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Issue Brief

Reinvigorating Pakistan's 'Look Africa' Policy

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Pakistan-Africa relations have a deep rooted historic and emotional bond which dates back to the period of anti-colonial struggle. Pakistan was the first Muslim country to gain independence from British colonialism, and later, to



spearheaded moral and diplomatic support for liberation movements in African countries. Also, at times of emergencies in Africa, Pakistan's United Nation Peacekeeping missions have been at the forefront. Many eminent Pakistanis have served on several African assignments, where they not only contributed their expertise for institutional development in Africa, but also gave African continent a voice in the international community.

However, despite the shared cordiality in Pakistan-Africa relations, Pakistan's foreign policy lacks the vigor required for unlocking the hidden potential in these relations. African continent is a rising market of 1.26 billion people. It is rich in mineral resources and an exporter of energy resources. In 2010, the McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) described the potential and progress of African economies as “lions on the move”.¹ On the contrary, Pakistan-Africa trade is negligible. On the diplomatic front, Pakistan's presence in Africa is only confined to a few countries, i.e. Pakistan has only thirteen missions to cover 54 African countries, while others are covered through concurrent accreditation. Similarly, Pakistan's state level visits to Africa are also numbered, and only with occurrence after long intervals.

Pakistan needs to invest in its relations with Africa, both by taking initiatives having symbolic importance, i.e. state level visits, as well as increased interaction with universities, think tanks and civil society organisations. And also by adding more valuable substance, especially in the realm of economic cooperation. Pakistan's 'Look Africa' policy should make a conscious and

purposeful effort to fill in the visibility deficit of Pakistani leadership and 'brand Pakistan' in Africa.

The following section will highlight some pertinent policy recommendations that may provide Pakistan with both symbolic significance and tangible substance covering a broader portfolio of engagement with the African continent.

- Pakistan needs to increase its diplomatic presence in all friendly African countries. Every country should have a separate designated Pakistani mission which can be utilised for exploring and establishing new opportunities for collaboration. Moreover, having a wide coverage and network of diplomatic missions in Africa will serve the benefit of more profound representation, cooperation on regional and global issues and most importantly, an opportunity of closely interacting and establishing relations with local communities. Such an engagement will provide a strong foundation to Pakistan's bilateral relations with Africa.
- There is also a need to increase high level state visits by Pakistani leadership to African countries. Such visits are very important as they not only add symbolic value to the bilateral relations, but also add substance in terms of new agreements undertaken and Memorandum of Understanding signed in areas of mutual interest. Moreover, high level state visits are given extensive media coverage which helps in building more visibility in the country being visited. The Indian leadership in the year 2016 alone undertook 12 visits to Africa under their 'Africa Outreach' initiative. Similarly, Pakistan should also proactively pursue high level state engagement with African countries under a conscious and well-designed programme.
- In addition to high level state visits, political leadership of Pakistan and Africa should undertake frequently occurring friendly exchanges. Involvement of political leadership will invest prestige and commitment to these bilateral relation. Also, in terms of people to people contacts, Parliamentary endorsement and exchanges grant legitimacy and popular support to these relations. Parliament is the supreme policy making organ and

is the right forum for expressing policy issues of concern. The Parliament of Pakistan can pass motions in favor of Africa and debate what possible policy direction should be undertaken with respect to adding substance to Pakistan-Africa relations.

- On the frontier of public diplomacy and cultural promotion, Pakistan and Africa need to invest more heavily, especially in the context of the tarnished image being projected in the international media about both regions. The leadership of both regions should make meaningful interactions between think tanks, universities, business forums, educational institutes, civil society organisations and media. There is a need for establishing joint forums where media and other opinion making entities can interact and cooperate with each other for providing a narrative to Pakistan-Africa relations. The Diaspora should also be engaged as an additional force in-aid to the contingent diplomatic mission. Moreover, Pakistan should provide more scholarships to African youth and also undertake other human development initiative. Pakistan should organise exhibitions, seminars, conferences and round-table dialogues both at home and abroad. Pakistan should also establish Centers for African Studies in leading universities, so that academic research can be used to make evidence-based policy with regard to Pakistan-Africa relations.
- With respect to economic cooperation, public-private partnership model should be emphasised. African continent is a huge market for Pakistani goods and similarly, Pakistan's geo-strategic location and connectivity offers opportunity for African goods to Central Asia and South Asia. Moreover, increase in bilateral trade will open new opportunities for both regions which will help them in diversifying their trade basket and also in reducing the price that will ultimately benefit the consumer. Pakistan should encourage investment in agro-based industry in Africa, as phosphates and other fertilizers are abundant in many African countries. Many African countries import meat despite being rich in livestock, which gives Pakistan an opportunity for investing in meat processing units in Africa. Africa is rich in minerals, and also some African countries are

oil exporters which can help Pakistan in managing its energy appetite. African minerals can also find a huge market in China through Pakistan. Also, with respect to China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Africa is a common market for both Pakistan and China which can be jointly explored. China can help Pakistan realise this potential with our mutual African friends.

- Pakistan-Africa cooperation in the field of defence and security is better than other fields. Recently, South Africa signed an agreement in this field, and Nigeria also showed interest in buying Pakistani fighter planes². The recently held defence and security exhibition under IDEAs 2016 attracted a lot of African countries. There is a need to strengthen this cooperation, especially in intelligence sharing and sharing of Pakistan's success against terrorism.

Since 1986, Pakistan is helping African countries with capacity building initiatives for its government officials and military staff. However, there is a need to add more items to this portfolio and more substance to this relation. It should begin with making high level state visits and exchanges. Consequently, build on cultural and public diplomacy for strong bilateral relations which should be sustained with better communication network. Tourism is a potential industry that can provide a foundation for people to people contact.

With countries like Ghana or Mali, where a new beginning of diplomatic relations is needed, Pakistan should set the framework for future engagement with the formation of a Joint Commission to work on detailed matters and mechanism. It should establish relation between the Foreign Services Institutes of these countries and sign agreement for the exemption any visa requirements for diplomatic and official passport holders. Also, in places where MoUs are not be finalised, Pakistani government should adhere to signing 'Letter of Intent' for potential future partnerships.

Pakistan's 'Look Africa' policy is an attempt for expanding Pakistani footprint in the African continent and beyond. The African Union carries 54 votes in the United Nations General Assembly. Pakistan should capitalise on establishing and strengthening relations with all

member states of the African Union. Pakistan and Africa also need to cooperate on geo-strategic issues and on issues of global governance as both regions, in many ways, face problems of similar nature. However, for this to happen, Pakistan's pro-active engagement with Africa under a well-designed, comprehensive policy becomes an imperative.

Notes and References:

¹ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/05/what-s-the-future-of-economic-growth-in-africa/>

² <http://allafrica.com/stories/201703280520.html>