

Prospects for Minilateralism in the Western Indian Ocean

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Abstract

Traditionally, New Delhi has cooperated with the East and South African countries bordering the Indian Ocean within the broader framework of South-South Cooperation. Now within the Indo-Pacific narrative and increasing Chinese profile in the region, India's strategic engagement with the countries of the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) has increased. This has been reflected through commercial and development interactions and maritime security cooperation. The India-Africa summit meetings and Prime Minister Modi's Africa policy has further sharpened these engagements. The paper looks at India's bilateral and multilateral engagements and explores scope for a minilaterals involving India, a few of its major strategic partners and some key countries from the region. The paper argues that existing triangular development cooperation interactions in the WIO could be extended to trade and commerce, infrastructure connectivity and maritime cooperation in the form of possible minilaterals.

Key Words: Indo-Pacific, minilateralism, Western Indian Ocean

Introduction

Due to the increasing importance of the Indian Ocean within the context of contemporary Indo-Pacific narrative as well as India's traditional close ties with Africa, the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region has emerged as an important area of engagement for India. Many other powers including China are also active in the region. Most definitions of the WIO region include Comoros, French Indian Ocean territories (Mayotte and Reunion), Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Mauritius, Maldives, Seychelles, Somalia, South Africa and Tanzania. Traditionally, India has dealt with countries in the WIO region mainly bilaterally within the broader policy of South-South Cooperation (SSC). More recent ties could also be explained within the context of India-Africa Forum Summits and ten guiding principles of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Africa policy. India also engages with the region through the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). New Delhi has also cooperated with major powers like South Africa within Group of 20 (G20), Brazil- Russia- India- China-South Africa (BRICS), and India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA). Maldives is a member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). As India occupies a key position in the Indian Ocean, it is keen to take more maritime responsibilities in the WIO. The region is vulnerable due to piracy, radicalisation and terrorism. Through maritime cooperation, New Delhi is also playing an important role in shaping the maritime security architecture in the WIO. This is done through

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conducting anti-piracy patrols, bilateral maritime cooperation and coordination with multilateral arrangements like the Djibouti Code of Conduct. India's major engagement with the WIO countries is also through capacity building programmes, and lines of credit through development cooperation activities. In recent years, many development projects are also being implemented through triangular cooperation with the United Kingdom, United States and Japan. With the United States, India is working in Kenya and Mozambique. A strong partnership is emerging with the United Kingdom in Kenya and Tanzania. With Japan, a broad understanding is developing through implementation of the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC). As there is a limited engagement in the WIO region through minilateralism so far, the paper looks at possibilities of minilateral cooperation in specific areas of action.

Contextualising WIO Region through historic India-Africa Ties and Contemporary Indo-Pacific Narrative

In recent years, the WIO region has become important for Indian strategic calculations. Its significance, however, needs to be situated within the broader India-Africa relations and contemporary narrative on the Indo-Pacific. The interplay of these two factors will help us understand current dynamics and possible new alignments in terms of new regional or minilateral engagements. New Delhi's historical, cultural, economic and political linkages between India and Africa are well documented (Sharma, 2007; Taylor, 2012). India's historical role against colonialism, neo-colonialism and apartheid also strengthened these bonds. Over decades, both have shared a common understanding on a large number of crucial global issues. In most cases, both have been on the same side in global negotiations to make the international economic order more equitable and friendly to the countries from the South. In the last three decades, particularly after the end of the Cold War, both India and Africa have changed significantly. Still, the importance of both for each other has not declined. Both have young populations, growing economies and a lot of development experiences to share. To a large extent, India-Africa economic developments in the last few decades could be incorporated within the broader concept of South-South Cooperation (SSC).

Compared to earlier decades, growth performance in Africa in the last two decades has been remarkable. In the 1990s, average economic growth in Africa was slower than global growth and much lower than other developing countries. For the period between 2001 and 2008, growth in Africa accelerated. It was about six per cent per year, which was very close to fast

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growing developing countries in Asia and elsewhere. As a result of many factors including declining global growth and volatility in primary product prices, African growth for the period since 2009 has come down to about 3 percent per year. Although lower than India and other Asian developing countries, this is still slightly higher than the average global growth. Overall, African growth performance in the last twenty years illustrate huge economic potential in the coming years. To a significant extent growth in the first decade of twentieth century was resulted from high prices of primary products. However, many other sectors including wholesale and retail trade, telecommunications, financial services, construction etc. played an important role. The resurgent Africa has expressed its ambition through *Agenda 2063* and its 15 flagship projects.

