



Leveraging India's Experience for Sustainable Transformation of Africa's Agri-food System

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1. Introduction

Over the past six decades, agri-food systems in the Global South have undergone profound transformation, driven by technological innovation and supported by investments in irrigation, agricultural research, rural infrastructure, and markets, and enabling institutions and policies. This transformation led to a significant increase in agricultural productivity, improvements in food security and nutrition, and reduction in rural poverty. However, the pace of this transformation has been uneven across the Global South. While many countries in Asia and Latin America have reaped significant benefits, much of sub-Saharan Africa continues to face low agricultural productivity and food insecurity. Nearly two-thirds of the region's population is prone to moderate or severe food insecurity

(FAO, 2025), and approximately 45 percent lives below the international poverty line of US\$3 per person per day (2021 PPP) (World Bank, 2024).

This situation persists despite Africa's strong agricultural resource base. The continent has approximately 200 million hectares of uncultivated arable land—nearly 60 percent of the global total (AfDB, 2025)—and about 0.66 million km³ of groundwater (MacDonald et al., 2012). Yet, this immense potential remains largely untapped because of a lack of investment in irrigation, agricultural research and extension, rural infrastructure, markets, and human capital, and weak institutional and policy support.

Unlocking Africa's agricultural potential therefore requires a comprehensive approach combining technological innovations, public

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This Policy Brief has been prepared by Dr. Pratap Singh Birthal, Senior Adjunct Fellow, RIS and Ms. Pritha Banerjee, Consultant (Economics), RIS. The authors are grateful to Professor Sachin Kumar Sharma, Director General, RIS, for providing support to prepare this Policy Brief. Views expressed are personal. Usual disclaimers apply.



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investment in infrastructure, strong extension and financial institutions, efficient markets, and enabling policy frameworks. Equally important are partnerships that can promote knowledge sharing, technology adaptation, and institutional learning across countries facing similar developmental challenges.

In this context, India's agricultural success offers valuable insights for Africa. Within two decades of the introduction of the Green Revolution, India transitioned from a food-deficit to a food-sufficient situation by adopting a comprehensive approach including technological innovation, investments in irrigation, agricultural research and extension, rural infrastructure, and markets, effective institutions, and enabling policies. The relevance of India's experience to Africa stems from the structural and agroecological similarities between these two regions. Both are characterized by diverse agroecological conditions, smallholder-dominated mixed farming systems, heavy dependence on rainfall, and increasing exposure to climatic variability. These common challenges make India's experience

relevant to Africa's agri-food system transformation.

Drawing on India's experience, this policy brief identifies opportunities to strengthen the India–Africa partnership in agriculture. It argues that cooperation should focus on co-creation, co-innovation, and mutual learning to develop and scale locally adapted solutions for building productive, resilient, and inclusive agri-food systems across Africa.

2. Africa's Agricultural Productivity Challenge

Agriculture remains central to rural livelihoods, food security, and economic development across Africa. It employs nearly half of the continent's workforce and contributes approximately one-fifth of the gross domestic product (GDP). However, much of Africa continues to have some of the lowest land and labor productivity. The average yields of major crops are significantly below the global average (Table 1). However, there are regional disparities, with North Africa achieving significantly higher yields compared to other regions.

Table 1: Average yields on important crops (Kg/ha*), 2022-2024

Crop	North Africa	West Africa	Central Africa	East Africa	Southern Africa	Africa	India	World
Rice	9026	2142	1152	2527	2860	2352	4290	4747
Wheat	2707	2384	1225	2921	3743	2820	3539	3661
Maize	6749	1966	1092	1951	5244	2133	3424	5780
Pulses	1352	633	630	937	853	769	935	1061
Oilseeds	254	372	409	413	1244	404	685	1338
Vegetables	24280	5326	5921	8515	16741	8821	15951	19774
Fruits	14847	7393	8015	6920	22791	8919	15754	13926
Milk (Kg/An)	206	67	134	274	2568	202	1540	1146

*For milk, the unit of yield is Kilogram per animal (Kg/An)

Source: Authors' estimates based on data extracted from FAOSTAT.

