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**PAKISTAN'S ENGAGEMENT WITH AFRICAN NATIONS:  
TRADE, AID, AND DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Pakistan's engagement with African nations has evolved over the years, encompassing trade, aid, and diplomatic relations. Historically, Pakistan established early ties with African countries during their post-colonial independence, offering diplomatic support, technical assistance, and educational scholarships. These relationships have been further strengthened through mutual cooperation in areas such as defense, trade, and cultural exchanges. Despite these efforts, Pakistan's trade with Africa remains limited, accounting for less than 1.5% of Africa's total imports, with challenges such as high tariffs, logistical issues, and competition from global players like China and India. However, opportunities for growth exist in sectors such as textiles, pharmaceuticals, and mining, where Pakistan has a comparative advantage. Pakistan's diplomatic relations with Africa are multifaceted, involving participation in international organizations, peacekeeping missions, and cultural exchanges. The establishment of the Pak-African Friendship and Solidarity Network aims to foster mutual support and collaboration, particularly in defense, science, and technology. Despite these initiatives, Pakistan faces significant challenges, including infrastructural limitations, political constraints, and Africa's geopolitical instability. To enhance its engagement, Pakistan must focus on niche industries, expand its export base, and invest in sustainable development projects in Africa. This paper highlights the historical context, current dynamics, and future prospects of Pakistan-Africa relations, emphasizing the need for strategic partnerships that benefit both regions. By leveraging its youthful population and improving economic conditions, Pakistan can transition from being a recipient of aid to a provider of development assistance, fostering long-term growth and mutual prosperity.*

**Keywords:** *Pakistan, Africa, Trade Relations, Diplomatic Engagement, Aid, Economic Cooperation, Strategic Partnerships, Development Assistance,*

### **Introduction**

Pakistan and its relations with various African nations have unfortunately not been the subject of extensive study over the years. However, it is clear that engagement with Africa holds significant importance for Pakistan due to several compelling reasons. Historical ties were established early on with the nascent African countries during their formative years as independent states. These newly established nations extended crucial diplomatic recognition to Pakistan, particularly supporting it on the contentious Kashmir issue (Safdar, 2021). Such recognition by the African countries was considered vital for facilitating Pakistan's membership in the United Nations, which is a crucial aspect of international diplomacy.

Furthermore, many African nations continue to receive various forms of assistance from Pakistan, such as specialized training programs, technical aid, and educational scholarships that aim to enhance skills and knowledge. Additionally, a multitude of African countries cherish good memories of Pakistan and its hospitable people, as these nations have historically fostered friendly relations with one another. Notably, the presence of the largest number of South Africans in Pakistan stands out, especially when considering their visits during the harsh days of Apartheid, a prominent chapter in their shared history. All these multifaceted issues have contributed to forging a meaningful relationship between Pakistan and the diverse nations of Africa, underscoring the interconnectedness and mutual support that characterize their interactions.

The relationship between Africa and Pakistan has many dimensions. A number of African economies have achieved sustained economic growth rates in the last decade, compared to global averages in recent years. At the same time, the number of poor people in Africa has increased, as population growth in many poor countries has more than offset the positive economic trend. African governments have expressed their desire for a stronger economic partnership with Pakistan to design their own development programs in order to have more control over their

economic policy choices (Kanval et al.2024). According to the Cooperation Agreement of the New Partnership for African Development, there is an opportunity for developing countries that the African countries defined as "partners" to help them develop their programs. These economic potentials have encouraged Pakistan to forge extensive trade relations with Africa.

Recognizing an immensely important opportunity within the broad context of the rich history of economics and commerce, Pakistan began to seriously consider the prospect of discovering common ground with various countries, despite the historically interrupted past that has characterized relations. This endeavor is crucial as it has the potential to stimulate not just a new venture of economic relations, but also a revitalization of collaborative efforts between nations. Opportunities are viewed not only as a politically useful tool but are recognized as a fundamentally significant economic event that can lead to mutual growth and benefits. African countries, even to this day, continue to attach paramount importance to regional and sub-regional cooperation, understanding that unified progress can have a transformative effect. An earnest attempt to involve these nations is predicted to forge a pathway that would lead to faster and sustainable agreements.

