India to benefit from healthcare investment in Africa

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Healthcare systems across the world are under severe stress with the outbreak of COVID-19. Africa's healthcare system has been fragile, even before the pandemic, along with an additional burdened of higher number of cases in HIV, malaria, diabetes, hypertension and malnourishment, among others.

According to Global Health Security Index, which assesses a country's health system capabilities, 33 out of 54 ranked African countries are rated as least prepared to deal with epidemic threats, which have international implications. Estimates suggest that Africa's health financing gap is as high as $ 66 billion per annum, indicating that the conventional source of financing healthcare, viz. government financing and donor funding are inadequate.

Improving access to equitable healthcare will require multi-sectoral interventions. Cooperation and participation of all stakeholders, including governments, private sector along with the international community and regional development institutions, will be required to build capacities of national health systems.

India attracts nearly 50,000 medical tourists from Africa annually. The recent international air travel bans have made it increasingly difficult for medical tourists to avail such health services.

Exim Bank's preliminary study estimates that presently the Indian healthcare sector can significantly benefit from an investment of at least five hospitals in Africa with a capacity of hundred bed each. These could be spread across the five regions of the continent – North, East, Central, West and Southern Africa.

India needs to realign its foreign policy with Africa, in line with such evolving needs, and must explore investment opportunities in the development of facilities in Africa's health sector and support African economies achieve their Sustainable Development Goals, mainly Universal Health Coverage (UHC), and Africa's Agenda 2063.

These suggestions were discussed at a webinar on 'India-Africa Dialogue: Prospects in Healthcare', held recently.

The webinar covered three key aspects of healthcare: healthcare infrastructure, healthcare facilities and training and capacity building. The discussions during the webinar highlighted the need for a three-pronged strategy to increase cooperation in building core healthcare infrastructure. These include cooperation through GoI- supported Lines of Credit (LOCs) to African nations and engagements through the public-private partnerships (PPP) mode; cooperation in capacity building and training of medical personnel; and setting up regional hubs across Africa to provide tertiary and quaternary care.