



Doing Business in Benin: 2008 Country Commercial Guide for U.S. Companies

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Chapter 1: Doing Business in Benin

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Market Overview

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- Benin has a stable democracy and a small domestic market. The country's key economic indicators for 2007 are as follows: GDP: \$5.92 billion; Real GDP growth rate: 4%; Per capita GDP: \$749, Inflation rate: 1.3%; Population 7.9 million. Benin's GDP is roughly 80 percent agriculture, 12 percent services, and eight percent manufacturing. Cotton production and processing alone account for about one third of GDP.
- In 2007 Benin's export's amounted to \$259 million. In 2007 Benin imported \$1.2 billion worth of goods including foodstuffs, tobacco, petroleum products, energy products, capital goods, and used cars. Benin's major trade partners include Nigeria, France, China, Italy, Brazil, Libya, Indonesia, U.K., and Cote d'Ivoire.
- Currently, trade between Benin and the United States is small, but interest in American products is growing. The largest sector of trade is in transportation equipment. Benin has been eligible for the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) since the program began in 2000. It qualified for AGOA textile and apparel benefits in January 2004.

Market Challenges

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- Benin's official language is French, and English is not spoken widely. U.S. companies seeking to do business in Benin will probably need to hire a translator and/or Interpreter for assistance.
- Recourse to the judicial system to resolve a civil dispute is extremely time consuming and resolution of judicial disputes is slow. Corruption and slowness in bureaucratic processes can also pose a problem.
- The biggest challenge facing many U.S. businesses exporting to Benin is the difficulty in finding consolidators who can ship smaller orders in ocean-bound freight containers at a competitive price and frequency.

- Businesses should be particularly cautious about unknown Beninese "companies" promising them big business deals. Unfortunately, a number of perpetrators of sophisticated internet scams use Benin as a base to defraud U.S. companies and citizens with "419" scams (e.g. advance fees), so named for the relevant section of Nigerian law. Potential U.S. investors and exporters can ask the Economic Section at the U.S. Embassy Cotonou or the Commercial Section in at the U.S. Embassy in Dakar to verify the bonafides of their proposed business partners in Benin.

Market Opportunities

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- Despite its small market size, Benin may be used, with its fairly efficient port, as a re-exporting country for its landlocked neighboring countries and for Nigeria which has a market of 150 million consumers.
- U.S. companies could find success in exporting electronic products, cosmetics and toiletries, telecommunications equipment, electrical power systems, transportation equipment, cotton industry equipment, and medical equipment.
- The best prospects for major projects are infrastructure projects (road, airport, port and rail way construction), housing, telecommunications, tourism, and the energy production sector.

Market Entry Strategy

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- Many exporters may find it necessary to employ the services of a local agent or notary public who knows Benin well and can advise an exporter or investor on entry into the Beninese market.
- Investors or exporters can also use the Foreign Commercial Service's Gold Key Program or the International Company Profile (ICP) program to gain more information about the Beninese market and arrange meetings and contacts with possible clients in Benin.
- For those investors who wish to establish a business in Benin the government has established a Corporate Formalities Center (CFC) at the Benin Chamber of Commerce and Industry's (CCIB) Cotonou headquarters to facilitate the registration of new businesses. Through the CCIB, it is possible to register a new company within two weeks depending on the type of company.
- Businesses may also want to visit the Government of Benin's tender website at http://www.gouv.bj/affiche_tous_appel_offre.php

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Chapter 2: Political and Economic Environment

For background information on the political and economic environment of the country, please click on the link below to the U.S. Department of State Background Notes.

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/6761.htm>

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Using an Agent or Distributor

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- U.S. companies considering entering the Beninese market, particularly if they have not previously done business in the region, should consider working with a reputable agent or distributor. They should be fluent in both French and English and familiar with local business practices. An agent or distributor may need a French translation of the product's documentation and literature.
- The U.S. Embassy's Commercial Section can help a U.S. company identify suitable partners in coordination with the the Commercial Service office in Dakar, www.buyusa.gov/westafrica/en/. Additional information is available at www.export.gov.

Establishing an Office

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- A real estate company or the U.S. company's local partner or agent is the most suitable organization to help identify a location to lease.
- Any American firm establishing an office in Benin should work with an established local partner of solid reputation and retain a competent Beninese attorney. A list of attorneys licensed in Benin may be found at <http://cotonou.usembassy.gov/listoflawyers.html>
- The incorporation package which needs to be presented to Benin's Chamber of Commerce and Industry's (CCIB) Corporate Formalities Center (CFC) to incorporate a company includes a certified copy of the identity card or the passport of the manager; a certified photocopy of the police record if the

manager is a foreigner; a photocopy of the identity card or passport of the partners or shareholders, and if they are legal entities, a copy of their trade register and the statutes; an original voucher of the opening of a bank account in a local bank in the name of the company; three identity photos of the manager; two folders, a fiscal stamp costing about \$2.50; the amount of the expected turnover; the number of employees, a copy of lease of the head office in Benin and the annual rent; and information related to employees registered with the social security office. If the company to be incorporated is a branch of a foreign company, the above-mentioned documents will need to include the names of the local board of directors. Further information may be found on www.ccib.bj.

