

India - Benin Relations

Benin and India have friendly ties by virtue of shared principles of democracy and secularism. Both sides recognise the urgent need for reform of the UN Security Council. Beninese government has reiterated its support for Indian candidature for Permanent membership of the expanded UN Security Council.

2. The current phase of growth and expansion in Indo-Benin relations can be traced to the State visit to India on March 3-7, 2009 by President Boni Yayi accompanied by Madame Chantal Yayi and five cabinet ministers. In addition to delegation level meeting with then Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, President Boni Yayi held meetings with our President, Vice President and EAM. PM announced a Line of Credit \$ 15mn for Benin during the meeting. Two grants of one million dollars each for mutually identified projects in Health & Education sectors as well as setting up of an IT Centre for Excellence and a Centre of Demonstration of Technology (both on grant basis) were also agreed to. The visit concluded with five bilateral agreements with Benin. [(a) Protocol for Consultations between Ministry of External Affairs of the Republic of India and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and African Integration of the Republic of Benin; (b) Agreement between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the Republic of Benin for the creation of the India-Benin Joint Committee for Political, Economic, Scientific, Technical and Cultural Cooperation; (c) MoU between the Republic of India and the Government of the Republic of Benin for setting up an Information Technology Centre of Excellence (CETI) in the Republic of Benin; (d) Memorandum of Agreement between the Government of Republic of Benin and National Research Development Corporation, New Delhi, India; & (e) Agreement of Mutual Cooperation between National Small Industries Corporation, India and the Government of the Republic of Benin]. During his official interactions, President Yayi appreciated India's support to Africa and extended full support to India's bid for permanent seat at the UN Security Council and in our struggle against terrorism. A group of Benin businessmen also accompanied the official Presidential delegation.

3. Minister of State for External Affairs Dr Shashi Tharoor paid an official visit to Republic of Benin from October 21 to 23, 2009 and the first Meeting of the India-Benin Joint Commission on political, economic, scientific, technical and cultural cooperation was held at Cotonou. The JCM reviewed the entire gamut of bilateral relations and discussed various measures to strengthen bilateral ties. H.E. Mr Ehouzou and MOS (ST) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Cultural Exchange Programme for 2010-2012. MOS(ST) paid a courtesy call on H.E. President Dr Boni Yayi and conveyed Government of India's commitment to further strengthen and diversify our mutually beneficial bilateral cooperation. He also inaugurated the Indian International School of Benin and ceremonially flagged off the first goods train powered by an Indian locomotive. MOS (ST) was accompanied by an 18-member multi-sectoral business delegation organised by CII. During his visit, MOS (ST) also addressed a Business-to-Business event hosted by the Benin Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

4. Minister of Industry, Trade, Small and Medium Enterprises, Mr. Safio Idrissou Affo, accompanied by two officials visited Johannesburg, South Africa to attend the 3rd India-Africa Trade Ministers meeting on September 30 - October 01, 2013. A Business delegation from Benin attended the 10th CII-Exim Bank Conclave on India-Africa Project Partnership held in New Delhi from March 9-11, 2014. Other important visits may be seen at **Annexure**.

5. **FOC:** The Foreign Secretary of Benin visited New Delhi in April 2005 for 2nd round of Foreign Office Consultations. Shri Shashak, Secretary, MEA, earlier visited Cotonou in August 2003 for first round of FOC.

CREDIT LINE FACILITIES

6. A Line of Credit of \$ 15 million for agricultural equipment was announced by then PM of India during President Boni Yayi's visit to New Delhi in March 2009, which has since been fully utilised. Two grants of \$1 million each for mutually identified projects in Health and Education sectors have also been utilised. An IT Centre of Excellence as well as Centre of Demonstration of Technology were to be set up with Indian grants. Benin is interested in joining Team-9 and availing of our \$250 million LOC to ECOWAS. From the ECOWAS LOC, Benin has already availed of a \$ 15 million facility for rural development project.