Defense cooperation is another key issue that holds immense significance for African countries. In this domain, Pakistan has already established itself as a known and competitive player, providing valuable knowledge that could be shared with African nations to enhance their capabilities. This overlapping of advantages has led to the proposal of the entire concept of the Pak-African Friendship and Solidarity Network. This network consists of a diverse group of African countries along with Pakistan, working collaboratively to reinforce one another and achieve highly convergent purposes that are beneficial for all parties involved (Khan, 2024). It is thoughtfully designed to bring about mutual supportive and friendly assistance to the concerned parties while fostering enduring relationships based on trust and shared interests. However, as these relationships develop, it is essential to ensure that they do not impinge upon the divine sovereignty, territorial integrity, or the intrinsic sense of identity of any involved nations. The framework of this network must be

meticulously woven on the principles of mutuality and respect for fundamental rights and public freedoms.

In the scope of developed areas, economic development and industrial progress are of utmost priority along with modernity matters such as trade prosperity and robust communication networks. Additionally, defense and security, science and technology, culture, education, and other relevant fields of common concern play pivotal roles in this initiative. Convinced of the strong economic opportunities and objectives that lie ahead, the proposed network offers an array of new avenues for cooperation, effectively supporting mutually profitable policies and programs tailored to the specific needs of the member countries.

Within the purview of widespread agreement and compatibility with the overarching objectives of the Charter of the United Nations as well as the role played by the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the network aims to provide complementary items to international and regional institutions that are dedicated to peaceful activities and confidence-building policies. To promote functional coordination among the member states, it seeks to establish consultative bodies designated as Joint Cooperation Councils that will facilitate ongoing dialogue and collaboration. At more practical levels, individual bilateral agreements shall be created with specific parties, and appropriate implementing instruments will be devised in pursuance of the agreed terms reached through these councils (Meyer et al.2023). Furthermore, a comprehensive package of technical and energy projects shall be meticulously defined to structure their program of execution effectively. This collective approach strives to foster unity in action, ensuring that the aspirations of the Pak-African Friendship and Solidarity Network translate into tangible results for all involved nations.

### **Historical Background of Pakistan-Africa Relations**

Pakistan and African nations have historically engaged with each other in a number of ways. Despite being from different regions of the world, there are numerous cultural exchanges that bind Pakistan with the countries of Africa. They shared a common colonial history earlier in the 20th century where different regions of South Asia and Africa came under British colonial control. Various leaders and political movements in Pakistan supported the

anti-colonial struggles in Africa. Pakistan has traditionally extended educational and technical support including military training and armaments to numerous African nations that gained independence in the 1950s and 1960s. A non-residential South Asian collective of which Pakistan is a part has also expressed solidarity with the African nations that have abolitionist initiatives in international organizations as a shared struggle in decolonization. Despite these historical connections this region's interactions with the African nations have been termed "quite uneven and contentious" (Ebad Athar, 2019).

Pakistan's interaction with Africa has closely followed its alliances with the global and regional powers and has swayed on both sides. In the nascent years of independence and Cold War, Pakistan was close to the USA and UK and supported Euro-American positions and resolutions in international organizations against different anti-colonial initiatives supported by African nations. Later this nation joined the US bloc in the Cold War and considered Africa as belonging to the Soviet socialist bloc. Pakistan's geostrategic proximity to the Persian Gulf economies and the Iranian and regional oil producers has given Africa a secondary place in its foreign policy (Ahmed & Wahab Siddiqui, 2010).

However, efforts have been made to engage with the African nations trading in armaments and textile products during the 1970s and 1980s. Due to numerous internal and external factors, a very limited aid and trade relationship has taken place, thus constraining the influential historical connections compared to other more profound linkages such as trade, aid and diplomatic relations with North America, Europe, Middle East and Asia-Pacific. Regardless of these evolving incidences, the 'Africa Group' at the United Nations (UN) has remained an essential component for Pakistan's international strategy. It has been expanded and groups African nations with a large Muslim community like Nigeria and others with shared interests in international relations.