- Once the statutes have been signed the following needs to be performed: registration of the statutes at the land registration department, approval of the statutes by the appropriate court; registration of the company with the trade and movable credit register; publication of the company in the governmental daily newspaper "La Nation" and/or the Journal Officiel de la Republique du Benin (Official Journal of the Government of Benin); statement of existence at the internal revenue service; registration with the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Analysis (INSAE); statement of establishment with the Ministry of Labor; registration with the Benin Chamber of Commerce and Industry; and securing a trading or importer card.
- The incorporation fees are about \$450 if the company is created by a Beninese national or \$850 if the company is created by a foreigner.

Franchising

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- At present, franchising is underdeveloped in Benin. Car rental agencies, such as Hertz and Avis, are the only existing franchising companies.

Direct Marketing

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- Employing direct marketing techniques in Benin may not be viable due to underdeveloped telecommunications, postal, and information technology infrastructure. However, advertising and communications companies and some TV programs may serve as platforms for direct marketing.

Joint Ventures/Licensing

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- U.S. and Beninese companies may wish to form a joint venture to participate in the privatization of a public company or in public procurements. With the assistance of a notary public the joint venture should be registered in court and published in an official gazette such as the governmental daily "La Nation".

Selling to the Government

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- Government procurements are governed by the Beninese procurement code. Procurements by the national government are announced in major newspapers, particularly "La Nation" and on www.gouv.bj/affiche_tous_appel_offre.php. The published procurements usually include participation requirements. The areas of opportunities are energy, bridge and road construction, sanitation, building, agricultural equipment, cars, security equipment, medical equipment, and others.
- Bidders are required to submit proposals in French. The U.S. Embassy offers assistance to U.S. companies participating in the bids and advocates with appropriated government officials on their behalf.

Distribution and Sales Channels

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- The majority of Benin's population is concentrated in the southern part of the country, particularly in the Cotonou agglomeration. The retail landscape is fragmented, but retailers and their consumers typically cluster in marketplaces. The wholesale network is dominated by Lebanese, Indian, Pakistani, and Chinese businesses. The Dantokpa market in Cotonou is one of the largest markets in West Africa. Re-export activity through Benin to Nigeria, although complicated by a number of Nigerian import restrictions, is one way to reach the vast Nigerian market.
- The port of Cotonou is the gateway to northern Benin and to landlocked countries such as Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali and Chad. Cargo arriving in the port is transported by road on trucks to various local and foreign destinations.

Selling Factors/Techniques

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- Due to the heavy emphasis on personal relationships in Benin, "face-time" with current and prospective clients is a critical selling factor. Selling to informal and formal retailers is the best way to distribute goods throughout the country. Buyers expect promotional material and technical documents to be in French or both English and French.

Electronic Commerce

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- Employing electronic commerce techniques in Benin may not be viable due to an underdeveloped information technology infrastructure and limited access to computers and the internet. However text messages via mobile phone are an useful advertising channel.

Trade Promotion and Advertising

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- Besides being a key element of Benin's emerging democracy, Benin's free press is a useful vehicle for marketing U.S. products and services. In addition to the GOB's daily newspaper, "La Nation," there are more than twenty privately owned newspapers in Cotonou. Along with the national TV station, ORTB, there are four

private TV stations, LC2 (www.lc2international.tv), Golfe TV and FM, Canal 3, IATV, and Tele Carrefour. There are over twenty private radio stations in Benin including Golfe FM, which broadcasts via satellite to several African countries. Text messages via mobile phone can also be used as an advertising channel.

Pricing

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- Generally speaking, a majority of Beninese consumers have little disposable income and are extremely price sensitive, making purchasing decisions principally based on the cost of a product. With that said, however, there are substantial markups for luxury goods and there is a small but growing segment of consumers willing to pay top dollar for high-end merchandise.
- A Value Added Tax (VAT) of 18% of the gross value is levied on sales, imports, real estate activities and all lucrative activities other than salaries and agricultural activities.
- U.S. exporters should price their products on a CIF (Cost, Insurance and Freight) basis. New U.S. exporters should require an irrevocable confirmed letter of credit from their Benin partners prior to shipping.

Sales Service/Customer Support

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- Due to the heavy emphasis on personal relationships in Benin, "face-time" with current and prospective clients is a critical selling factor. Concerning equipment, Beninese clients may have an expectation that service is included in the purchase price. As appropriate, sellers should clarify this point with their clients and either factor customer support costs into the purchase price or negotiate an after-sale support package at the same time a sales transaction is concluded.

Protecting Your Intellectual Property

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- The Government of Benin office responsible for managing issues related to the protection of intellectual property is the Government Patent Office (CENAPI). Their contact information is as follows:

01 BP 363 Cotonou
Tel: +229 21-31-02-40
Fax: +229 21-30-30-24
Email: cepani02@yahoo.fr

- It is important to emphasize Benin has weak safeguards to protect intellectual property. Illegally reproduced DVDs are openly sold in the streets of Cotonou. Please refer to the Investment Climate Statement for further information.

