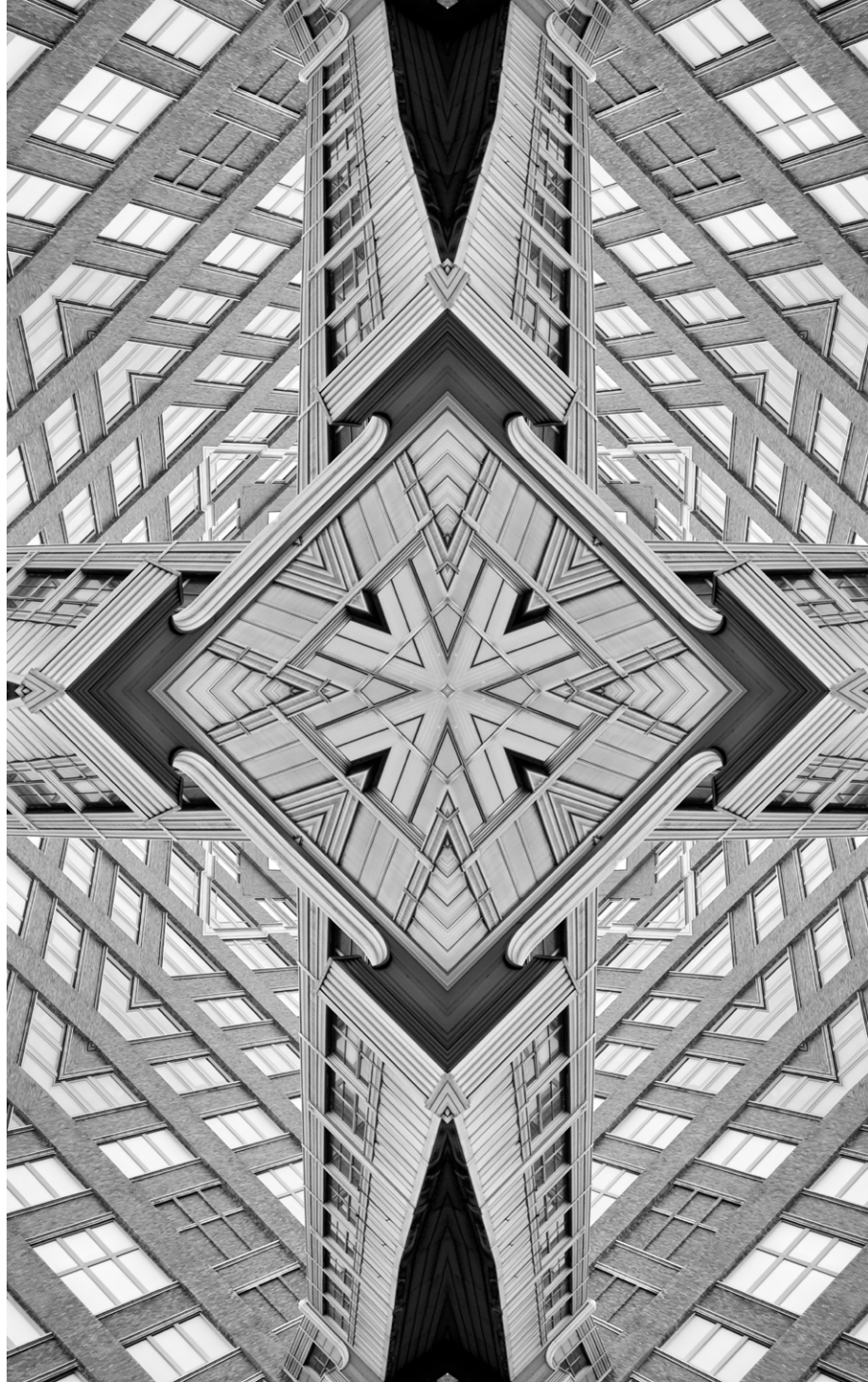


# Issue Brief

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# India and Africa Leverage Climate Diplomacy

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## Abstract

This brief highlights the importance of climate diplomacy in Indian foreign policy, and the country's role in the North-South politics of climate negotiations as a leading member of the Global South that includes Africa. It focuses on two India-led multi-stakeholder global partnership organisations—i.e., the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)—both of which are working to combat the two regions' shared misfortunes of disproportionate vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. It explores possible ways by which India and Africa can strengthen their climate cooperation towards ensuring sustainable livelihoods for their 2.84 billion people.