### **Trade Relations between Pakistan and African Nations**

Pakistan and African nations have seen bilateral trade grow over the years to \$4 billion, although the bulk of it is concentrated on a few key markets. Pakistan exports textiles and apparel goods, rice, cotton yarn, fabric, and pharmaceuticals to African nations, importing raw cotton, iron and steel, sulphur, minerals and palm

oil in exchange (Vaqar & Ghulam, 2011). The pharmaceutical industry, agriculture and mining are sectors Pakistan and African nations around the region can collaborate in. The regions can also partner in the marble, granite and gemstone sector as Africa has vast resources of these regions and Pakistan has the technology and potential to extract and enhance the value of these natural endowments. The increase of trade will not only create jobs in both regions but will also help balance the trade deficit that both regions currently have. Trade Agreements with Africa in place have been inked with the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa / Preferential Trade Agreement, ECOWAS, and Mauritius; a Comprehensive Trade Agreement with Sudan; and PTA Forum and Free Trade Agreements with Egypt and South African Customs Union. Agreements under discussion comprise a Trade Agreement with the Maghreb Union and Free Trade Agreements with Algeria, Ghana, Tunisia, Morocco, Kenya, and Tanzania. Free Pre-Feasibility Studies on Free Trade Agreements with Nigeria and the Southern African Development Community Customs Union are under consideration.

Pakistan's trade with Africa has shown remarkable growth over the years, yet it continues to remain quite limited in scope when compared to the trade relations that other countries maintain with the African continent. Currently, Pakistan holds a share of less than 1.5% of the total imports of goods by various African countries, which underscores the challenges and barriers that still exist. A number of issues impede the more rapid growth of trade between Pakistan and Africa. For instance, high tariffs imposed by African nations on imports from Asia are a strategy aimed at shielding their emerging industries (Masood et al.2023). Additionally, Pakistan's value-added textile products face intense competition from established players such as China and India, leading to difficulties in gaining market access. Logistical problems further complicate the situation, making it hard to facilitate smooth trade operations.

Given that sub-Sahara Africa is classified as one of the least developed regions globally, projections indicate that if the current average level of trade persists, it could take about a century for the merchandise trade volume between Africa and Pakistan to reach a more substantial level. Currently, Africa represents approximately

1% of Pakistan's overall exports, which is strikingly low. However, it's important to highlight that small and medium enterprises (SMEs) stand to gain significantly from initiatives aimed at enhancing trade relations between Pakistan and Africa. These SMEs are vital components of most economies, contributing a considerable share of exports, and internationalizing them can greatly increase their competitiveness by fostering better productivity and encouraging innovation.

Moreover, the rapidly changing international trading landscape, particularly influenced by the US-driven conflict in Iraq, might lead to a surge in affordable imports from developed countries, especially textiles, thus exerting additional pressure on Pakistan's already struggling manufacturing sector. In light of these dynamics, there has been ongoing exploration of the potential for strengthening economic relations with emerging markets located in both South Asia and Southeast Asia. Efforts have been made to support the Pakistani business community operating in Africa by organizing trade missions and arranging reciprocal visits involving business delegations. The question arises whether it is considered beneficial for business delegations from relevant African nations to make visits to Pakistan, and importantly, whether such visits have already been arranged or planned.

The initiatives aimed at exploring and developing closer economic ties have predominantly been directed towards countries that share either geographical or historical connections with Pakistan. In this context, the Government of Pakistan has initiated some preliminary steps to uncover trading opportunities with Commonwealth nations in Africa (Kothari & Cruikshank, 2022). A notable meeting occurred on 18 December 2018 in Islamabad, where the High Commissioner of Pakistan in Kenya convened with the South African High Commissioner based in London. During the meeting, there was consensus on the necessity of fostering bilateral trade between these two nations, alongside discussions on the modalities for effectively utilizing South Africa as a gateway to access the wider African continent.