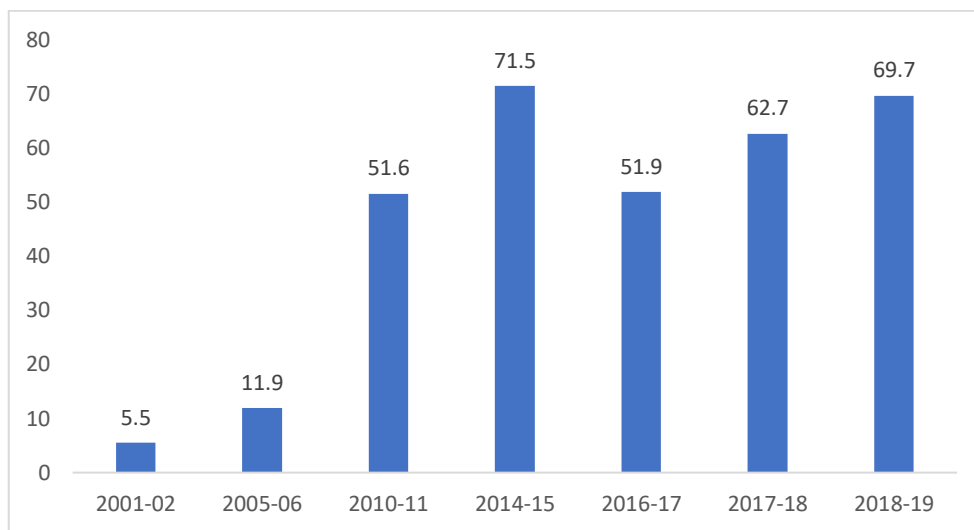
Africa with its recent growth history, young population and plenty of success stories in agriculture, telecommunications, consumer markets, banking etc is much more confident today than any time in the recent past. Many of the fastest growing economies of the world are in Africa. When there are clear trends towards protectionism in the world, Africa has taken a bold step in the opposite direction by launching the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in 2019. As almost every country in the continent is a member, this will be the largest free trade area in the world by number of countries. The idea is to create an Africa-wide market for goods and services as well as promotion of movement of capital and people (Hartzenberg, 2019). Despite a large number of regional economic groupings within Africa, intra-regional trade is low. It is hoped that AfCFTA will promote higher trade and economies of scale for African companies. Within these changing dynamics, a new development partnership is being built between India and Africa. It is based on solid historical closeness as well as new economic dynamism in both Africa and India.

As a result of economic changes in Africa and India, bilateral trade has increased from about \$ 5.5 billion in 2001-02 to about \$70 billion in 2018-19. It increased to about \$52 billion in 2010-11 and peaked at about \$72 billion in 2014-15. This improvement in trade was also facilitated by introducing policies like the 'Focus Africa' programme by the Indian government in 2002. This was an initiative to improve trade and investment ties with Africa. Similarly, the India-Africa Summit initiative was started in 2008. In addition, the Duty Free Tariff Preferences (DFTP) initiative for Least Developing Countries (LDCs) by the Indian government also might have helped bilateral trade. The scheme is now extended to 98% of India's tariff lines and 38 African countries now benefit from the DFTP scheme. The trade

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with Africa is still concentrated on a limited number of products. About three-fourth of African exports to India are natural resources and primary commodities. Similarly about 40% of Indian exports are pharmaceuticals and refined petroleum products (Afreximbank and Exim India, 2018). As a result of global slowdown, bilateral trade came down to \$52 billion in 2016-17. It improved again and reached about \$70 billion in 2018-19 (figure 1).