7. India also donated 100 tractors each in 2009 and 2010, 4 AC Tata buses in July 2010 and 60 ambulances in February 2011 to Benin. Another Line of Credit of \$ 15 million for tractor and agricultural machinery assembly plant has been approved in May 2012. Yet another LoC of US\$ 42.61 mil equivalent has been approved in May 2013 for upgradation of water supply schemes in 69 villages in Benin. Benin has joined the Pan African e-Network.

8. Two Indian cotton experts visited Cotonou from 22 November to 1 December 2010 under a GOI's programme. A 5-member cotton delegation visited Cotonou to announce a 3-year Technical Assistance Programme of GOI (2012-14) for Benin in May 2012. GOI made a donation of half a million dollars in cash for flood relief in December 2010. Mr Andre Sanra, Benin's First Resident Ambassador to India presented his credentials to Indian President on October 18, 2010.

COMMERCIAL AND TRADE RELATIONS:

9. **Bilateral Trade:** Bilateral Trade with Benin during the year 2014-15 was US\$720 million, which was 22% less than US\$ 932 million recorded in previous year. While India's exports declined from US\$64 million in 2013-14 to US\$ 498 million in 2014-15, India's imports increased from US\$167 million in 2013-14 to US\$222 million in 2014-15. The main reason for fluctuations in our exports to Benin is attributed to the fact that nearly 80% of global imports into Benin are meant for Nigerian market. If direct exports to Nigeria are feasible and profitable, Indian exporters prefer that route. However, if due to various reasons (non-tariff barriers like congestion in Nigerian ports, insecurity, import bans or high tariffs, etc) it is non-advantageous, Benin route is used.

India-Benin Bilateral Trade Statistics (Value in US\$ million)

	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
India's Exports	264.43 (+19%)	655 (+148%)	479 (-27%)	763.98 (+59%)	498.00 (-34%)
India's Imports	153.43 (+24%)	286 (+86%)	253 (-11%)	167.6 (-33%)	222.11 (32%)

CULTURE & EDUCATION

10. **ITEC:** Till 2007-08, Benin was allotted 5 seats under ITEC (Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation) programme. This was increased to 10 after the first *India-Africa Forum Summit* in 2008, out of which 7 were utilized during 2009-10. During 2010-11, the number of slots was raised to 15 out of which 10 were utilised. Following second Africa-India Forum Summit, Benin's ITEC quota for 2012-13 was increased to 30 of which 19 slots were utilised. In 2013-14, out of 30 slots, 12 slots have been utilised and so was the case in 2014-15. The utilisation in case of Benin has not been to the maximum mainly due to language constraints. The slots for 2015-16 have been kept at 30 though.

11. **Cultural Troupes:** A 15-member Theyyam dance group from Kerala visited Benin on December 2, 2011 and gave a performance at Palais de Congress in Cotonou before an audience of high dignitaries, diplomats and Indian community.

Indian Community:

12. The Indian Community in Benin is estimated at 1860 persons. About 230 Indian companies mainly in trading and about 165 retail shops are in Benin, dealing in textiles, rice, cashew, scrap, electronics and supermarkets. A dozen Indian experts are working in the West Africa Rice Development Centre (WARDA). Indian community is generally respected in the country and has been engaged in various socio-economic charitable activities including education, healthcare, potable water supply etc., especially in rural areas. A school for local rural children has been opened and being run by the community. Cotonou has an Indian Cultural Association as well as a Hindu Temple to anchor cultural activities. The Indian Community has also set up the Indian International School of Benin in Cotonou in May 2008. The school received CBSE-affiliation in October 2011 and currently has over 120 students.

13. India does not have a Resident Diplomatic Mission in Cotonou, Benin. High Commissioner to Nigeria is concurrently accredited to Benin. Government of India has appointed Shri Ashok R. Mirchandani, a local Indian, as its Honorary Consul to Benin. Benin's resident mission in New Delhi is functional since September 2010.

Air Connectivity:

14. There are no direct air connections between Benin and India. The convenient alternatives are: via Lagos (which is three hours by road from Cotonou); and via Paris (connected by a daily flight from Cotonou).

Useful Resources:

High Commission of India, Abuja website:
<http://hcindia-abuja.org/index.php>

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