To a certain extent, commercial envoys located within Pakistan and at various missions abroad have been actively highlighting available trade opportunities to business communities in both Pakistan and pertinent African countries, with a view to promoting

and expanding Pakistan's export base. Although a degree of rapport exists among the Commonwealth High Commissions scattered across Africa, the commercial staff at these missions are already fully engaged in advocating for the export interests of their respective countries. Beyond facilitating the exchange of trade inquiries, commercial information, and advisory support, any discreet collaboration on a mutually beneficial basis tends to be constrained by the distinct commercial objectives that each mission pursues. Compounding these challenges is the fact that Pakistan has only one embassy located in Africa, which is in Nairobi, tasked with servicing the entire continent. This limited presence presents significant logistical hurdles to the potential trade between the two regions. Additionally, the lack of direct flights connecting Pakistan and various parts of Africa, combined with the reality that Asian airlines have discontinued stops in Africa, severely restricts cargo capacity and thereby hampers trade possibilities. (Habibullah and Xiguang2022)

#### **Aid and Development Cooperation Initiatives**

This paper investigates the size and nature of Pakistani aid with African nations both multilaterally and bilaterally. Evidence suggests that Pakistan has mainly supplied military aid with African nations. Using principals and agents approach this paper suggests it is due to the reason that military aid serves the purpose of the donors more than the receivers. However, with the reduction of security related externalities in Pakistan, a new avenue for aid is needed. Based on the principal and agents approach this paper argues that one potential source for new aid would be in the sector that has weakened Pakistan the most from the principals and agents point of view over the last decade – civil naval assistance, which, if poorly supplied, is an inefficient good due to limited number of potential suppliers (Ahmed & Wahab Siddiqui, 2010). Africa is increasingly recognized both by the government and the private sector and called the commercial diplomacy initiative. In this regard, it pursues aid effectiveness in order to enhance the diplomatic objectives. It argues that Africa's importance would rise further due to the rural transformation plan and the ongoing dispute with the US regarding the H-1B visa use by the IT professionals of Pakistan.

#### **Diplomatic Relations and International Cooperation**



Diplomatic relations between Pakistan and African nations utilize a complex network of formal and informal channels of communication in order to meet both the commercial and political interests. Previously mainly concentrated on economic relations, this text outlines different aspects of diplomatic initiatives between Pakistan and African nations and evaluates their impact on bilateral relations. Such diverse diplomatic appeals may include representation of political leaders, representation of the Pakistani government and military officials in international organizations, regional interactions between Pakistan and the African Union also through the Istanbul Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries, and the participation of Pakistan in UN peacekeeping missions in Africa. This research deploys a mixed-methods approach by integrating data received from diplomatic questionnaires and in-depth trade interviews with the government officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan.

Pakistan's involvement in Africa extends beyond the mere outline of its formal diplomatic relations, revealing a multidimensional engagement that is crucial for both parties. Although Africa is generally considered on the fringes of Pakistan's broader foreign policy framework, the continent's geographical significance plays a pivotal role in shaping Pakistan's strategic interests there (Berger, 2022). Positioned strategically south of Europe and the Middle East and to the north of the vast Indian Ocean, the geopolitics surrounding Pakistan are characterized as being of paramount importance, especially given the critical sea routes that connect Europe to the Persian Gulf, Africa, and Central Asia, all of which pass through Pakistani territorial waters.

Insights derived from various diplomatic questionnaires indicate that the roots of Pakistan's strategic interests in Africa lie in its recognition of Africa as home to some of the largest undeveloped and underutilized markets around the globe. The ongoing development of Pakistan's economy aligns with the belief among Pakistani policymakers that the country has a wealth of valuable development experiences that it could share effectively with various African nations. Furthermore, this research suggests that Pakistan's economic aspirations in Africa are intricately linked to the strategic stakes it maintains in the Indian Ocean region.

Beyond these economic and strategic interests, Pakistan has historically nurtured a friendship with the African Union, reinforcing the bond between the two. The recent diplomatic visits signal a deviation towards a more expansive diplomatic strategy; Pakistan aims to establish new diplomatic consulates across the globe, with a keen focus on the African continent. It becomes evident that diplomacy is not the sole strategy undertaken by the Pakistani government in its quest to strengthen bilateral relations; such diplomatic endeavors are frequently accompanied by diverse initiatives led by Pakistani businessmen and trade delegations exploring opportunities in other nations (Fatima, 2023).

