

## INDIA - BENIN BILATERAL RELATIONS

### **A. Overall Relations:**

1. India and Benin have friendly ties characterized by democracy and secularism. Benin as a shining example of a tolerant, progressive multi-ethnic and multi-religious society with a multi-party democracy, is a natural partner to India, being the world's largest democracy.
2. Benin as a member of several international forums, including the United Nations, works closely with India. During the visit to India of the then President of Benin Dr. Boni Yayi in March 2009, Benin extended its unflinching support to India in her bid for a Permanent Seat in an expanded UN Security Council. Benin expressed solidarity with India in its efforts to tackle the scourge of terrorism, which has become the biggest threat to international peace and security in the current times.

### **B. Bilateral Visits**

3. India-Benin relations were placed on a firm footing with the State visit of the then President Boni Yayi accompanied by five Cabinet ministers to India from 3 to 7 March 2009. In addition to delegation-level meeting with the then Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, President Boni Yayi held meetings with the President, Vice President, and External Affairs Meeting. India announced a Line of Credit (LoC) of US\$ 15 million for Benin during the visit. Two grants of one million dollars each for mutually identified projects in Health & Education sectors as well as the 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 including an MOU on setting up an Information Technology Centre of Excellence (CETI) in the Republic of Benin.
4. Prof. Ram Shankar Katheria, MoS (HRD) visited Benin as the Special Envoy to Prime Minister from September 14-15, 2015, to personally handover invitation letter to Beninese President to attend the third India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS-III) scheduled to be held in New Delhi from October 26-30, 2015. During the visit, Minister Prof Katheria met Benin President Boni Yayi and Foreign Minister Saliou Akadiri.
5. The then President Boni Yayi paid a second visit to India from October 26-30, 2016, to attend the Third India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS-III) held in New Delhi. Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with President Yayi on the sidelines of the IAFS-III. President Yayi 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. Earlier, Benin 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.

6. Benin President Mr. Patrice Talon led a 13–member delegation including Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Economy, and Planning, to India to attend the annual meetings of the African Development Bank (AfDB) held in Ahmedabad from 22-26 May 2017.

7. The Minister of Energy of Benin, Mr Dona Jean-Claude Houssou visited India to participate in the Founding Conference of the ISA and the Solar Summit in Oct 2018.

8. His Excellency Mr. Ram Nath KOVIND, President of the Republic of India, paid a State visit to Benin on July 28-30, 2019, heading a high-level delegation and met his counterpart His Excellency Mr. Patrice TALON, President of the Republic of Benin. He also visited the Benin National Assembly where he had discussions with the Speaker of the Benin Parliament and addressed Beninese MPs during a regular session of the Parliament. This visit is an historic visit, very first to Benin at the level of Head of State/Government. During the visit, the two Heads of State held a tete-a-tete, at the Palace of the Republic, for discussions relating to bilateral cooperation, India-Africa partnership, and global issues. President KOVIND announced a soft Line of Credit of USD 100 million to Benin for its national priority projects. President KOVIND also announced the inclusion of Benin in India's e-visa regime. Four (4) Agreements/MoUs were signed during the visit -Cultural Exchange Programme between Benin and India for 2019-23; MoU on Tele-medicine and Tele-education; Agreement on mutual exemption from visa requirement for holders of diplomatic, official/service passports; and MoU on cooperation in the field of export credit and investment insurance.

9. Ms. Medesse Veronique Tognifode, Hon’ble Minister of Social Affairs and Micro Finance of the Republic of Benin visited India in Jan 2020, to attend the Peer Exchange-“Accelerating Digital Social Protection Payments” organized in New Delhi.

10. In February 2023, Mr. Romuald WADAGNI, Minister of Economy and Finance & Mr. Dona Jean-Claude HOUSSOU, Minister of Energy visited India. During this visit they met EXIM Bank officials.

### **C. Institutional Mechanisms**

11. India and Benin have also established two institutional mechanisms to review the bilateral engagement.

(i). **Joint Commission Meeting (JCM):** The Agreement to establish the India-Benin Joint Commission on political, economic, scientific, technical, and cultural cooperation was signed during the first-ever State Visit to India (3-7 March 2009) by Dr. Boni Yayi, President of the Republic of Benin. Minister of State for External Affairs Dr Shashi Tharoor paid an official visit to Benin from October 21-23, 2009 and co-Chaired the first Meeting of the India-Benin Joint Commission on political, economic, scientific, technical and cultural cooperation held at Cotonou. The official delegation included representatives of RITES and NSIC and a 15-member business delegation coordinated by CII. The JCM reviewed the entire gamut of bilateral relations and discussed various measures to strengthen bilateral ties.

(ii) **Foreign Office Consultations (FoC):** The then Secretary (East) Mr. Shashak, visited Cotonou in August 2003 for the first round of the FOC. Secretary-General for Foreign Affairs of Benin visited New Delhi in April 2005 for second round of Foreign Office Consultations.

#### D. Defence Cooperation

12. Beninese Armed Forces have been attending training/courses in defence institutions in India under the ITEC program. The focus of the training is on specialist areas like counter terrorism and anti-piracy. India is also looking at capacity building of the Beninese Armed Forces. Vacancies in UN courses are also being provided.

#### E. Commercial and Trade Relations

13. India has emerged as the largest trading partner of Benin with two-way trade touching US \$ 1.34 billion in 2022-23. Lead items of India's exports were rice, pharmaceutical products, electrical machinery, cotton, and automobiles particularly two and three-wheelers etc.

