

Interaction with Amb Amar Sinha, Secretary (Economic Relations), MEA (India)

September, 2016



Welcome

I'd like to personally welcome all delegates. It's an exciting time for all of us as we continue to grow and adapt, remaining always adaptable, motivated and responsive to new ideas. We're meeting during a time of large nation-wide and global change. The field of law, policy and strategy research is an exciting area in which we work. We will continue to meet and bring intellectual people to come together in forums like this, to ensure IIFH remains at the top to strengthen the humanity.



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Amb Amar Sinha, Secretary (Economic Relations) in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Government of India, interacted with a select panel of policy experts on Sep 2016, focusing on the Prime Minister's visit to Africa and the way forward in India-Africa relations. The interaction squarely focused on adding more teeth to India's Africa policy.

In his opening comments, General NC Vij, underlined that after decades' of neglect, Africa has finally landed on India's strategic radar, thanks to an observant Prime Minister. In a major departure from the past tradition of engaging Africa only through the OAU (Organisation of African Unity), India has decided to engage with the African countries on bilateral basis through a series of sustained engagements. A reflection of India's changed outlook on Africa was first witnessed on a global scale in 2015, when New Delhi invited all 54 African countries for the five-day India-Africa summit, doing away with the earlier practice of sending invites to only those countries which the OAU decided. An 'embrace all' policy became imperative because African countries, left out of triennial jamboree called India-Africa Summit, often felt slighted and complained against the partisan attitude to the diplomatic establishments in India.

Amb Amar Sinha, who served as India's Ambassador to war-torn Afghanistan for almost three years prior to taking over as Secretary (Economic Relations) in the MEA, gave a broad overview of India's refurbished Africa policy during the initial phase of his presentation. He underlined security and economy as the driving imperatives of India's present outreach to Africa. While Africa, a resource-rich continent, is a big attraction for Indian investors, it is also perceived as a potential bulwark against the Chinese expansionism in the Indian Ocean. Amb Amar Sinha, however, pointed out that while India looked elsewhere, China managed to make deep inroads into Africa. In view of the grounds already lost out to China, the Indian diplomats need to redouble their efforts insofar as their mission in Africa is concerned, the Ambassador stressed.

Amb Sinha's presentation also highlighted that India has adopted a model of development in Africa which is way different from that of China's. Whereas the Chinese have adopted an intrusive model of development,



India has chosen to be a partner in development, focusing more on building capacities for the African countries. While Indian projects, flowing from the lines of credit are financed by India, they still remain locally-owned, with the Indian role limited only to providing technical assistance and training in soft skills. Undeniably, while India is being perceived as a benefactor, the Chinese are perceived largely as exploiter of Africa's natural resources and so face pockets of resistance across many countries in the continent,. Many African countries are further peeved because of unsavory meddling in their internal politicking by the Chinese businessmen seeking more favorable political dispensations.

The ensuing interaction focused largely on making the Indian projects more resilient, result-oriented and time-bound. Specific projects were identified and discussed. It was also brought out that India's lines of credit projects in Africa need to be linked up with 'Make in India', especially in the defence sector. Toning up India's Africa policy with military diplomacy and leveraging the Indian Diaspora in Africa were among other major takeaways of the interactive session.

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