These differences in crop yields are closely associated with disparities in the adoption of improved production technologies and the availability of complementary inputs, particularly irrigation and fertilizers (Table 2). North Africa has approximately 20 percent of its cropland equipped for irrigation, compared to less than 5 percent in other African regions. Fertilizer use also varies widely, ranging from only about 6 kg per hectare in Central Africa to nearly 70 kg per hectare in Southern Africa. By comparison, India applies about 182 kg of nutrients per hectare and has nearly 45 percent of its cropland irrigated.

Table 2: Irrigation, and Fertilizer Use in African Regions, India and the World (TE 2024)

Region	Area equipped for irrigation (% of cropland)	Fertilizer use (NPK /ha of cropland)
North Africa	20.1	50.4
West Africa	1.4	7.9
Central Africa	0.4	5.7
East Africa	3.9	27.2
Southern Africa	16.1	69.4
Africa	5.6	22.5
India	44.9	182.4
World	22.3	119.7

Source: Authors' estimates based on data extracted from FAOSTAT

Agricultural systems in Africa are highly heterogeneous. As shown in Table 3, cropping patterns differ markedly across regions because of variations in agroecological conditions, climate, and resource endowments. West Africa accounts for a large share of the continent's rice, pulse, and oilseed areas, whereas East Africa is the main producer of maize and pulses. Wheat cultivation is concentrated in North and East Africa, while the

Table 3: Regional Distribution of Africa's Geographical Area and Crops (%)

Region	Share geographical area	Rice	Wheat	Maize	Pulses	Oilseeds	Fruits	Vegetables
North Africa	26.0	3	66	2	3	15	14	16
West Africa	20.2	62	0	30	51	49	56	31
Central Africa	21.8	12	0	17	9	11	9	17
East Africa	23.2	23	27	44	37	22	20	34
Southern Africa	8.8	0	6	6	1	4	1	3
Africa	100.0	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Authors' estimates based on data extracted from FAOSTAT

cultivation of fruits and vegetables is widespread. These differences imply that technological and policy interventions should be guided by the regional context.

3. Why India's Agricultural Experience Matters for Africa

India's transition from a food-insecure to a food-surplus nation is a leading example of successful agricultural transformation in the developing world. In the 1960s, India faced chronic food shortages and depended heavily on cereal imports to meet its domestic demand. Thanks to the Green Revolution, India achieved food self-sufficiency within two decades of its introduction.

Unlike Africa, India has limited arable land (156 million hectares); hence, agricultural transformation has largely been driven by productivity-enhancing technological changes. The yields of most major crops increased considerably, and are much higher than the African average (see Table 1). The average rice and wheat yields are nearly twice those of Africa. The yields of maize, pulses, and horticultural crops are also significantly higher.

Technological advancements alone were insufficient to enhance agricultural productivity. They were complemented by public investments in irrigation, rural infrastructure, electrification, and markets, as well as access to institutional credit and insurance and policy incentives such as input subsidies and minimum support prices. Collectively, these

established an enabling ecosystem that facilitated the widespread adoption of technologies.

India's agricultural experience is relevant to Africa for two reasons. First, the two regions have several similar structural and agroecological characteristics. India's diverse production environments closely resemble those found across Africa. The irrigated farming systems of the Indo-Gangetic Plains are comparable to those of North Africa; the rainfed systems of the Deccan Plateau share many characteristics with the semi-arid regions of the Sahel, East Africa, and Southern Africa; the Himalayan hill production systems resemble those of the East African Highlands; and India's coastal agriculture is comparable to the humid coastal regions of West and East Africa. Furthermore, in both India and Africa, agriculture is dominated by smallholder mixed farming systems, with average farm sizes typically below two hectares. These similarities make India's technologies, institutional innovations, and smallholder-oriented development strategies highly relevant to Africa's diverse farming systems.

Second, India's agricultural experience clearly reveals that agricultural transformation requires more than just technology. Technological change must be accompanied by investment in rural infrastructure, strong institutions, and enabling policies. However, such enabling ecosystems are lacking in much of Africa. Therefore, India's experience offers valuable lessons for unlocking Africa's agricultural potential.

4. Successful Indian Models Relevant for African Countries

India's agricultural experience offers valuable lessons for Africa. Although not directly replicable, several successful models can be adapted to Africa's diverse agroecological and institutional contexts.