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

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
India's Exports	480	427	327	555.20	716.41	892.81
India's Imports	223	376	359	325.97	402.12	452.58
<b>Total trade</b>	<b>703.00</b>	<b>803.00</b>	<b>686.00</b>	<b>881.17</b>	<b>1118.53</b>	<b>1345.40</b>

*Source: DGCIS India*

#### G. Development Cooperation

##### (I) Credit Line Facilities

14. A Line of Credit of US\$ 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 the Health and Education sectors have also been utilized. From the Lines of Credit offered by India to ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development (EBID), Benin availed the following LOCs since 2006: (i). US \$18.8 million LOC facility for first phase of rural electrification project, (ii). the second phase of Rural Electrification in Benin through LOC of US\$20 million has also been completed, and (iii). through an LoC of US \$10 million, Procurement process is ongoing for acquisition of material and medico-technical equipment for the health facilities in Benin.

15. India had donated 100 tractors each in 2009 and 2010, 4 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 was approved in May 2012, which since been completed and inaugurated by Benin President in December 2014. Yet

another LoC of US\$ 42.61 million equivalent has been approved in May 2013 for upgradation of water supply schemes in 69 villages in Benin.

16. Benin received support from India under the Cotton Technical Assistance Programme (TAP) since 2012. Initially, two Indian cotton experts visited Cotonou from 22 November to 1 December 2010 followed by a 5-member cotton delegation in May 2012 to finalize details of a three-year Technical Assistance Programme of the Government of India (2012-14). Recently MEA has extended the project till September 30, 2019, to complete the operationalization of the Model Ginning Unit that has been set up in Benin to demonstrate the viability of double roller ginning technology and provide training on the same. A technical team consisting of officials from Bajaj Steel, IL&FS and CIRCOT travelled to Benin in September 2019 to complete the operationalization and training.

17. Benin is part of the Pan African e-Network project. An MoU on e-VBAB (Tele-education and Tele-medicine) was signed between the Republic of Benin and TCIL, during the State Visit of President Ram Nath Kovind to Benin from 28-30 July 2019.

18. President Ram Nath KOVIND announced a soft Line of Credit of USD 100 million to Benin for its national priority projects, during his State Visit to Benin from 28-30 July 2019.

19. **IBSA's Salt Farming Project:** An India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) project on Salt farming in the Republic of Benin was announced on 16 July 2021 in Djegbadji village near Ouidah, Benin. The Salt Project is under implementation and commercial production of the prototype machinery is likely to start by the end of 2023. The Salt Farming Project aims to provide improved technology, capacity building and distribution support to the local population (mainly women) in the efficient, cost-effective, and environmentally safe production of salt.

## **(II) Capacity Building Programme**

20. **ITEC/e-ITEC:** Since 1964, India has been supporting Benin's efforts in Capacity building under Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme. India regularly offers training slots under ITEC Civil to Benin annually. Beninese officials regularly attend short to medium terms training programmes in diverse subjects ranging from IT to Parliamentary studies in India. Beninese public servants regularly attending a special course on English Proficiency of six-weeks duration under ITEC, at EFLU, Hyderabad.

21. Consequent to the India-Africa Forum Summit-III held in New Delhi in October 2015, India has been offering additional training programmes to Benin in diverse subjects ranging from Agriculture to Hydro power etc. Beninese diplomat regularly attending the Professional Course for Foreign Diplomats (PCFD) in the Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service, New Delhi.

22. **ICCR Scholarship** : Every year there are 5-10 scholarships offered by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) for Beninese Students to pursue undergraduate / post graduate courses in India.

23. **C.V Raman International Fellowships**: Beninese Nationals are regularly availing the C.V.Raman International Fellowships offered by Government of India in doctoral and post-doctoral research training.

24. **e-Vidya Bharati and e-Arogya Bharati MoU**: The Government of the Republic of Benin and Nigeria and Telecommunications Consultants India Limited (TCIL) signed the e-VBAB MoU in 2019 and India has been offering various free online courses (tele-education and free tele-medicine) to Benin under this MoU. Beninese students regularly availing scholarship under e-VBAB.

### **(III) COVID-19**

25. India donated a 6 tonne-consignment of essential medicines, including HCQS and antibiotics, to the Republic of Benin in July 2020. During the Covid-19 pandemic, a total of 293 stranded Indian nationals in Benin have been repatriated to India in 3 flights. On 10 March 2021, India sent consignment of 1,44,000 doses of Covishield vaccine from the Serum Institute of India (SII), under the Covax scheme of GAVI. It is the first consignment of Covid-19 vaccines to reach the Republic of Benin.

### **H. Cultural Exchanges**

26. India and Benin signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP) for 2019-23 during the State Visit of President Ram Nath Kovind to Benin from 28-30 July 2019. A 15-member Theyyam dance group from Kerala visited Benin on December 2, 2011 and gave a performance at Palais de Congress in Cotonou.

### **I. Indian Community**

27. The Indian Community in Benin is estimated at 1500 persons. About 90 Indian companies mainly in trading and retailing are in Benin, dealing in textiles, rice, cashew, scrap, electronics and supermarkets. 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, health care, potable water supply etc., especially in rural areas. A school for local rural children has been opened and is 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 about 120 students.

28. India does not have a Resident Diplomatic Mission in Benin. High Commissioner of India to Nigeria is concurrently accredited as Ambassador to Benin. Government of India has appointed Mr. Gobind Manglani (current President of Indian Association, Benin

- IAB) as India's Honorary Consul in Benin. Benin's resident mission in New Delhi was opened in September 2010. The Benin Resident Embassy in New Delhi was closed in 2016.

*As on 13 Sept 2023*