indian 'diasporic' groups. While East African South Asians have to some extent had difficult relations with their respective states, South Asian communities in South Africa are arguably more firmly lodged in the local contexts and have certainly been more widely accepted as progressive forces in the freedom struggle, for example.
- <sup>7</sup> [http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/News/Economy/Foreign\\_Trade/\\_India-Africa\\_trade\\_to\\_grow\\_nine\\_times\\_by\\_2012\\_Assocham/articleshow/3948475.cms](http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/News/Economy/Foreign_Trade/_India-Africa_trade_to_grow_nine_times_by_2012_Assocham/articleshow/3948475.cms), accessed 24 January 2009.
- <sup>8</sup> Confederation of Indian Industry Press release, 13 March 2008 [http://www.cii.in/full\\_story.php?menu\\_id=78&news\\_id=1283](http://www.cii.in/full_story.php?menu_id=78&news_id=1283), accessed 19 November 2008.
- <sup>9</sup> In other words, development partners who are not members of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee.
- <sup>10</sup> India has in fact been directly beaten to hydrocarbon concessions by more capital-intensive Chinese bids in Angola and Nigeria in recent years.
- <sup>11</sup> In the same month Ethiopia's popular musical and opposition icon, Teddy Afro, was jailed for 6 years for a hit-and-run offence, although it was widely speculated the sentence was punishment for his activist songs, which became opposition anthems during the violent aftermath of the 2005 elections.
- <sup>12</sup> <http://www.demdigest.net/blog/94/ethiopia-ngo-law-confirms-authoritarian-drift.html>, accessed 4 January 2009.

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