Due Diligence

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- Although the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Ministry of Industry and Commerce can provide some information on companies doing business in Benin, no formal system exists to verify the bona fides of companies. Unfortunately, Benin's proximity to Nigeria means that a number of mala fide Nigerian operators, increasingly in collusion with Beninese, have established companies which are little more than a cell phone, fax machine and post office box whose sole purpose is to defraud potential foreign exporters and investors
- The Embassy's economic and commercial section spends a significant portion of its time warning U.S. businesses and individuals about specific "Nigerian 419" cases, so named for the section of Nigeria's Criminal Code dealing with advanced fee fraud. "Boiler room" operators try to defraud unsuspecting victims using a variety of scams, such as one in which a U.S. entity is offered a large "purchase order" or "reward" if they send e.g. USD 1,000 or share their bank account information. Examples of these scams have included orders, ostensibly from the Benin Government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or charitable organizations, for 6,000 computers, 10,000 cellular phones, and 25,000 tons of frozen poultry. Requests for such large quantities of goods should be met with skepticism and verified through the Commercial Section. Furthermore, any requests for an upfront "registration fee" required by the Beninese government in order to do business should be considered carefully because exaggerated sums have been used to extort money from exporters of products to Benin. To order International Company Profile (ICP) service in Benin U.S. exporters may contact Ms. Youanidou Wane Ba or Mr. Steven Morrison at Youhanidou.Wane.Ba@mail.doc.gov or Steve.Morrison@mail.doc.gov respectively.

Local Professional Services

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- The Government of Benin has established a Business Registration Center at the Cotonou headquarters of the Benin Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCIB) to facilitate the registration of new businesses (www.ccib.bj). To ease the startup process, investors are strongly encouraged to hire a local notary public for the required assistance. A list of attorneys licensed in Benin may be found at <http://cotonou.usembassy.gov/listoflawyers.html>

Web Resources

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- U.S. exporters seeking general export information and assistance or country-specific commercial information should consult with their nearest Export Assistance Center or the U.S. Department of Commerce's Trade Information Center at (800) USA-TRADE, or go to one of the following web sites: www.buyusa.com, www.export.gov, or www.tradeinfo.doc.gov or www.buyusa/dakar/en
- U.S. exporters can also consult the Benin Chamber of Commerce and Industry's website at www.ccib.bj or the Government of Benin's tender website at www.gouv.bj/affiche_tous_appel_offre.php

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Electronic Components (ELC) and Consumer Electronics (CEL)

Overview

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Value (1,000 dollars)	2006	2007 Jan-Sept	2008 (estimated)
Total Market Size	NA	NA	NA
Total Local Production	0	0	0
Total Exports	0	0	0
Total Imports	NA	NA	NA
Imports from the U.S.	3,859	8,241	NA

(US Department of Commerce) NA: Not Available

A thriving market in electronic products exists in Benin. Private radio and TV stations and record companies are increasing their activities. Moreover the government is making great efforts to modernize its telecommunications equipment and liberalize the telecommunications sector. The exemption of duty on computers paves the way to the increased use of computers by private businesses and the government.

Best Prospects/Services

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The demand for electronic products from the U.S. is increasing because they are regarded as the best in this market. They include computer peripherals and software, audio and video products, and telecommunications software.

Opportunities

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Establishment of a branch of a U.S. information technology company in Benin would provide the opportunity supply these products to the local market as well as to re-export to neighboring countries and participate in public procurements across the region.

Resources

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Government of Benin's offer website: www.gouv.bj/affiche_tous_appel_offre.php

Projet Cerco, an information technology school: www.projetcerco.com

H2com, an information technology company: www.h2com.com

Benin Telecoms: www.benintelecoms.bj

Private TV station LC2: www.lc2international.tv

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Apparel (APP)

Overview

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Value (1,000 dollars)	2006	2007	2008 (estimated)
Total Market Size	NA	NA	NA
Total Local Production	NA	NA	NA
Total Exports	NA	NA	NA
Total Imports	NA	NA	NA
Imports from the U.S.	5,691	4,063	NA

(US Department of Commerce) NA: Not Available

The import of textile and used clothing is a very important business in Benin because there is a market dedicated to these products. Even though Chinese textile imports dominate the market, the importation of used clothing, of which the majority comes from the U.S., is increasing. Used clothing from the U.S. is affordable to the low and middle income population.

Best Prospects/Services

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The demand for used clothing and other textile products is permanent. The annual population growth rate is 3.5% and the consumption of used clothing is very popular among youth.

Opportunities

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There are businesses already importing textile and used clothing from the U.S. who may increase their imports further if they find exporters who can ship high quality clothing.

Resources

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Benin Chamber of Commerce and Industry: www.ccib.bj
Benin Agency for Trade Promotion: E-mail: micpe.cbce@otitelem.bj
www.beninbusinessinfo.com

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Cosmetics/Toiletries (COS)

Overview

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Value (1,000 dollars)	2006	2007	2008 (estimated)
Total Market Size	NA	NA	NA
Total Local Production	NA	NA	NA
Total Exports	NA	NA	NA
Total Imports	NA	NA	NA
Imports from the U.S.	NA	NA	NA

NA: Not Available

Even though statistics for this sector are not available, there is a market for American cosmetics and hair care products in Benin. These products, sold in small quantities on the local market are imported either by wholesalers or purchased in small quantities from the U.S by retailers for local resale and re-exportation to Nigeria and Cameroon.

