

Brief on India - Benin Relations

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.

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 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. 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 also 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 Telemedicine 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. During the visit, it was also agreed that the second session of the India-Benin Joint Commission, at Ministerial level, will be held in New Delhi on a date to be agreed upon by the two parties. President KOVIND invited President Patrice TALON to pay a return visit to India.

Institutional Mechanisms

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

(i) **Joint Commission Meeting:** 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 also 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. The 2nd India-Benin JCM will be held soon.

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

Defence Cooperation

9. Beninese Armed Forces have been attending training/courses in defence institutions in India under the ITEC program. Focus of the training is in 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.

Commercial and Trade Relations

10. India has emerged as the largest trading partner of Benin with two-way trade touching US \$ 803 million,. The two-way trade also increased by 14.2% in 2018-19 compared to US\$ 703 million in 2017-18. India's exports to Benin decreased by 11% registering US \$427 million in 2018-19 compared to US\$ 480 million in 2017-18. India's imports from Benin increased by 69% registering US\$ 376 million in 2018-19 compared to US\$ 223 million in 2017-18. Lead items of India's exports were rice, pharmaceutical products, electrical machinery, cotton and automobiles particularly two and three-wheelers.

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

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
India's Exports	498	427	448	480	427
India's Imports	222	276	208	223	376
Total Trade	720	703	655	703	803

Development Cooperation

(I) Credit Line Facilities

11. 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 Health and Education sectors have also been utilised. 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.

12. 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.

13. 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.

14. 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.

15. 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.

(II) Capacity Building Programme

16. **Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC)**: Since 1964, India has been supporting Benin's efforts in Capacity building under Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme. India offers 20 training slots under ITEC to Benin annually. During the period 2018-19, 10 Beninese officials attended short to medium terms training programmes in diverse subjects ranging from IT to Parliamentary studies.

17. **Third India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS-III)**: 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 Hydropower. In the year 2018-19, 11 Benin officials were trained under IAFS-III Programmes.

18. A Beninese diplomat attended the 65th Professional Course for Foreign Diplomats (PCFD) in Foreign Service Institute, New Delhi from 7 March-6 April 2018.

Cultural Exchanges

19. 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.

Indian Community

20. 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, 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 about 120 students.

21. 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. Ashok R. Mirchandani, a local Indian, as its Honorary Consul to Benin. Benin's resident

mission in New Delhi was opened in September 2010 with Mr. Andre Sanra as Benin's First Resident Ambassador to India. The Benin Resident Embassy in New Delhi was closed in 2016.

September 25, 2019