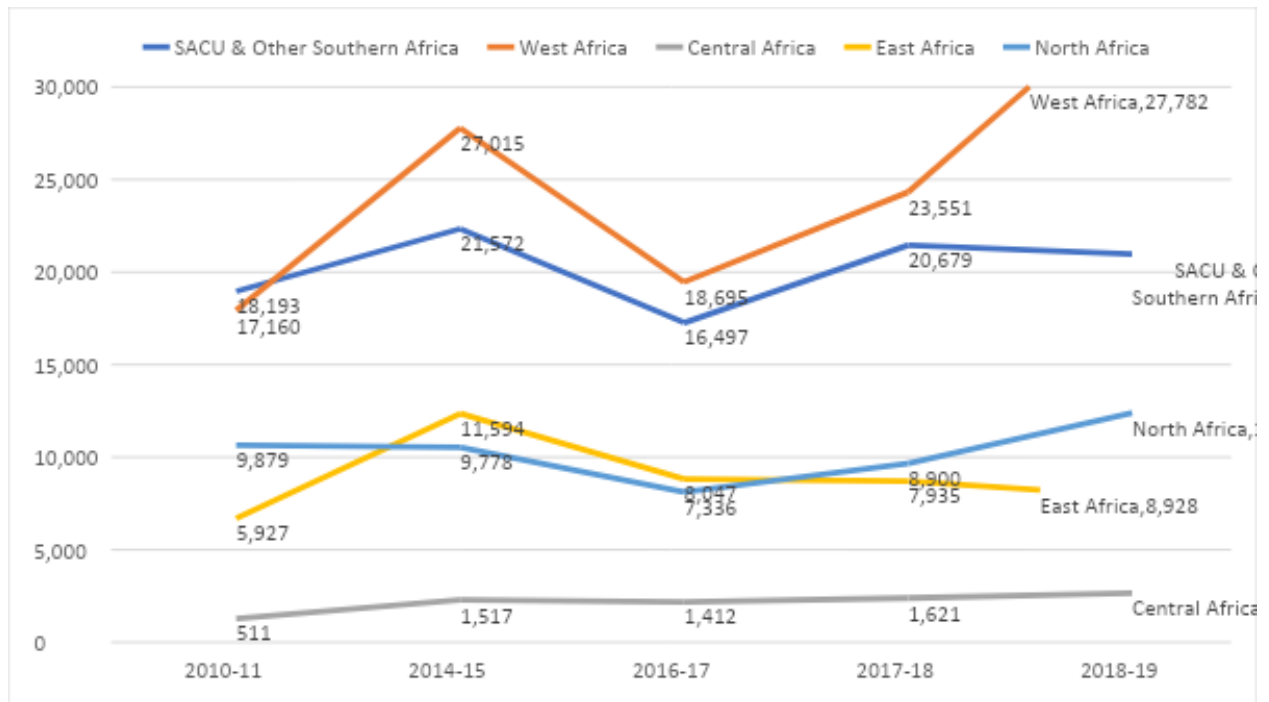
Figure 1: India-Africa Trade, 2001-02 to 2018-19 (US\$ billions)



Source: Authors' calculations based on Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Government of India Database

The coastal Eastern and Southern African countries of the WIO region are becoming important trade partners. The Western Africa has emerged as a major trading partner of India, mainly because of petroleum imports from Nigeria and gold from other countries. In the Southern region (including South African Customs Union (SACU) and other countries, South Africa is a major market for India. Trade with Eastern Africa has also improved. Major exports are pharmaceuticals, petroleum products and vehicles. Imports include coal, metals, and vegetables. Main trading partners from the region include Tanzania, Mozambique, Kenya, Ethiopia and Mauritius (Sachdeva, 2020).

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Source: Authors' calculations based on Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Government of India Database

Apart from trade, investment linkages with Africa are also becoming stronger. And within India-Africa economic relations, the WIO region is playing a key role. Although Indian policy makers have emphasized success in this area at every forum, the real situation is rather complicated. The Ministry of External Affairs officials claim that “India has become the fifth largest investor in Africa with cumulative investments at over US\$54 billion” (Tirumurti, 2019). These figures are correct but bulk of these investments are made in the WION region, particularly in Mauritius. As Mauritius is a tax haven, a large part of this money is round tripped back to India (Chakrabarty, 2018). Between 2012 and 2016, Mauritius accounted for about 86% of total Indian FDI to Africa. Excluding Mauritius, only a few African countries have received large investments from a limited number of big public or private companies. Second major recipient is another WIO nation, Mozambique. This is due to large public sector investments by India in the oil, gas and coal sector. Third important recipient is South Africa, another country from WIO. This is due to investments made by TATA group of companies in the hotel industry, steel, IT sector and consumer goods (Chaudhry, Tomar and Joshi, 2018).

While looking at two-way investments from Africa, technically the WIO region is a major investor in India. In fact, for the period between April 2000 and June 2022, Mauritius is India's top investor with \$160 billion investment. This was 26% of total investments made in India during this period. Other important investors from the WIO were South Africa (about \$590

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million), Seychelles (\$218 million), Mozambique (about \$16 million) (MOCI, 2022). So, the India-Africa investment story is basically India-WIO region investment story.