Best Prospects/Services

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Cosmetics, hair and toiletry products.

Opportunities

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Given the fragmented nature of the local market, and logistical difficulties facing retailers, there are significant opportunities to resell bulk quantities of inexpensive products on the local market or in neighboring Nigeria.

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Beninese cosmetics importers usually attend the COSMPROF trade show in the U.S.: www.cosmoprofnorthamerica.com

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Telecommunications Equipment (TEL)

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Value (1,000 dollars)	2006	2007	2008 (estimated)
Total Market Size	NA	NA	NA
Total Local Production	0	0	0
Total Exports	0	0	0
Total Imports	NA	NA	NA
Imports from the U.S.	NA	NA	NA

NA: Not Available

Mobile telephony service in Benin is rapidly growing. The government has liberalized the mobile telephony sector, and number of users is growing with an estimated 20 mobile phone subscribers per 100 members of the population in 2007.

Best Prospects/Services

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The prospects for telecommunications equipment, particularly that used by mobile telephone operators, are strong.

Opportunities

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Some Beninese telecommunications companies already buy cellular phone antenna pylons and VSAT equipment from American companies. As coverage expands these opportunities might increase

Resources

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Benin Telecoms S.A.: www.benintelecoms.bj

Moov: www.moov.bj

MTN: www.areeba.com.bj

Export-Import Bank of United States: www.exim.gov/products/special/africa/

United States Trade Development Agency: www.ustda.gov

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Electrical Power Systems (ELP)

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Value (1,000 dollars)	2006	2007	2008 (estimated)
Total Market Size	NA	NA	NA
Total Local Production	NA	NA	NA
Total Exports	NA	NA	NA
Total Imports	NA	NA	NA
Imports from the U.S.	NA	NA	NA

NA: Not Available

Even though the electrical energy parastatal, Societe Beninoise d'Energie Electrique (, SBEE), has a monopoly on the distribution of electricity, it is having difficulty meeting the increasing demand for electrical power. The government is actively seeking to curb Benin's power deficit and signed a contract in 2007 with a U.S company to build an 80 mW power plant. Many companies depend on their own generators to provide power.

Best Prospects/Services

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Gas turbines, generators, other power generation equipment, and feasibility studies for power plants might be of interest to U.S. firms.

Opportunities

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U.S. companies may be interested in Build-Own-Operate (BOO) power plants or supplying power plants to the government, and generators to businesses.

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Government of Benin: www.gouv.bj

Export-Import Bank of United States: www.exim.gov/products/special/africa/

United States Trade Development Agency: www.ustda.gov

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Autos/Light Trucks/Vans (AUT)

Overview

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Value (1,000 dollars)	2006	2007	2008 (estimated)
Total Market Size	NA	NA	NA
Total Local Production	NA	NA	NA
Total Exports	NA	NA	NA
Total Imports	NA	NA	NA
Imports from the U.S.	80,283	147,611	NA

(U.S. Department of Commerce) NA: Not Available

The market for new and used cars is growing and the dollar's fall has enticed a large number of used cars dealers to import their cars from the U.S. Providing buses for public transportation in Cotonou, the economic capital of Benin with a population estimated at above 1,000,000, is also a possibility.

Best Products/Services

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New and used cars and spare parts.

Opportunities

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The GOB invites regular tenders to renew its vehicle fleet. Additionally, the majority of the Beninese middle class buys their cars in used cars markets while a large number of people from neighboring countries import used cars from Benin to their respective countries. There are also prospects for the import of buses by the municipality of Cotonou or the national government for public transportation within the city of Cotonou to reduce pollution.

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Government of Benin: www.gouv.bj

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Textile Machinery (TXM)

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Value (1,000)	2006	2007	2008 (estimated)
Total Market Size	NA	NA	NA
Total Local Production	NA	NA	NA
Total Exports	NA	NA	NA
Total Imports	NA	NA	NA
Imports from the U.S.	NA	NA	NA

NA: Not Available

The cotton production is the most developed and organized sector in Benin and accounts for about 80% of Benin's export income. Only 3% of the country's production is locally processed.

Best Products/Services

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Ginning equipment and textile processing machinery.

Opportunities

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There are opportunities for the export of ginning equipment and parts, and textile processing equipment to Benin. There are 18 ginning factories in the country. 8 are owned by private businesses and 10 belong to the government. The privatization of the GOB ginning factories may pave the road to the import of more ginning equipment. The government's hopes for the cotton sector include the creation of an integrated sector which will allow cotton derivative products such as textiles to be exported to the U.S under the benefits provided by the African Growth and Opportunities Act (AGOA).