4.1 Sustainable Development of Irrigation

Water scarcity and high rainfall variability are major constraints to agricultural productivity across Africa. Expanding irrigation and improving water-use efficiency are therefore essential for increasing productivity and strengthening agricultural resilience.

India has substantially expanded irrigation coverage through investments in surface and groundwater irrigation. Recent initiatives increasingly emphasize efficient management of irrigation. The Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY), launched in 2015, expanded irrigation and improved water-use efficiency by promoting micro-irrigation and watershed development. India's recent experiences illustrate how the integration of solar energy and micro-irrigation can reduce electricity consumption and increase water-use efficiency and cultivation costs without impacting crop yields.

Africa's abundant untapped groundwater resources and high solar radiation make it ideally positioned to expand solar-powered irrigation. Harnessing this opportunity will require coordinated investments in groundwater exploration and development, solar pumping systems, and micro irrigation.

4.2 Climate-smart Agriculture

Climate variability poses an increasing threat to agricultural production in India and Africa. Consequently, enhancing agricultural resilience has become a primary objective of agricultural development. India has incorporated climate resilience into agricultural research initiatives. Since 2011, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has been implementing the National Innovations on Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA), which combines strategic research, on-farm technology demonstrations, and capacity building of various stakeholders. Evaluations of NICRA villages across the country have demonstrated significant improvements in water-use efficiency, yield stability, diversification, and adaptive capacity of farming communities (ICAR 2023).

ICRISAT's landscape approach in Bundelkhand, a region in India highly prone to drought, demonstrates that integrating rainwater harvesting, improved crop varieties, crop diversification, and community participation significantly enhances water availability and strengthens agriculture's resilience to climate change (ICRISAT, 2023).

The key lesson for Africa is that climate resilience should be integrated into mainstream agricultural development. Investments in climate-resilient technologies are most effective when supported by extension services, weather information, community participation, and locally adapted farming practices.

4.3 Seed Systems and Community-Based Innovations

Quality seeds are the most important determinants of crop yields. However,

smallholders in Africa have limited access to improved, affordable, and locally adapted seed varieties because of underdeveloped seed systems and poor extension support.

Following the Green Revolution, India strengthened its public seed system through ICAR, agricultural universities, state agricultural departments, and seed corporations by investments in plant breeding, seed multiplication, and distribution. This enabled the rapid dissemination of high-yielding and locally adapted varieties.

A key feature of India's seed sector is the integration of formal research with community-based seed systems. Community seed banks and participatory seed production have helped conserve local varieties and strengthen resilience in rainfed and marginal farming systems.

India's experience shows that strong seed systems require investment in breeding, seed multiplication, quality assurance, and distribution, supported by collaboration among public research institutions, private seed companies, and farmer organizations.

4.4 Small-farm Mechanization

The lack of scale-appropriate and affordable farm machinery is a major constraint to agricultural productivity in Africa. India's experience demonstrates how smallholder-friendly mechanization can address these challenges. The country has promoted small tractors, power tillers, and improved farm implements, while custom hiring centers have enabled farmers to rent machinery at affordable rates, improving access, the timeliness of farm operations, and resource-use efficiency.

For Africa, mechanization policies should emphasize access rather than ownership by promoting scale-appropriate machinery, custom hiring centers, private service providers, and farmer organizations.

4.5 Agricultural Research, Extension, and Capacity Building

The sustainable transformation of agri-food systems requires sustained investment in agricultural research and effective extension systems to deliver innovations to farmers. In many African countries, research and extension systems are weak, limiting technology dissemination and farmers' access to knowledge and capacity-building opportunities.

India has established a strong agricultural research and extension system that has played a crucial role in generating, adapting, and disseminating agricultural technologies. A notable innovation is the establishment of Farm Science Centres, known locally as Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), with at least one in each district. KVKs conduct adaptive research, demonstrate improved technologies, offer farmer training, and facilitate two-way feedback between research institutions and farming communities.

For Africa, the key lesson is that strengthening national agricultural research systems, extension networks, and farmer institutions is essential to ensure that innovations reach the farmers. Digital tools can complement traditional extension approaches by expanding access to timely information; however, they cannot substitute for effective local institutions and human capacity.

