Q8(b)

Discuss some of the key drivers of India's new interests in Africa which might help in developing long-term comparative advantage over China

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · PSIR GS 2 · 15 marks · State in comparative perspective

State in comparative perspective: Characteristics and changing nature of the State in capitalist and socialist economies, and, advanced industrial and developing societies.

Core demand of the question

- **Name drivers of India's Africa policy:** diaspora, ITEC, peacekeeping, pharma, digital public goods, G20/AU, energy and critical minerals
- Contrast with China's scale (BRI, debt, construction)
- Argue where India can hold a long-term comparative advantage - without pretending to match Chinese capital

Revision summary

India's Africa push is driven by diaspora, ITEC, peacekeeping, pharma, digital public goods, minerals and Global South diplomacy.

China competes on BRI-scale infrastructure and credit; India cannot win that race on money.

Long-term advantage is plausible in skills, affordable tech, political comfort and a less threatening profile.

Delivery failures and domestic racism can still waste the advantage.

Pick trust and human capital, not a stadium-for-stadium contest.

Introduction

India's **new** African interests are not a discovery of the continent. They are a **thicker, more strategic return: votes, minerals, markets, energy, and a Global South story that cannot be only Asian. China** is the scale competitor - Belt and Road, contractors, and credit. The question asks for drivers that might yield a **long-term comparative advantage**, not a fantasy of out-spending Beijing next year.

Body

Drivers

Diaspora and history - from Gandhi's Natal to traders in East Africa - give a human network China must buy. **ITEC** and education still train officers and doctors who later sit in cabinets. **UN peacekeeping** is an Indian comparative practice. **Generic pharma** and vaccine manufacturing (including the COVID years) hit a need China does not own. **Digital public infrastructure** - identity, payments, open networks - is a 2020s export that fits African leapfrogging better than some heavy BRI monuments. **Critical minerals** and energy (oil, solar partnerships) are the hard-economy driver. **African Union in the G20** and India-Africa

Forum Summits are the diplomatic driver: voice, not only projects. Defence training and maritime awareness in the western Indian Ocean complete the security ring.

Versus China

- **China wins** speed and steel**:** ports, rails, stadiums, and a willingness to ignore governance sermons. It also accumulates **debt-and-image** problems that African publics now debate. India cannot copy the chequebook. It can copy **presence of people**: students, SMEs, English-language professional classes, and a democracy that, however noisy, is intelligible to African plural societies. Advantage, if it comes, will be in **human capital, affordable tech, pharma, and political comfort**, plus a less threatening naval profile than either China or old extra-regional powers.

Long-term, not brochure

Comparative advantage is **not automatic**. Indian delivery is slow; projects stall; racism toward Africans in Indian cities wrecks the brand; and some African states want Chinese speed anyway. A serious policy would finish lines of credit, stay in mining with environmental care, and keep peacekeeping. The G20 AU seat is a joint win, not an Indian trophy. Advantage over China is plausible in **trust and skill intensity**. It is implausible in **bulk infrastructure**. Honesty is part of the 15-mark answer: do not claim a race India is not funding.

Flow diagram

Drivers -> People ITEC pharma DPI

Drivers -> Minerals energy G20

China BRI -> Steel and speed

People ITEC pharma DPI -> Long-term trust advantage

Steel and speed -> Scale not India's race

Conclusion

India's African drivers are people, training, pharma, digital public goods, minerals and a South-South voice. Those can beat China in trust over a generation. They will not beat China in concrete next quarter. Policy should pick the race it can win.

Facts & figures

ITEC

Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation: training as a long-running diplomatic asset in Africa.

AU in G20

African Union's G20 membership, advanced in the Indian presidency period, is a voice-driver of the new relationship.

DPI

Digital public infrastructure (identity, payments) offered as a leapfrog toolkit unlike monument BRI.