In parallel with these efforts, the growth of bilateral commerce is significantly supported by the establishment of government-backed agreements that aim to cater to the trading requisites of both nations involved. Additionally, there are profound understandings articulated by noted individuals in both countries, deemed essential for fostering community-building and nurturing deeper ties. Often, these reciprocal relationships are gradually cultivated over protracted periods, culminating in lasting partnerships.

Sports leagues, particularly cricket tournaments, have emerged as influential platforms in this regard, recognized as effective avenues for initiating people-to-people dialogue and fostering cultural exchanges with other nations. These initiatives not only bolster the sports community but also reinforce broader ties between Pakistan and Africa, ultimately contributing to a deeper mutual understanding.

### **Regional Dynamics and Alliances**

Global headlines often portray Africa as a venue for intense geopolitical competition among major powers. Underlying these narratives are complex histories of trade, conflict, and alliances that predate colonial borders. In order to understand the context within which Pakistani diplomatic, trade, and aid efforts are mobilized, the geopolitics of African regions are considered, particularly within the Eastern and Southern regions that may be overlooked in public discourse (Csurgai, 2022). In acknowledgment of , the “strategic culture of great powers” and the effect of other major powers in Africa including China, India, and the proposed “Bretton Woods Opportunities”, specifically the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are

received a unique focus. In how they are shaping the context for Pakistani diplomacy and trade in regional forums, shaping local understandings of security, and influencing the structures of international power, these powers compete and cooperate across a large swath of Africa and exert power in a multitude of direct and indirect ways.

Considering the escalating rivalry between China and India in Africa (so-called “Chindia”) and their significant interests in East Africa, less-discussed global reactions to the “Chindia” rivalry are examined, particularly those of the United States to establish what they mean for “third party” trade deals and security arrangements against more dominant powers. It is argued that a focus on the complicated interplay and confrontation of geopolitical alliances, rather than any individual power, may give a fuller picture of some of the broader underlying causes of current conflict and competition in the realm of diplomacy, trade, and aid in world affairs (Mamoon, 2017). These geopolitical landscapes are considered first and used as a lens to examine the impact of these alliances on trade, security, and political relations. In turn, analyses of the effect of regional organizations on these alliances are presented, and how they further shape trade, conflict, and alliance interactions. In receipt of these large considerations, a more detailed mapping of sub-regional geopolitical landscapes is pursued, with a focus, in particular, on how regional conflicts and collaborations provide the context for Pakistani diplomacy, trade, and aid efforts. This opening of the Section was informed by ongoing dialogue with African Studies scholars in hopes of better aligning this work with African regional priorities.

### **Challenges and Opportunities in Pakistan's Engagement with Africa**

Pakistan's growing engagement with various African nations is a relatively recent phenomenon that has not received the attention it deserves. This section delves into the multiple opportunities as well as the significant challenges that Pakistan faces in cultivating and enhancing its relations with different African countries. On the economic front, one critical issue that Pakistan must address is the existing trade imbalance with Africa, which poses a considerable obstacle. The apparent lack of infrastructural development in Pakistan serves as a barrier, hindering its ability to effectively

compete with economic giants like China or India on the African continent (Shahzad et al.2023). China has made substantial investments, funding the construction of roads, airports, and has undertaken many bolder ventures across Africa, particularly in areas where Pakistan has yet to establish a significant footprint. Some local constraints have also impeded the ability of Pakistani companies to successfully compete with Chinese acquisitions in various sectors, particularly in the west, such as construction contracts for skyscrapers and major public works projects. Factors including risk mitigation strategies, the structuring of deals, and other considerations play a crucial role in these dynamics.

On the political front, the limited space available for politicians and diplomats to engage in discussions surrounding sensitive allegations has constrained the negotiating power required for forging stronger ties with African nations. Additionally, electoral commitments that tether domestic policy to regional interests further complicate Pakistan's engagement in Africa. It is apparent that changing these ingrained dynamics will require more than just the tenure of a single government; rather, it establishes a much longer and more complex runway for any serious attempts at redefining Pakistan's role in the African landscape. Furthermore, Africa is characterized as a highly unstable region concerning Pakistan's strategic interests. The myriad issues surrounding governance, long-standing civil wars, the presence of Islamic terrorist organizations, and numerous land disputes represent highly relevant barriers to realizing prosperous ventures in critical markets such as Nigeria or Kenya.