4.6 Digital Agriculture and Public Digital Infrastructure

Digital technologies offer new opportunities to improve agricultural information, service delivery, market access and risk management. However, many African smallholders still lack access to reliable advisory services, market information, financial services, and digital platforms.

India has emerged as a global leader in leveraging digital technology for agricultural transformation. Digital platforms, such as AgriStack, integrate land records, crop and soil data, weather information, market prices, and financial services to deliver location- and farm-specific advisories, thereby enabling data-driven decision-making. Complementing these platforms, the electronic National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) enhances market integration and price discovery, while artificial intelligence-based multilingual advisory services expand farmers' access to timely and personalized information.

The key takeaway for Africa is to develop digital agriculture as an integrated public ecosystem rather than as a collection of standalone applications. This requires investment in digital infrastructure, data systems, connectivity, digital literacy and institutional capacity.

4.7 Agricultural Credit and Crop Insurance

Access to finance is essential for farmers to adopt improved technologies and invest in risk mitigation. However, financial institutions for delivering credit and insurance are underdeveloped in many African countries (African Risk Capacity, 2023;

AfDB, 2025).

Over time, India has built an inclusive rural financial system that combines institutional credit and risk management. Through a network of commercial and cooperative banks, regional rural banks, and targeted credit programs, it has significantly expanded institutional credit to agriculture, improving smallholders' access to production and investment finance. Complementing this, the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), launched in 2016, leverages digital technologies and institutional coordination to improve crop loss assessment, expedite claim settlement, and reduce transaction costs. Together, these initiatives have strengthened farmers' resilience, encouraged technology adoption, and increased investment in agriculture.

The key lesson for Africa is to build strong rural financial institutions to provide accessible credit, affordable insurance, and digital financial services, which are essential for fostering sustainable and resilient farming systems.

4.8 Dairy Cooperatives and Livestock-Based Livelihood Transformation

Livestock are an essential component of the agri-food system in Africa, contributing to food and nutrition security, income and employment generation, agricultural sustainability, and resilience to climatic and economic shocks. However, livestock productivity remains low because of limited access to improved breeds, animal health services, feed and fodder, markets, and value chain infrastructure.

India's dairy development strategy integrated millions of smallholder producers into organized value chains through a country-wide network of cooperatives. Led by the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB), dairy cooperatives linked farmers with breeding and animal health services, milk collection, processing, and marketing, transforming dairy farming into a reliable source of income for millions of rural households.

For Africa, the key lesson is that the transformation of subsistence-oriented smallholder dairy farming into a commercial enterprise should be anchored in strong dairy cooperatives that integrate producers with input supply, animal health services, milk collection, processing, and marketing.

4.9 Farmer Producer Organizations

Small farm size is a major structural constraint affecting the competitiveness of smallholder agriculture. Individual farmers have limited access to quality inputs, technology, extension services, and markets, resulting in high transaction costs and weak bargaining power.

India's experience with Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) demonstrates the potential of collective action to generate economies of scale and scope, decrease transaction costs, enhance market linkages, and facilitate farmers' access to technical and financial services (BIRTHAL and NIKAM, 2025). By combining cooperative principles with professional management, FPOs enable farmers to transition from subsistence farming to market-oriented agribusinesses. India has established over 10,000 FPOs nationwide.

In Africa, professionally managed farmer organizations backed by access to finance, capacity building, and strong market linkages can enable smallholders to participate more competitively in modern agricultural value chains.

4.10 Enabling Policy

Framework

India's agricultural transformation was supported by a robust policy framework that encouraged technology adoption, reduced production and market risks, and created incentives for farmers to invest in agriculture. Policies, including the procurement of grains at government-determined minimum support prices, provision of input subsidies, offering of concessional institutional credit, and investment in supportive rural infrastructure, contributed significantly to this transformation.

However, India's experience highlights that policies must evolve with changing development priorities. The prolonged use of input subsidies and price support has led to unintended consequences, including excessive groundwater extraction, imbalanced fertilizer use, and distortions in cropping patterns (BIRTHAL et al., 2025). These experiences highlight the necessity of regularly reviewing policy instruments to ensure that they remain aligned with sustainability, resource conservation, and evolving nutritional priorities.