India and Africa are two regions that bear a disproportionate impact of climate change, even as their per-capita emissions of greenhouse gases are lower than global average and they are responsible for only a small share of the current stock of emissions. The Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)<sup>1</sup> has warned that India—home to 20 percent of the world’s population—could face multiple climate change-induced disasters in the next two decades. In the African continent, meanwhile, eight countries are among the ten most vulnerable in the world.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, climate is a global common, and therefore the mitigation of climate change is a global public good. This shared responsibility to combat global warming continues to shape international climate change diplomacy, paving the way for agreements that seek mitigation and adaptation measures, and the appropriate financing.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the evolution of climate diplomacy has been a logical consequence of long-lasting concerns about nature and human survival that have preceded the construction of the current climate action regime.<sup>4,5</sup>

In recent years, new networks and approaches to establishing a global conversation on the consequences of, and solutions to climate change,<sup>6</sup> have emerged. These include the birth of multi-stakeholder global partnerships such as the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), which will be highlighted in this brief.

“Climate is a global common, and the mitigation of climate change is a global public good.”

# India in Global Climate Diplomacy

India is a prominent case study of how a state navigates climate diplomacy. It has shifted from its earlier defensive, neo-colonial attitude on the matter of climate responsibility, to a more proactive and cooperative internationalist approach in recent climate engagements. It has chosen a cooperative strategy to emphasise its responsibility through diplomacy and sustainable energy investments, in the process buttressing its role as a global powerhouse and widening its influence on partner countries.

India's push for cooperation on climate change has expanded beyond simply seeking a multilateral solution to organising the emerging powers, or newly industrialised countries of the developing world into a coalition.<sup>7</sup> India has been a part of three significant groupings—the Brazil, South Africa, India and China (BASIC) countries, the Brazil, Russia, India and China and South Africa (BRICS), and the Group of 77 (G-77) countries of the Global South.<sup>8</sup> BASIC was a key player at both the Copenhagen and Paris Conferences of the Parties (COPs) where India was recognised as a drafting author of the agreements.<sup>9</sup> A last-minute agreement negotiated between leaders from BASIC and the United States led to the adoption of the Copenhagen Accord.<sup>10</sup>

For Africa's part, all countries of the continent are part of the G77. The group provides the means for countries of the Global South to articulate their collective economic interests and enhance their joint negotiating capacity on crucial international economic issues within the UN system, and promote South-South cooperation for development.<sup>11</sup> Under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the G77 + China coalition has historically argued for financial support from the wealthy nations to enable developing countries to mitigate the impacts of climate change and adapt to the already changing climate, based on the principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities'.

At COP27 in 2022, India was an assertive yet cooperative key actor, welcoming the establishment of the Loss and Damages Fund while clarifying that it would not be contributing to it but will stake its claims. Indian representatives proposed that countries agree to phasing down *all* fossil fuels, and not just coal. Arguing on principles of global justice and equity, India blocked an attempt by wealthy nations to push for the use of terms such as 'major emitters' and 'top emitters' in the cover text of the Summit; it was supported by other countries including China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan. At the same Conference of the Parties, India also reiterated its desire to continue to foster strong international cooperation through forums such as ISA and CDRI.

# The Case for the International Solar Alliance

The birth of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) as a child of the ambitious ‘One World, One Sun, One Grid’ initiative of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was announced at COP21 in Paris by the Indian leader, along with the French president at that time, François Hollande. The formation of ISA by India, jointly with France, reinforced India’s presence as a dominant global force in climate action. ISA was proposed as a multi-country partnership organisation with membership from the ‘sunshine belt’ countries lying fully or partially between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn.<sup>12</sup> The multilateral treaty status accorded to ISA by the United Nations came into force on 6 December 2017.