Although the concept of Indo-Pacific is still evolving, it has already become a powerful narrative in the last few years. Diplomatically, countries are trying to define its relevance in various ways. Depending on the national interests and strategic priorities countries are defining geographical boundaries of the Indo Pacific. However, the centrality of that narrative is to build some coalitions, forums, platforms which can somehow balance the impact of rising and assertive China. And within this narrative, India becomes important. First, because of its important role in the Indian Ocean. The Indian Ocean is a key component of the Indo Pacific construct and India plays an important role in the Indian Ocean. Secondly, compared to other countries in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) or trilateral security pact between Australia, the UK, and the US (AUKUS), India is not an alliance partner of the United States. So far, the major focus of the narrative has been towards East and Southeast Asia, perhaps mainly because of concentration of actions to rebalance China. However, for India, the WIO part of the Indo-Pacific narrative is equally important. Through various strategies and announcements, Indian policy makers are also giving significant attention to the WIO part of the Indo-Pacific story.

Infrastructure Connectivity

Although the Indo-Pacific narrative has been dominated by strategic arrangements, the real competition is emerging in connectivity strategies. Despite the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) dominating discussions in the last few years, there are many other important initiatives which are at different stages of implementation. Apart from the ASEAN connectivity plan, Japan, India, South Korea and other countries have their own designs. The EU announced its own Europe-Asia connectivity and Global Gateway strategy. The Quad nations have formed their own infrastructure partnership. The G7 and G20 have also outlined their principles for sustainable connectivity. The frameworks of these plans differ in terms of their origin, priorities, resource commitments and partnerships. All have strong Indo-Pacific or BRI dimensions.

Every major infrastructure can be looked at from various perspectives. The developmental aspect clearly highlights the economic benefit of the project for participating countries.

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Historically, many regional infrastructure projects within their regional cooperation or regional integration frameworks in Europe and Asia were primarily advocated for their economic benefits. In the last two decades, however, many of the large infrastructural projects of strategies have also been monitored very closely through the prism of geopolitics. This has been clearly the case with the United States' New Silk Road Strategy (NSRS), Russian dominated Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and China led BRI. Similarly, the BRI has been looked at primarily from a geopolitical perspective by India, United States and some other countries. As Russia-China bonhomie has grown, both are trying to integrate their infrastructure strategies. Similarly, the EU, Japan and the United States are trying to build connectivity partnerships with like-minded countries, either bilaterally or through G7 grouping.

Within the WIO region, geopolitics of maritime connectivity is becoming a major concern, particularly for India. The importance of the Indian Ocean for China has increased significantly in recent years due to its expanding trade, energy transport and investments. Sea lanes of communication running through Malacca Strait, Persian Gulf, Arabian sea, Indian Ocean and South China Sea are important for China for its increasing energy and raw material needs. Indian Ocean littorals are also becoming important due to increasing investments by Chinese companies in the region as well as Chinese citizens living and working in these areas (US China Commission, 2016). For China, maritime expansion is also part of its strategy of economic integration of different regions of the Indo-Pacific with the Chinese economy (Sachdeva 2021). As a result, China has started increasing its footprint in the Indian Ocean. Within South and Southeast Asia it has made investments in strategic ports. However, it is not just South Asia but 'nearly two-thirds of the world's 50 major ports are either owned by China or have received some Chinese investment' (Malik, 2018). China is also dispatching an increasing number of surface warships and submarines to the Indian Ocean region.

As commercial ports could be converted into military use, this Chinese "string of pearls" in South Asia has already troubled many Indian policy makers and analysts (Suri, 2017). India considers itself as a leading player in the Indian Ocean and at present has a considerable advantage over China. Although a peaceful maritime environment in the WIO region is important for China for its economic expansion, this area may see increasing competition from India and others. China, however, would like to project these investments as purely

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commercial ventures and perhaps would welcome further Indian investments in WIO ports which will improve its own connectivity with the region.