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Government of Benin: www.gouv.bj

Association Interprofessionnelle du Cotton, AIC or Benin Cotton Association:

www.aicbenin.org

Email: aic@intnet.bj

Export-Import Bank of United States: www.exim.gov/products/special/africa/

United States Trade Development Agency: www.ustda.gov

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Tourism Infrastructure Services (AB)

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Value (1,000 dollars)	2006	2007	2008 (estimated)
Total Market Size	NA	NA	NA
Total Local Production	NA	NA	NA
Total Exports	NA	NA	NA
Total Imports	NA	NA	NA
Imports from the U.S.	NA	NA	NA

NA: Not Available

Benin is the fifth largest tourist destination in West Africa and has a great potential for tourism infrastructure. The government has declared the beachfront zone west of Cotonou between the airport and the city of Ouidah as a tourism center. The government is encouraging the development of hotels and leisure centres in this zone.

Best Products/Services

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Construction of recreational centers and 2,000 hotel rooms.

Opportunities

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The government has put in place incentives for foreign investors interested in building hotels in that area. Investors can obtain duty exemption from the government on all building materials and equipment destined to such a project.

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Office of Execution of the Tourism Project or Cellule d'Execution de projet de Developpement touristique (CEPDC-RP): www.laroutedespeches.org/english/index.htm
Email: laroutedespeches@yahoo.fr

Export-Import Bank of United States: www.exim.gov/products/special/africa/
United States Trade Development Agency: www.ustda.gov

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Medical Equipment (MED)

Overview

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Value (1,000 dollars)	2006	2007	2008 (estimated)
Total Market Size	NA	NA	NA
Total Local Production	NA	NA	NA
Total Exports	NA	NA	NA
Total Imports	NA	NA	NA
Imports from the U.S.	NA	NA	NA

NA: Not Available

Most of the Benin's teaching hospitals medical equipment is obsolete and needs to be replaced. Private clinics are growing and the need for medical equipment is increasing. Some of these clinics may opt for used medical equipment

Best Products/Services

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The best products are new and used medical scanners, X-ray machines, and imaging equipment. The voltage used in Benin is 220 volts.

Opportunities

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The government is projecting to purchase new medical equipment for medical centers under its control. The prospects to sell U.S medical equipment exists if interested parties have good Beninese partners. The private clinics are important clients for used medical equipment.

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Government of Benin: www.gouv.bj

Export-Import Bank of United States: www.exim.gov/products/special/africa/

United States Trade Development Agency: www.ustda.gov

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Agricultural Sector

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Benin is food sufficient and even exports some of agricultural products to its neighboring countries. However the country is has deficit in rice production and import significant quantity of rice to fill the gap. It also imports wheat and wheat flower mainly from Europe. In late 2007 the rise in price of oil in the world market severely impacted prices of foodstuffs in Benin.

The potential for U.S. exports of agricultural and food products exists, but American products will face stiff competition from European, Brazilian and Asian products.

Agricultural product prospects

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American exporters may be interested in exporting the following products to Benin: rice, wheat, corn, soybeans, canned fruits and vegetables, tomato puree/ketchup, bottled vegetable oil, fruit juices, margarine, pasta, wine, frozen chicken, health food products, powdered milk, and mayonnaise.

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Import Tariffs

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Benin, together with other countries belonging to the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) and the CFA Zone: Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo, implemented a common external tariff (CET) in 2000. The CET is a standardized tariff applied to imported goods for WAEMU member states. The CET comprises duties and taxes which are basically the Customs Duty (DD: the rate varies between 0 and 20% depending of the nature of the goods), the Community Solidarity Deduction (PSC: 1%), the Statistical Duty (RS: 1%), the Import Cyclical Tax (TCI: 10%), and the Regressive Protection Tax (TDP: 10% and 20%).

The CET establishes four categories of products on which customs duties are levied: 0% on drugs, books and condoms; 5% on essential goods, basic raw materials, capital goods and specific inputs (semi-manufactured and manufactured goods used by local industries); 10% on inputs and intermediary products; 20% on final consumption and all goods imported from outside of the WAEMU zone (for instance frozen fish, used clothing, milk, oil, wheat flour, nuts, canned fish and cigarettes).

On top of these customs duties, importers are also required to pay 18% Value-Added-Tax (VAT) at the point of entry.

Further information on customs procedures in Benin may be obtained on the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MDEF) website at www.gouv.bj, www.mdef.bj and www.izf.net.

Trade Barriers

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Benin's enactment of the common external tariff and Benin's adherence to the WTO has eliminated many trade barriers. However, an inefficient, and corrupt customs process may make the importation of goods by sea, air or land costly and time consuming.

Although the possibility of obtaining a bonded warehouse for onward shipment in the Port exists in theory, in practice it is very difficult to obtain such a status.

Import Requirements and Documentation

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Documents related to import requirements vary depending on the type of the imported goods. In general the main documents to be produced by importers before the clearing of goods are the invoice, the bill of lading, the Inspection certificate issued by BIVAC or Bureau Veritas Group (<http://www.bureauveritas.com>), the importer's card, attestation of origin of the goods (if they are from a WAEMU member state) and an animal or plant health inspection certificate if appropriate.