To navigate this landscape effectively, the primary focus should be on expanding Pakistani exports to Africa, specifically in niche industries where the country has a comparative advantage. Rather than pursuing an overarching vision of economic development, the emphasis should be placed on sectors including textiles, cutlery, and sporting goods. To illustrate, the city of Sialkot stands out as a model for best practices in this context. The existing value-added sports goods cantonment in Sialkot needs to be further expanded to other cities across Pakistan to replicate its success. Other viable alternatives for technology transfers involve selling pharmaceuticals and establishing cement factories within Africa, while also exporting any excess production to meet local demands

(McCartney, 2022). For instance, exports of wind and hydro equipment from Pakistan to Tanzania are already running under an off-take guarantee that is being supported by TFIN. Consumer goods originating from Pakistan are consistently supplied to supermarkets in Uganda, illustrating a growing market presence.

Ultimately, the emphasis should not be solely on the magnitude of the venture but rather on the intention behind it: to make high-yielding investments in a resource-rich yet underdeveloped region that is concurrently drawing the attention of various global power brokers. In this regard, six case studies developed by various actors in the development sector contain insightful observations that highlight the intricate links between Pakistan and Africa. These case studies offer a nuanced exploration of what success looks like in this collaborative endeavor, alongside illuminating the difficulties and costs that are inevitably involved in this complex process. This comprehensive understanding can guide future policies and investment strategies as Pakistan aims to enhance its presence and foster lasting relationships with African nations. (Vaqar & Ghulam, 2011)

### **Conclusion**

This paper deeply reflects upon Pakistan's multifaceted interaction with various African nations, focusing on their historical context, current dynamics, and potential future areas of collaboration and mutual interest. It critically analyzes Pakistan's historical involvement with these distinguished nations and their gradual movement towards establishing more robust bilateral trading relations, particularly concerning the C-5 countries of Africa. The discussion encompasses a comprehensive overview of Pakistan's commercial stance with respect to Africa, outlining its current strategic trade initiatives and identifying various potential contributions that can be made to significantly enhance these vital relationships.

Additionally, the present state of foreign policy of Pakistan concerning the diverse African continent is elaborated upon in detail. Important key areas of traditional diplomacy are thoroughly addressed, encompassing trade and commerce, cultural exchanges, tourism promotion, capacity building initiatives, and humanitarian assistance through various developmental projects. Moreover, ongoing political support extends the discussion into

deeper realms of interaction between Pakistan and Africa. Furthermore, the paper forwards thoughtful insights regarding future prospects and concrete suggestions aimed specifically at fostering a more extensive and community-oriented involvement between Pakistan and the African nations. This emphasis is placed on collaboration that ultimately benefits not only the nations involved but also their respective populations, encouraging a sense of shared growth and prosperity.

Efforts must be made to portray a positive and compelling image of Pakistan, one that truly reflects its vast potential as an emerging country brimming with immense opportunities and capabilities to offer to the world. This is particularly crucial as we take full advantage of its improving security conditions and its steadily growing economy, which presents a new chapter for the nation. Moreover, Pakistan should vigorously transition from its current status as a recipient of predominantly emergency aid to becoming a proactive provider of sustainable and long-term development assistance to various African nations, among others. This shift is not merely beneficial but essential, as it signifies growth and maturity in Pakistan's role on the global stage. Only through such a transformation will the entrenched grip of the resource curse and the cycle of chronic violence that plagues the region be effectively broken and addressed over the long haul.

The prospects for progress must be channeled by strategically tapping into the enormous potential of the vast, young human resources of Pakistan, which can drive innovation, change, and sustainable development. Harnessing this youthful energy not only offers prospects for national development but also plays a pivotal role in fostering international cooperation and solidarity. In that expansive potential lies not only the future and well-being of Pakistan and its diverse civil society but also the crucial inclination towards the service of others an unwavering commitment to humanitarianism that truly needs to take center stage in our collective global dialogue and actions. This commitment can pave the way toward building stronger alliances and fostering understanding among nations, ultimately leading to a more harmonious and prosperous world for all.

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