Chinese maritime connectivity challenges have pushed India to have its own strategy. It has started fortifying its “defences in the Indian Ocean by acquiring privileged access to bases in the Maldives, Mauritius, the Seychelles, Madagascar, Oman, and Iran; conduct joint naval exercises in the East and South China Seas; sign logistics exchange agreements with the United States, Singapore, and France to gain access to naval bases in the Indo-Pacific, and launch an ambitious naval expansion program” (Malik, 2018). In addition, it has upgraded its development cooperation programs with the littorals, and to revive old cultural trade routes in the Indian Ocean, New Delhi also announced its own doctrine called SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region).

Although many European countries, US and Japan were always heavily involved in infrastructure projects financing, the BRI has pushed many geopolitical worries. Dual use of infrastructure projects is always possible. Any port or airport can be used both for business as well as military purposes. These worries have also led to competing infrastructure strategies. The increasing profile of the BRI is pushing many promoters of these plans in the Indo-Pacific to work out convergence strategies based on transparent behaviour, sustainable financing and quality infrastructure. Japan is now partnering with the EU and India for sustainable connectivity and Asia-Africa Growth Corridor respectively. It has also agreed to work with the US and Australia. India has established a connectivity partnership with the EU.

As a response to the BRI, many official statements and speeches from the Quad nations as well as from the EU refer to global norms, financial responsibility, transparency, debt burdens, environmental sustainability and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity etc (MEA, 2017). These are all indirect references to Chinese infrastructure projects in the region. These issues are now routinely mentioned at all bilateral and multilateral meetings including at the G7 and G20. The EU has also started raising some of these concerns during its global engagements and has also come out with its own connectivity and Indo-Pacific strategies.

The Quad nations have been working together or separately to pursue their connectivity strategies, in September 2021, they have formally launched a new “Quad infrastructure

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partnership”. Under the partnership they have agreed to “cooperate to provide technical assistance, empowering regional partners with evaluative tools, and will promote sustainable infrastructure development”. Under the new partnership they have also emphasized the “importance of supporting open, fair, and transparent lending practices in line with international rules and standards for major creditor countries, including on debt sustainability and accountability, and call on all creditors to adhere to these rules and standards” (The White House, 2021).

India’s various activities connected to maritime security in the WIO region will have to be synchronised with infrastructure connectivity. As outlined by Mishra (2019), India have developed various cooperation mechanisms with the WIO countries. These include Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS), Djibouti Code of Conduct (DCoC), and Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC) in Madagascar. Similarly, bilaterally, India has developed significant cooperation maritime issues. The cooperation is taking place in the forms of, conducting anti-piracy patrol, training of naval personnel, defence officers, and civilian personnel engaged in maritime administration, conducting Hydrographic Surveys and WIO nations developing basic capabilities in hydrography etc. Due to limited resource allocation, time overruns and weak coordination, the impact has been limited. (for details see Mishra 2019). Moreover, India also collaborates with WIO nations through Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). Since Chinese strategic activities in the region are also supported by its broader BRI projects, India also needs to link these activities with infrastructure connectivity projects. Since maritime infrastructure financing may involve significant resources, India may need to find like-minded partners to implement some of these projects in the WIO region.

The *UK-India Roadmap 2030* (MEA 2021) has talked about exploring initiatives to “improve connectivity between India and the UK and seek synergies between our cooperation on connectivity projects with third countries including in the Indo-Pacific region”. Since both are busy negotiating bilateral trade agreement at the moment, no major connectivity initiative in any third country has been announced so far. The WIO region is certainly one area where India and the UK can work together in maritime connectivity or related fields. Similarly, in the context of Indo-Pacific region, India and France have agreed that both “will continue to develop new partnerships in various formats with like-minded countries in the region and

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within regional organisations” (MEA 2022a). Besides, they will “work together in the implementation of the India-EU Connectivity Partnership”. Japan is also lead connectivity partner in India’s Indo-Pacific Oceans’ Initiative (IPOI) (MEA 2022b), which was announced by Prime Minister Modi in 2019. Seven pillars of the IPOI include maritime security; maritime ecology; maritime resources; capacity building and resource sharing; disaster risk reduction and management; science, technology and academic cooperation; and trade connectivity and maritime transport (MEA 2020).