Further Information can be obtained from the "Direction de l'Application et de la Reglementation" or Office of Regulation Application of Benin's Customs Service at +229-21318740.

It is important to underline that all goods are subject to BIVAC inspection before embarkation.

U.S. Export Controls

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U.S. company companies exporting to Benin must adhere to the requirements of the U.S. Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) www.bis.doc.gov, which regulates the export and re-export of sensitive goods and technologies.

Temporary Entry

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Benin allows temporary entry of non-prohibited goods. The temporary entry is granted on request addressed to the Director General of Benin Customs prior to disembarkation and to the relevant section of the Ministry of Economy and Finance. It allows calculating the duties and taxes receivable based on the duration of the depreciation of the equipment and on the duration of its utilization in Benin.

The goods that benefit from temporary entry include equipment imported for the execution of public works such as trucks, handling equipment, construction camps, drilling machines, light vehicles and others. Spare parts for equipment and machines used within the framework of public works are excluded from the benefits of this system.

When the temporary entry warranty ends, the beneficiary company has four options: it may pay the difference of the duties and taxes if it wants to keep the goods or equipment in Benin, re-export the equipment, place it in warehouse or depot until its final destination is known or request an extension of the initial temporary entry authorization.

Labeling and Marking Requirements

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There are no specific labeling requirements for goods. Well labeled goods ease their identification and the customs clearance. However, Beninese law does not allow any foreign, natural or manufactured goods to leave or enter Benin, if those goods are

labeled to wrongly reflect that they are from Benin or a country with which Benin has signed a brand protection agreement. All goods without reference of the country of origin and the marking "Imported" are not allowed to enter Benin.

Prohibited and Restricted Imports

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The import of guns, ammunitions, and any narcotics products, except those accepted for medical purposes, are prohibited

Customs Regulations and Contact Information

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Goods are cleared by registered clearing agents hired by the importer. All required important documents are handed to them for customs procedures. Further information on Benin customs may be obtained at:

Direction Generale des Douanes et Droits Indirects

Telephone: 00 229 21 315703/315548

Fax: 00 229 21 316786

Direction de l'Application et de la Règlémentation

Tel. +229-21318740

Email address: douanes-béninoises@yahoo.fr; website: www.mdef.bj

Bivac, Bureau Veritas Group

Tel. +229 21 302013/204901; Fax. +229 21 300182

<http://www.bureauveritas.com>

Standards

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- [Standards Organizations](#)
- [Conformity Assessment](#)
- [Labeling and Marking](#)
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Overview

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Benin's standards are derived from France. Electricity used in the country is 220 volts and the system of measurement is metric

Standards Organizations

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The Benin Center for Standardization and Quality Management (CEBENOR) opened in July 2000 and promotes the quality of locally made goods. In this context, it also grants approval for and disseminates government standards on all products and services. CEBENOR participates in certifying enterprises' product quality, and assists in obtaining certificates of conformity to standards.

NIST Notify U.S. Service

Member countries of the World Trade Organization (WTO) are required under the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT Agreement) to report to the

WTO all proposed technical regulations that could affect trade with other Member countries. **Notify U.S.** is a free, web-based e-mail subscription service that offers an opportunity to review and comment on proposed foreign technical regulations that can affect your access to international markets. Register online at Internet URL: <http://www.nist.gov/notifyus/>

Testing

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Direction de l'Alimentation et de la Nutrition Appliquée (Food Safety Control Office) or DANA is under the Benin Ministry of Agriculture and is the only governmental organization allowed to do testing of food products prior to their clearance at the port of entry. Col. Dr. Denis Mikode Ahoukpo is the DANA Director.

Contacts: DANA BP 295 Porto-Novo, Benin, Tel. +229-20-212670, Fax: +229-20-213963 E-mail: admikode@yahoo.fr

Direction des Pharmacies (Pharmaceutical Products Control Office), this office is under the Benin Ministry of Health and tests drugs at the port of Entry before clearance. The Director is Dr. Alfred Dansou,

Contacts: Tel/Fax: +229-21-332178; email: kissavic@yahoo.fr

Conformity Assessment

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Conformity assessment is carried by a number by private and public organizations. They include Food Safety Control Office (DANA), the Department of Pharmacies, the Department of Metrology and Quality Standards, and Bivac pre-shipment inspection services.

Labeling and Marking

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Labeling and marking are essential for the import of goods in Benin. The imported products may include, depending on the nature of the product, the name of the product, the country of origin, the manufacture and the expiration dates

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Direction de l'Alimentation et de la Nutrition Appliquée (Food Safety Control Office) or Dana is under the Benin Ministry of Agriculture and is the only governmental organization allowed to do testing of food products prior to their clearance at the port of entry. Col. Dr. Denis Mikode Ahoukpo is its Director Contact: DANA BP 295 Porto-Novo, Benin, Tel. +229-20-212670, Fax: +229-20-213963 E-mail: admikode@yahoo.fr

Direction des Pharmacies (Pharmaceutical Products Control Office), this office is under the Benin Ministry of Health and tests drugs at the point of entry before clearance. Its Director is Dr. Alfred Dansou, Tel/Fax: +229-21-332178 ; email : kissavic@yahoo.fr