For African countries, the key lesson is that agricultural policies should incentivize technology adoption while minimizing environmental externalities. Public investment should be targeted toward research, extension, irrigation, market infrastructure, digital systems and climate resilience.

5. Strategic Framework for India–Africa Agricultural Partnership

Agricultural development is a priority in Africa. However, technology alone cannot drive this transformation. It requires an enabling ecosystem of innovation, institutions, infrastructure, markets, investments, and policies. India's experience illustrates that sustained productivity growth is achieved when technological change is reinforced by strong research systems, effective institutions, and complementary public investment.

However, Africa's diverse agroecological conditions and socioeconomic and institutional contexts necessitate solutions tailored to local needs. Consequently, agricultural cooperation between India and Africa should focus on co-creation, co-innovation, and mutual learning. Partnerships should prioritize the development, adaptation, and scaling of solutions that address the specific challenges faced by Africa.

5.1 Technology Transfer, Adaptation, and Co-innovation

In the short term, technology transfer can play an important role in addressing Africa's immediate productivity challenges. India's experiences in seed systems, smallholder mechanization, solar-power irrigation, dairy development, and climate-resilient farming provide valuable starting points.

Technologies must be adapted to local farming systems, resources, markets, and farmer needs. The India–Africa partnership should therefore support joint research, demonstration

projects, and innovation hubs to test, adapt, and scale context-specific solutions.

5.2 Strengthening Institutions, Research Systems, and Human Capacity

Institutions have been fundamental to India's agricultural transformation and are equally important for Africa. India–Africa cooperation should therefore strengthen agricultural research organizations, extension systems, and innovation networks to accelerate technology development, adaptation, dissemination, and farmer adoption.

India's experience with Krishi Vigyan Kendras, dairy cooperatives, and Farmer Producer Organizations demonstrates the importance of strong research–extension–farmer linkages. India–Africa cooperation should therefore focus on technology sharing and strengthening institutional capacity for innovation and technology dissemination.

Capacity building should include training for researchers, extension professionals, policymakers, entrepreneurs, and farmer leaders. Long-term exchange programmes, joint research initiatives, and institutional partnerships can create sustainable knowledge networks between India and African countries.

5.3 Promoting Investment, Value Chains, and Private Sector Participation

Agricultural transformation requires investments beyond public resource allocation. India–Africa cooperation should encourage investment in

agricultural research, agro-processing, mechanization, renewable energy, irrigation, storage, logistics, and cold-chain infrastructure through blended finance, public–private partnerships, and development finance.

Particular attention should be given to supporting startups, agritech enterprises, farmer producer organizations, cooperatives, and small- and medium-sized agribusinesses, as they are critical for creating employment, adding value, reducing post-harvest losses, and integrating smallholders into domestic and international markets.

Strengthening regional agricultural value chains should also be a priority. Improved market infrastructure, trade facilitation, and processing capacity can enable African countries to move beyond the export of raw commodities to higher-value agricultural products.

5.4 Digital Agriculture and Knowledge Partnerships

Digital technologies offer significant opportunities to address information gaps, improve service delivery and enhance market integration. India's experience with digital public infrastructure, including digital identity systems, agricultural databases, digital payments, market platforms, and AI-enabled advisory services, provides useful lessons for Africa (BIRTHAL et al., 2026).

India and African countries can collaborate to develop digital agricultural ecosystems that integrate land information, weather data, soil information, market intelligence, financial services, and extension support. However, digital transformation must be accompanied

by investments in connectivity, digital literacy, data governance, and institutional capacity to ensure that smallholders benefit from these innovations.

5.5 Institutional Coordination and Long-term Partnership

The effective implementation of India–Africa agricultural cooperation requires coordination among governments, research institutions, universities, development partners, farmer organizations, and the private sector. The African Union can play an important role in identifying regional priorities, facilitating coordination among member states, aligning cooperation with Africa's agricultural development agenda, and promoting knowledge exchange.

India–Africa cooperation should evolve into a long-term strategic partnership based on shared priorities and mutual learning. Such a partnership can drive the co-creation of solutions and support the development of productive, resilient, and inclusive agri-food systems across Africa.

6. Conclusion

Africa possesses immense agricultural potential; however, realizing this potential requires more than just abundant natural resources. This calls for an enabling ecosystem that addresses constraints in technology, extension, infrastructure, and institutions while integrating innovation, investment, and supportive policies to drive sustainable agricultural transformation.