India-WIO Development Partnership

Today development partnership with African countries occupies an important position in Indian strategy and its external economic policy. To some extent this might have been influenced by the growing Chinese profile in the region. Indian development partnership is clearly manifested through the institutional mechanisms built over decades as well as specific development cooperation programmes, projects and soft credit lines. These activities in India’s neighbourhood and Africa broadly appear within the framework of South -South Cooperation (SSC). The Indian development activities abroad broadly include lines of credit (LOCs), capacity-building programmes and grant assistance projects. By March 2020, the EXIM Bank had signed 288 LOCs covering more than sixty countries in Africa, Asia, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and Latin America, with credit commitments of around US\$ 29.6 billion (India Exim Bank, 2019). A large number of these LOCs are with African countries. Within the WIO region, the Indian government has provided LOCs worth about US\$ 5 billion so far. Major LOC recipient countries in the WIO region include Maldives (\$ 1330 million), Tanzania (\$1115 million) Mauritius (\$954 million), Mozambique (\$772 million) Kenya (\$206 million), Comoros (\$ 42 million) and Seychelles (\$16 million) (Exim Bank Database, nd). Another \$ 500 million LOCs are under negotiation. These include a \$300 million metro project in Mauritius, 100 million defence related projects in Madagascar and \$100 million for upgradation projects in Maldives. In recent years, India has also initiated triangular cooperation with other partners in Africa. In partnership with the US, India has agreed to work jointly in agriculture related projects in Botswana, DR Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia (USAID, n.d.). With Japan, India has initiated an infrastructural project called Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC). The AAGC will work through development cooperation projects, quality infrastructure and institutional connectivity, enhancing capacities and people to people

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partnership. The project will be aligned with development priorities of African countries. The priority projects will be in the areas of health and pharmaceuticals, agriculture, disaster management and skill development and connectivity . Similar triangular projects are also being explored with the EU. Some have argued that individual member states of the EU like Germany could also work with India on triangular projects in Africa (Wagner, 2019).

Traditionally, India used to be very important recipient of British aid. This relationship is totally transformed now. In the last two decades, this relationship has grown into global partnerships for development, particularly in Africa. In recent years, the UK government agencies have supported many of the triangular projects implemented through the Indian government, civil society or the private sector. To institutionalise many of these actions, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and DFID signed the “Statement of Intent on Partnership for Cooperation in Third Countries” in 2015. Some of the major initiatives include DFID-TERI Partnership (2011-15), Knowledge Partnership Programme (2012-16), Strategic Health and Nutrition Partnership (2013-18), Innovative Ventures and Technologies for Development (2013-19), Global Research Partnership on Food and Nutrition Security, Health & Women (2013-20), Supporting Indian Trade and Investment for Africa (SITA Africa, 2014-2020). Some of these projects were also implemented in the WIO region including in Kenya and Tanzania (For details see Mittal, 2020 and Paulo 2018).

Possible Minilateralism in the WIO

The post-pandemic and post-Ukraine war world may be a different world altogether. The world order was already in transition. These two developments have accelerated this change. The western world order under the leadership of the United States is already weakened. China is expanding and asserting. Many European nations are talking about strategic autonomy. Similarly, India’s hope for an alternative norm building through the BRICS are low today. However, suspicions about Beijing are also growing. Multilateral institutions including the WHO, WTO and the UN, have proved less effective during the pandemic, trade tensions and Ukraine war. Due to limited effectiveness of regional and multilateral institutions, there has been a rise of minilateral institutions. These smaller groups have advantage over broader regional and multilateral forums due to limited like-minded membership and focussed agenda (see Singh and Teo 2020) Similar to many other countries, India has also started using minilateral engagements as part of its foreign policy tools.

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The Indo-Pacific region has seen establishment of Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad); Australia-France-India trilateral ministerial dialogue; Australia, India and Indonesia trilateral; Malabar naval exercisers; and the Australia, UK and the USA (AUKUS). These minilaterals deal not just with security related matters but also issues like climate change, supply chain resilience, infrastructure, critical technologies and health issues (Rajagopalan 2021). This has been clearly the case with the Quad. In an attempt to rebalance China's assertive rise, the focus of these groupings has been mainly East and South East Asia. There is however, relatively little similar activity in the WIO region. Since India's security and economic interests are clearly linked with the WIO region, it has improved its bilateral engagements significantly. It also has a strong strategic partnership with South Africa. Besides, wherever possible, it has aligned its activities with multilateral agencies. Due to strong Chinese and Russian presence, objectives of BRICS grouping may be entirely different from the objectives of the Indo-Pacific narrative. The IBSA grouping works within the broader context of South-South Cooperation but not directed towards any particular region of the world.