Bivac, Bureau VERITAS Group
Tel. +229 21 302013/204901; Fax. +229 21 300182

Standard Point of Contact at U.S. Embassy Cotonou:

Marius C. Lotsu
Economic/Commercial Assistant
U.S. Embassy
01B.P. 2012 Cotonou, Benin
Rue Caporal Bernard Anani
E-mail: LotsuMC@state.gov
Tel: (229) 21-300650
Fax: (229) 21-300670

Trade Agreements

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Benin is signatory to all international trade conventions under the aegis of the World Trade Organization and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Benin is also part of the trade agreement between the European Union and the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific countries. Benin is also a member of regional and sub regional economic unions such as ECOWAS and WAEMU. In 1993, Benin ratified the convention providing for the establishment of the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) regarding improvement of investments opportunities in developing countries and promotion of investment flows.

Benin signed bilateral trade agreements for the promotion and the protection investments with the Federal Republic of Germany, Tunisia, Switzerland, Peoples Republic of China, Portugal, Greece, France, and the United States of America.

Web Resources

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Government of Benin: www.gouv.bj
U.S. Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) <http://www.bis.doc.gov>
Ministry of Economy and Finance: www.mdef.bj
Bivac/Bureau VERITAS: www.us.bureauveritas.com
African Growth and Opportunity Act: www.agoa.gov
NIST Notify U.S. Service: <http://www.nist.gov/notifyus/>

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Chapter 6: Investment Climate

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- [Conversion and Transfer Policies](#)
- [Expropriation and Compensation](#)
- [Dispute Settlement](#)
- [Performance Requirements and Incentives](#)
- [Right to Private Ownership and Establishment](#)
- [Protection of Property Rights](#)
- [Transparency of Regulatory System](#)
- [Efficient Capital Markets and Portfolio Investment](#)
- [Political Violence](#)
- [Corruption](#)
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Openness to Foreign Investment

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President Yayi, in office since April 2006, aims to establish double digit economic growth in Benin before the end of his term in 2011 and is cognizant that he needs foreign investment to reach that goal. In attempt to attract increased investment President Yayi set up the Presidential Investment Council (PIC) in 2006. The objectives of this organization are to reinforce dialogue between the government and investors and speed the process of identification and implementation of reforms in order to improve the business environment. The PIC includes local and foreign private investors and government representatives.

The government of Benin officially favors and encourages foreign investment. Many opportunities for foreign investment have historically been linked to the privatization of state-owned enterprises, whose numbers have been reduced from 130 in 1980 to only four currently: SONAPRA (cotton), SBEE (electricity), SONEB (Water), Benin Telecoms S.A (Telecommunications) and La Poste du Benin S.A (Post). Privatization of these final parastatals is slow-moving and attempts at privatizing SONAPRA have failed on two occasions. Foreign companies are invited to bid on privatizations and the bidding process is open and well-publicized.

The current investment code, adopted in 1990, establishes the conditions to obtain benefits under different investment regimes and grants extensive discretionary power to the Investment Control Commission at the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MIC) Tax reforms introduced in recent years largely removed the need for special incentives to potential investors. The MIC has a "guichet unique" or one-stop shop to help dispense with unnecessary and time-consuming formalities facing investors. The GOB also set up

the Business Registration Center in the Cotonou headquarters of the Benin Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCIB) to facilitate the registration of new businesses. Using the center it is possible to register a new company within 2 weeks depending on the type of company.

Beninese law guarantees the right to own and transfer private property. The Beninese court system upholds the sanctity of contracts but justice is often slow in coming. Beninese courts process, on average, 8 percent of their civil cases each year.

To ease the company start up process, investors are strongly encouraged to hire a local notary for the required assistance. Any American firm establishing an office in Benin should work with an established local partner of solid reputation and retain a competent Beninese attorney. A list of English-speaking lawyers and Notaries public is available from the Embassy's Commercial section.

Conversion and Transfer Policies

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Benin is a member of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU). Benin's currency is the CFA franc, which is issued by the Central Bank of West African states (BCEAO). The CFA franc is fixed against the euro, and one USD dollar presently equals about CFA 450 (December 2007).

Foreign exchange is readily available. Transfers exceeding 300,000 FCFA (approximately \$667) require approval from the BCEAO and the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF). This requirement is aimed at preventing money laundering and is not used to prevent investors from removing money from Benin. There are no restrictions on the remittance of profit by companies which invest in Benin. The remittance of profits by individual resident investors is restricted in certain areas.

Expropriation and Compensation

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The state guarantees under law that it will make no attempt to nationalize enterprises operating in Benin. The government does have the capacity to seize property by eminent domain. If the government does seize land, it is required to pay compensation to the owners.

Dispute Settlement

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The government was instrumental in settling a recent investment dispute. There have been few investment disputes and there does not be a discernible pattern in the causation of the disputes.

Benin is a member of the Organization for the Harmonization of African Business Law, known by its French acronym OHADA, and has adopted OHADA's universal commercial code to govern commercial disputes and bankruptcies. Benin is also a member of OHADA's Common Court of Justice and Arbitration. Benin is also a member of the International Center for the Settlement of Investment Disputes.

