

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 Cotonou, Benin from October 21 to 23, 2009 to co-chair the first Meeting of the India-Benin Joint Commission on political, economic, scientific, technical and cultural cooperation.

4. 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.

5. Special Envoy to Prime Minister, Prof. Ram Shankar Katheria, MOS for HRD visited Cotonou, Benin from September 14-15, 2015 to personally handover invitation letters to Beninese President to attend India-Africa Forum Summit-III scheduled to be held in New Delhi from October 26-30, 2015. During the visit,

Hon'ble Minister called on Beninese President Boni Yayi and Foreign Minister Saliou Akadiri.

6. Benin President Boni Yayi visited New Delhi, India for the India-Africa Summit-III from October 26-30, 2015. Apart from Summit level meeting, Benin President called on Hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi. Benin President was accompanied by 27 member delegation comprising Mr. Saliou Akadiri, Minister of Foreign Affairs; Mr. Pocoun Dame Kombienou, Minister of Industries and Commerce; and senior officials.

7. Benin's new President Mr. Patrice Talon visited India to attend Annual Meeting of African Development Bank (AfDB) held in Ahmedabad, Gujarat from 22-26 May, 2017

8. 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. Beninese Minister of Industry and Commerce, Mr. Pocoun Dame Kombienou travelled to India to attend the fourth meeting of the India-Africa Trade Ministers at New Delhi on October 23, 2015. Other important visits may be seen at **Annexure**.

9. **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

10. 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.

11. 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.

12. 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:

13. **Bilateral Trade:** Indo-Benin bilateral trade has steadily grown over the past few years, esp. since President Boni Yayi's State visit to India in March 2009. India is

one of Benin's top trading partners with largest export market for Beninese goods, following grant of the Duty Free Tariff Preference to Benin as a Least Developed Country.

14. India's exports to Benin increased by 6% from US\$ 427.29 million in 2015-16 to US\$ 453.25 in 2016-17. The main reason for fluctuations in our exports to Benin can be 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 otherwise they go via Benin.

15. India's imports have decreased by 24% from US\$275.65 million in 2015-16 to US\$207.40 million in 2016-17 .

India-Benin Bilateral Trade Statistics

	(Value in US\$ million)					
	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
India's Exports	655 (+148%)	479 (-27%)	763.98 (+59%)	498.0 (-34%)	427.29 (-14.2%)	453.25 (6%)
India's Imports	286 (+86%)	253 (-11%)	167.61 (-33%)	222.11 (+32)	275.65 (+ 24%)	207.40 (-25%)

16. There are about 230 Indian companies engaged mainly in trading. Almost 165 of them are retail shops dealing in textiles, rice, cashew, scrap, electronics and supermarkets.

CULTURE & EDUCATION

17. **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. In 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 were utilised and so was the case in 2014-15. In 2015-16, only 3 slots were utilised out of 30 allocated seats. Due to low utilisations of slots, the number of slots for Benin was reduced to 20 in 2016-17, out of which only 7 slots were utilised.

18. **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:

19. 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.

20. 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, which was opened in September 2010 has since been closed.

Air Connectivity:

21. 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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**Important Bilateral Visits
From Benin to India**

Foreign Minister Mr. Pierre Osho	in April 1997 to attend the NAM Ministerial Meeting
Foreign Minister Mr. Pierre Osho	November 11-23, 1997 for bilateral visit
Foreign Minister Mr. Antoine Idji Kolawole	in October 2000 [held talks with MOS(EA) Shri Ajit Kumar Panja on bilateral issues]
Minister of Industry & Commerce, Mr. Soumanou Isofou Moujaidou	March 12-13, 2007 to attend the “Saving Doha Round and Delivering on Development”.
Foreign Minister Madam Mariam Aladji Boni Diallo	May 10, 2007
Minister of Mines and Research Mr B. Kassa	December 2009 to attend the 2 nd India-Africa Hydrocarbon Conference in New Delhi
Minister of Industry, Trade, Small and Medium Enterprises, Mr. Safio Idrissou Affo	September 30 -October 01, 2013 with two officials visited Johannesburg, South Africa to attend 3 rd India-Africa Trade Ministers meeting.
A Business delegation from Benin	10 th CII-Exim Bank Conclave on <i>India-Africa Project Partnership, New Delhi, March 9-11, 2014</i>
Minister of Industry and Commerce, Mr. Pocoun Dame Kombienou	October 23, 2015- to attend the fourth meeting of the India-Africa Trade Ministers at New Delhi on October 23, 2015
President Boni Yayi	October 26-30 October, 2015 to attend India-Africa Forum Summit(IAFS-III)
President Patrice Talon	May 22-26, 2017 to attend Annual Meeting of African Development Bank held in Ahmedabad, Gujarat

From India to Benin:

MOS (External Affairs) Shri Hari Kishore Singh	May 1990
Then Secretary (West) Shri Lalit Mansingh	April 1996
then Secretary (EAA) Shri Shashank	August 2003 (he had extensive discussions on bilateral matters with Beninese Foreign Minister and other officials).
MOS (ST) for External Affairs Dr Shashi Tharoor	October 21 to 23, 2009 for the first Meeting of the India-Benin Joint Commission held in Cotonou.
A 3-member team from the Central Institute of Agricultural Engineering, Bhopal.	December 4-10, 2011 (for feasibility report to set up agriculture equipment plant under GoI Credit Line
Special Envoy to Prime Minister, Prof. Ram Shankar Katheria, MOS for HRD	September 14-15, 2015 to personally handover invitation letters to Beninese President to attend India-Africa Forum Summit-III scheduled to be held in New Delhi from October 26-30, 2015.