India's agricultural transformation offers valuable lessons in this regard. India's transition from a food-deficit to a food-surplus country was not driven

by technology alone; it resulted from a holistic ecosystem encompassing investments in irrigation, agricultural research, extension systems, rural infrastructure, markets, and supportive policy frameworks.

However, India's experience should not be viewed as a blueprint for the African continent. The diversity of Africa's agroecological conditions, farming systems, and institutional environments requires locally adapted solutions. The most valuable lesson from India is the importance of building an integrated ecosystem in which technologies are supported by strong institutions, effective delivery systems, market linkages and appropriate policy incentives.

India–Africa agricultural partnership should therefore focus on co-creation, co-innovation, and mutual learning. Joint research, capacity building, digital innovation, investment partnerships, and institutional cooperation can help develop solutions that are suited to Africa's diverse contexts.

By combining Africa's abundant natural resources with India's experience in smallholder-oriented agricultural transformation, this partnership can contribute to building productive, sustainable, resilient, and inclusive agri-food systems in Africa.

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RIS specialises in issues related to international economic development, trade, investment and technology. It is envisioned as a forum for fostering effective policy dialogue and capacity-building among developing countries on global and regional economic issues. The focus of the work programme of RIS is to promote South-South Cooperation and collaborate with developing countries in multilateral negotiations in various forums. Through its following centres/forums, RIS promotes policy dialogue and coherence on regional and international economic issues.



The word “DAKSHIN” (दक्षिण) is of Sanskrit origin, meaning “South.” The Hon’ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, inaugurated DAKSHIN – Global South Centre of Excellence in November 2023. The initiative was inspired by the deliberations of Global South leaders during the Voice of the Global South Summits. DAKSHIN stands for Development and Knowledge Sharing Initiative. Hosted at the RIS, DAKSHIN has established linkages with leading think tanks and universities across the Global South and is building a dynamic network of scholars working on Global South issues.



AIC at RIS has been working to strengthen India’s strategic partnership with ASEAN in its realisation of the ASEAN Community. AIC at RIS undertakes research, policy advocacy and regular networking activities with relevant organisations and think-tanks in India and ASEAN countries, with the aim of providing policy inputs, up-to-date information, data resources and sustained interaction, for strengthening ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.



CMEC has been established at RIS under the aegis of the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPS&W), Government of India, and in collaboration with the Indian Ports Association (IPA). It has been mandated to act as an advisory/technological arm of MoPSW to provide the analytical support on policies and their implementation.



FITM is a joint initiative by the Ministry of Ayush and RIS. It has been established with the objective of undertaking policy research on economy, intellectual property rights (IPRs) trade, sustainability and international cooperation in traditional medicines. FITM provides analytical support to the Ministry of Ayush on policy and strategy responses on emerging national and global developments.



BEF aims to serve as a dedicated platform for fostering dialogue on promoting the concept in the Indian Ocean and other regions. The forum focuses on conducting studies on the potential, prospects and challenges of blue economy; providing regular inputs to practitioners in the government and the private sectors; and promoting advocacy for its smooth adoption in national economic policies.



FIDC, has been engaged in exploring nuances of India’s development cooperation programme, keeping in view the wider perspective of South-South Cooperation in the backdrop of international development cooperation scenario. It is a tripartite initiative of the Development Partnership Administration (DPA) of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, academia and civil society organisations.



FISD aims to harness the full potential and synergy between science and technology, diplomacy, foreign policy and development cooperation in order to meet India’s development and security needs. It is also engaged in strengthening India’s engagement with the international system and on key global issues involving science and technology.



As part of its work programme, RIS has been deeply involved in strengthening economic integration in the South Asia region. In this context, the role of the South Asia Centre for Policy Studies (SACEPS) is very important. SACEPS is a network organisation engaged in addressing regional issues of common concerns in South Asia.



Knowledge generated endogenously among the Southern partners can help in consolidation of stronger common issues at different global policy fora. The purpose of NeST is to provide a global platform for Southern Think-Tanks for collaboratively generating, systematising, consolidating and sharing knowledge on South South Cooperation approaches for international development.

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