ISA is envisioned as a platform for cooperation on solar energy, promoting new technologies and financing to achieve global energy equity. The goal is to mobilise more than US\$1 trillion in investments to set up 1,000 GWs of solar installations globally, thereby making clean power affordable and universally accessible by 2030.<sup>13</sup>

Headquartered in New Delhi, ISA has increased Indian involvement in renewable energy projects in Africa.<sup>14</sup> The aim is to make positive contributions to the common goals of improved energy access, enhanced energy security, and provision of more opportunities for better livelihoods in rural and remote areas.<sup>15</sup>

Africa is often referred to as the ‘Sun Continent’—the continent where solar radiation is greatest.<sup>16</sup> It is located between latitudes 37°N and 32°S, and spans a vast area that crosses the equator and both tropics. The solar energy potential of Africa is arguably limitless. However, most African countries have yet to effectively utilise the abundant solar energy available to them. It has been maintained that, with falling solar generation costs over the past decade, solar can be the cheapest source of electricity in Africa.<sup>17</sup> Solar potential is fairly distributed across all the countries, with an average of 6 kilowatt hours (kWh) of solar energy per sq m available per day.<sup>18</sup> The total solar potential of all countries in sub-Saharan Africa alone, is about 10,000 GW.<sup>19</sup> Following the first summit of ISA held in March 2018 in New Delhi, India has earmarked a credit line of up to US\$2 billion, with 15–20 percent of the amount to be earmarked for 179 solar-related projects in African countries.<sup>20</sup> ISA has also partnered with the African Development Bank to develop 10,000 MW of solar power systems across the Sahel region, which aims to provide electricity to approximately half

# The Case for the International Solar Alliance

of the 600 million Africans who remain off-grid.<sup>21</sup> ISA welcomed Republic of the Congo into its fold and hosted 60 participants from 13 African countries<sup>a</sup> in New Delhi to share best practices in solar energy deployment.

There are three flagship programmes driving ISA interventions in Africa: Scaling Solar Applications for Agriculture; Affordable Finance at Scale; and Scaling Solar Mini-grids. Two additional programmes—Scaling Residential Rooftop Solar and Scaling Solar E-mobility and Storage—are in the pipeline. ISA projects across Africa include setting up of solar PV power plants, mini-grid and off-grid plants; solar-powered irrigation systems; rural electrification; street lighting; solar energy linked cold-chains and cooling systems; and solar-powered urban infrastructure such as hospitals, schools and government establishments. Others are a 500-MW Solar Park in Mali; solar facilities and solar home systems in Burkina Faso, Uganda and Tanzania; solarised and efficient cold food chains in Nigeria; and solar-powered pack houses and cold storages in Senegal and Ghana.<sup>22</sup>

An appraisal of initiatives and activities of ISA in Africa shows their significant contribution to sustainable livelihoods through job creation, increased incomes, poverty reduction, improved productivity, quality education and healthcare, food security, and social stability. Improved access to solar energy also ensures sustainable consumption and production, and contributes to environmental conservation by reducing deforestation and land degradation.

ISA's work in the African continent merely reflects the vibrant and multidimensional relationship between the two regions, underpinned by well-established bilateral trade.<sup>23,24</sup> Over the years, Indo-African relations have expanded beyond political solidarities, to increased trade and investment, as well as scientific and technological cooperation.<sup>25</sup>

In July 2018, PM Modi outlined the 10 guiding principles for Indo-African engagement during his address to the Ugandan Parliament in Kampala. This vision for Africa represents continuity in policies that have historically defined Indo-African partnership.<sup>26</sup> The goal is to dovetail India's growth story with Africa's Agenda 2063, and spur mutual resurgence.<sup>27</sup>

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a Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo

# The Case for the International Solar Alliance

Indo-African relations were further institutionalised with India's decision to enter into a structured engagement with African countries under the framework of the India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS). Four editions of the summit have been held so far—in 2008, 2011, 2015 and 2020. These summits have intensified India-Africa engagements through trade—duty free tariff schemes, investments including grants and concessional lines of credit, knowledge sharing, technology transfer and capacity building programmes. India has also shared its developmental experiences with African countries through the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation and Special Commonwealth African Assistance Programme.<sup>28</sup> India has also emerged as one of the top five investors in Africa in recent years, with cumulative investments on the continent amounting to around US\$74 billion in 2021. India's bilateral trade with Africa reached US\$89.5 billion in 2021-2022.<sup>29</sup>

“The formation of ISA by India, jointly with France, reinforced India's presence as a dominant global force in climate action.”