Since the WIO region is becoming important, India may like to work with like-minded partners in specific areas of cooperation in the region. As India's foreign policy now follows a multi-alignment format, it is ready to work with different sets of players in various parts of the world. Going by the activities of recent years, there is a potential to work for a few minilaterals involving India, France, South Africa, Mauritius, Maldives, Kenya, Tanzania, Japan, UK and the USA.

A large number of bilateral and multilateral activities in the area of maritime security are already happening in the WIO region. There is already certain bilateral and multilateral institutional framework in operation in the area of counter piracy operations. It may not be easy to formulate a superior minilateral format say involving India, UK, France and one or two key countries like Somalia. However, in case of maritime capacity building initiative, minilateral format could provide some extra benefits.

The other area in which a minilateral setting could be useful is development cooperation. So far, most of the development assistance programmes are either bilateral or triangular cooperation in which normally a country from the North partners with a Southern country to implement projects in a developing country. As mentioned earlier, India has already started

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this kind of cooperation with the UK and the USA in some of the countries in the WIO. An imaginative minilateral involving say India, South Africa, UK, France as well as specific WIO countries could be formed. This will be an interesting combination of countries working together to achieve larger SDG goals in the WIO. India and the UK have already established a strong cooperation in this area including in some of the countries in the WIO.

Infrastructure connectivity minilateral could be another useful way of countries working together in the WIO. In the emerging Indo-Pacific economic architecture, almost every important country in the region has its own connectivity plans, either individually or part of multilateral frameworks. Within the changing geopolitical dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region, these connectivity strategies have also become an important part of national or regional strategies. This kind of initiative could also provide some alternatives to the WIO countries which are attracted by the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. Broadly India has been working with the European Union through connectivity partnership and with Japan through Asia Africa Growth Corridor. The Quad nations have formed their own infrastructure partnership. The G7 and G20 have also outlined their principles for sustainable connectivity. Within the WIO an imaginative infrastructure minilateral could be formed between India, UK, France, Mauritius, Maldives etc. Due to the geographical location within the Indian Ocean, immediate focus is likely to ports, special economic zones and other maritime infrastructure.

India, UK and some of the WIO countries could also concentrate on health and education matters. India and UK have successfully collaborated in vaccine development and both have provided vaccines to many of the countries in the region. A large number of students from the WIO countries are also attracted towards the UK and India.

Many of the issues discussed above are cross cutting issues. For example development cooperation, infrastructure connectivity and maritime capacity building cannot be discussed in isolation. So it might be useful to identify potential countries and many of these issues could be put together on the minilateral agenda. Overall, the minilaterals in the WIO could be formed in three different ways. In the first category India and the UK could work out specific issues with key countries where they have strong historical linkages like Kenya, Maldives, Mauritius and South Africa. In the second category India, UK and France could work out within a more extended circle. A larger minilateral for a particular sector like infrastructure connectivity could also be worked with other like-minded countries like Japan and the USA.

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Conclusion

Within the Indo-Pacific narrative and increasing Chinese profile in India's neighbourhood, the WIO region has emerged as an important area of strategic engagement for New Delhi. Historically, India has dealt with the East and South African countries bordering the Indian Ocean within the broader framework of South-South Cooperation. The India-Africa summit meetings and Prime Minister Modi's Africa policy has sharpened these engagements. Some of these interactions have happened through IORA, G20, BRICS, IBSA and SAARC. As maritime security cooperation has become an important area of concern, India has upgraded bilateral maritime cooperation with almost all WIO countries and also started participating in multilateral initiatives. It has also developed cooperation mechanism with CMF, CGPCS, DCoC and RMIFC. Similar to the Southeast and East Asia part of the Indo-Pacific, there is also a need to work out for some minilateral arrangements in specific areas viz. maritime security cooperation, physical infrastructure, development cooperation and health and people contacts. Most of these issues are identified by India-UK *Roadmap 2030* as well as under India-France *Roadmap on the Blue Economy and Ocean Governance*. India and UK are already working together in the area of development cooperation through triangular cooperation in some of the countries in the WIO region. By bringing maritime security and infrastructure connectivity into India-UK cooperation in the WIO region, the scope can be widened. While working with South Africa, Kenya, Mauritius and Tanzania, this could become an important minilateral in the WIO region of the Indo-Pacific. The scope can be further widened with expanding partnership to France and Japan. Coming of these powers together will provide proper legitimacy, resources and geopolitical backing to the grouping.

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