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Q9

India-Africa digital partnership is achieving mutual respect, co-development and long-term institutional partnerships. Elaborate.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · GS II · 10 marks · India and its Neighbourhood

India and its neighborhood - relations.

Core demand of the question

- Describe the India-Africa digital partnership as it actually exists
- Show respect, co-development and institutions with named tools
- Contrast with extractive or one-way tech export
- Point to limits so the answer does not become a brochure

Revision summary

The partnership runs on **Pan-African e-Network** heritage, **ITEC** training, **IAFS**, and newer **DPI** (payments, identity, document rails).

Co-development means African adaptation and AU working groups, not a vendor dump.

Respect means data under African law, unlike a back-doored hardware grid.

- **Limits:** power and connectivity, summit-without-follow-through, and China's larger cable footprint.

Score the relationship by live hospital and payment links.

Introduction

- **India-Africa digital partnership is a piece of South-South foreign policy:** share public digital tools, train operators, and leave the data under African law. It is smaller than China's cable-and-hardware footprint and older than the current UPI headlines. Mutual respect is the claim; **Pan-African e-Network**, **ITEC** and **DPI** are the evidence.

Body

What has been built

The **Pan-African e-Network** (later scaled with African Union partners) linked universities and hospitals for tele-education and tele-medicine - a **Nehruvian technical assistance** idea in fibre and satellite form. **ITEC** and **IAFS** (India-Africa Forum Summits) still fund digital training. In the 2020s India offers **Digital Public Infrastructure: UPI-like payments, modular identity, DigiLocker-style document rails, and open-source stacks** rather than a single vendor lock-in. **NPCI International** has worked with partners such as **Namibia** and others on fast payments. **Ghana** and further pilots sit in the same family. **Exim Bank** lines and concessional credit sometimes carry the hardware; the diplomatic pitch is that **Africa owns the policy**.

Co-development means African central banks and ministries **adapt**, not merely download. Long-term institutions mean **AU-India** joint working groups, **ISRO** cooperation on satellites and resource mapping, and **cyber capacity** workshops rather than a one-off app launch.

Mutual respect

Respect is the refusal to treat Africa as a **data colony**. India's own **DPDP** debate and Africa's **Malabo Convention** on cyber security set a language of **local storage and lawful access**. **Contrast: a turnkey smart-city camera grid with a foreign back door. India also campaigns with African states in WTO e-commerce and UN digital-governance talks as Global South votes, not as clients.**

Limits

Bandwidth, electricity and last-mile ID in the Sahel are not solved by a Delhi MOU. Some projects stall after the summit photograph. Chinese **BRI digital silk** still supplies more kilometres of cable. Diaspora and private Indian IT firms are uneven partners. A partnership that only exports **Aadhaar-as-brand** without African parliamentary scrutiny will repeat the very extractive pattern it criticises.

- **The honest elaboration is: training + open rails + AU institutions**, scored by live payment and hospital links, not by communiqué adjectives.

Flow diagram

India DPI ITEC -> AU states
AU states -> Local law and operators
India DPI ITEC -> Payments health education

Conclusion

India-Africa digital work is real where tele-medicine, **ITEC** and payment rails are in use. Mutual respect means African law on data and African engineers on the build. It remains a niche beside larger hardware powers, and it will stay respectable only if it stays co-owned.

Facts & figures

Pan-African e-Network

India-supported tele-education and tele-medicine network with African countries, an early institutional digital link.

ITEC

Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation programme, still a main training channel for African officials and technicians.

NPCI International

Arm that helps partner countries explore UPI-like fast payment interoperability.

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