# The Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure

**R**ecognising the importance of disaster resilient infrastructure to adapting to a warming world, the CDRI was launched by Prime Minister Modi during the UN Climate Action Summit in 2019 in New York. The African member countries of CDRI are Ghana, Madagascar, Mauritius and South Sudan.

Like ISA, CDRI is a demonstration of India's global leadership role in climate action and disaster resilience. CDRI is a multi-stakeholder global partnership of country governments, UN agencies and programmes, multilateral development banks and financing mechanisms, private sector, and knowledge institutions. CDRI is supported by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction to facilitate knowledge exchange, technical support and capacity building to develop resilient infrastructure and fortify existing infrastructure for resilience while fulfilling the commitment to leave no one behind. It covers areas of governance and policy, emerging technology, risk identification and estimation, recovery and reconstruction, resilience standards and certification, finance, and capacity development.

CDRI has launched a US\$50-million disaster trust fund to build disaster-resilient infrastructure systems in developing countries and island nations which face the greatest threats from climate change. The fund, called the Infrastructure Resilience Accelerator Fund (IRAF), was announced at COP27. The IRAF will enable the CDRI to achieve its mandate of resilience through risk-informed investments and infrastructure development resulting in reduced vulnerability of populations and reduced impact of extreme events and disasters on infrastructures.

CDRI endeavors to augment the capacity of the governments, private sector, and other organisations in ensuring resilient infrastructure by facilitating trainings and projects under its capacity development programme. The goal of the programme is to develop and strengthen the processes, resources and skills of organisations and communities, enabling more effective and sustainable infrastructure systems and services. Recent capacity development initiatives by CDRI in Africa include: recommendations on a proposal for capacity development of academic institutions and infrastructure professionals in Mauritius; rapid learning needs assessment study for transport, telecommunications, and power sectors in Mauritius in association with the country's National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Centre; and development and sharing of a course description for a customised training course on disaster-resilient infrastructure for the Road Development Authority of Mauritius. Other CDRI activities include consultations on resilient infrastructure in Mauritius, and bilateral engagement with governments of Madagascar and Rwanda on potential collaboration on disaster-resilient infrastructure projects.



The existential risks posed by climate change to humanity have led to the emergence of multi-stakeholder global partnership organisations like India-led ISA and CDRI. The establishment of both the ISA and CDRI is an example of India's progressive and cooperative climate engagement to shape and strengthen bilateral ties with other countries. Supporting and partnering with African governments through these organisations presents avenues for New Delhi to exercise its soft power towards influencing international and national agendas.

In Africa, the link between climate change and sustainable development is two-way, with enormous resources required for both climate change mitigation and adaptation. While spinoffs from ISA footprints across Africa extend beyond climate mitigation and adaptation to significant impacts on sustainable livelihoods of millions of Africans, CDRI activities in the continent are sparse and have limited contribution to the countries' ability to adapt to climate change. Africa needs climate-resilient infrastructure to adapt to climate change and sustain economic growth to pull its people out of poverty. A staggering sum of US\$170 billion annually in long-term financing is required to develop climate-resilient infrastructure in key sectors across the continent.<sup>30</sup> This underscores the need for more CDRI initiatives and projects to complement the efforts of ISA.

Besides shared disproportionate vulnerability to climate change, India and Africa have many advantages that can be leveraged for mutual benefit. These include their innovative youthful demography, fast-growing economies, huge markets, and vast natural resources. Looking ahead, Indian governments must continue to grasp the mood and changes in Africa to effectively deploy an array of soft power manifestations, beyond climate diplomacy, to sustain New Delhi's cordial relationship with the continent amidst fierce competition from Beijing, and to continue to be the voice of the Global South, at the heart of which is Africa. For Africa to benefit more from an ambitious New Delhi to combat climate change, African leaders must study carefully, learn, and build on the merits of India's experiences with climate diplomacy. [ORF](#)

*(This brief is an updated version of the author's chapter in ORF's Raisina Files 2023, 'Adrift at Sea: Lighthouse in the Tempest?'.)*

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