Benin does not maintain a commercial court system. Its civil courts handle commercial cases. In principle, Benin's courts will enforce foreign court judgments. A profound

backlog of civil cases often results in a wait of two or more years before matters proceed to trial. Corruption, however, remains an impediment to the administration of justice. Businesses and other litigants routinely complain that corruption is particularly widespread at the trial court level, as well as at administrative hearings.

Performance Requirements and Incentives

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Benin's government maintains a welcoming posture to foreign investors and its 1990 Investment Code contains several incentives, in the form of tax reductions, for investors depending on the level and type of investment. Depending on the amount of the investment, investors do not have to pay taxes on profits, exports of finished products, or imports of industrial equipment. To obtain these benefits investors must meet several criteria including employing a minimum number of Beninese nationals, safeguarding the environment, and meeting national accepted accounting standards. The Investment Control Commission monitors companies which benefit from these benefits to ensure their compliance with the standards required for receiving incentives.

Right to Private Ownership and Establishment

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The right to private ownership and investment exists in both theory and practice. Beninese law guarantees freedom of trade; choice of customers and suppliers; the right to move freely throughout the country; the right of foreign employees and their family members to leave the country; and freedom from government interference in the management of private enterprises.

Protection of Property Rights

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Secured interests in real and personal property are recognized and enforced. Benin's legal system protects and facilitates acquisition and disposition of all property rights, including land, buildings and mortgages. As mentioned above Benin's judicial system moves slowly and it may take a great deal of time to enforce a secured interest. Secured interests in property are registered with the Land Office in the Ministry of Finance.

International intellectual property agreements are not adequately enforced. Illegally reproduced DVDs containing pirated television shows and movies are sold openly.

Transparency of Regulatory System

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While the government has adopted a transparent policy to foster free enterprise, red tape is often a problem. Benin recently slipped in the World Bank's Doing Business ranking in "Dealing with Licenses" from 120 to 123. According to the same study, it takes a typical entrepreneur 332 days to secure the necessary licenses, approvals, and water and electricity connections to build a warehouse. The law governing commercial transactions conforms to the standards set by OHADA. Many labor laws remain holdovers from Benin's pre-1990 Marxist era and serve as impediments to private enterprise.

Efficient Capital Markets and Portfolio Investment

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Government policy supports free financial markets in Benin, subject to regulatory oversight by the Ministry of Finance and the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO). Credit is allocated on market terms and foreign investors can get credit on the local market. Some observers claim the banking industry is not subject to effective mandatory regulation and some banks are not managed in a transparent fashion.

Political Violence

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Benin is a democracy that has not known political violence in recent memory.

Corruption

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President Yayi's government has demonstrated a high level of political will to combat corruption in Benin and has moved, in several high-profile cases, against corrupt government officials. Corruption remains a problem in the customs service, with government procurement, and in the judicial system. Investors may encounter numerous attempts to solicit bribes as they begin operations in Benin.

While Benin lacks specific anti-corruption legislation both the gift and receipt of a bribe are illegal in Benin and punishable by a penalty of less than ten years imprisonment. Benin is a signatory to the UN Convention against corruption. The newly established State Audit Office is responsible for preventing corruption in the national government.

Bilateral Investment Agreements

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Benin has a bilateral investment agreement with France, Germany, and Great Britain. Benin does not have a bilateral investment agreement with the United States.

OPIC and Other Investment Insurance Programs

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The Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) offers financing programs to assist companies wishing to invest in developing countries, including Benin. OPIC insurance could be available to companies wishing to invest in Benin depending on the nature and extent of the investment. Potential investors should contact OPIC directly for further information at info@opic.gov.

Labor

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The government adheres to international labor standards and fully recognizes the right to form unions and engage in collective bargaining. The government adopted a new labor code in 1998 aimed at increasing flexibility in hiring decisions, eliminating the need for prior authorization from the labor directorate for employee dismissal, and consolidating labor regulations currently dispersed among various texts. As a practical matter, however, Benin's labor practices contain many inefficient features reminiscent of the Marxist era. Foreign companies who dismiss employees for unsatisfactory performance are routinely sued. Child labor is widespread and, although it is making efforts, the GOB still needs to do more to suppress it.

The Constitution provides workers with the freedom to organize, join unions, meet, and strike, and the Government usually respects these rights in practice. The labor force is

engaged primarily in subsistence agriculture and other primary sector activities. Although approximately 75 percent of salaried employees belong to labor unions the vast majority of union members are in the public sector with a much smaller percentage of workers in the private sector unionized. There are several union confederations, and unions generally are independent of government and political parties.

Strikes are permitted; however, the authorities can declare strikes illegal for stated causes (for example, threatening to disrupt social peace and order), and can require strikers to maintain minimum services. In August 2001, the Government declared illegal a strike conducted by customs officers protesting a surprise, anti-corruption inspection by the Finance Ministry.

Foreign-Trade Zones/Free Ports

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There is a free trade zone in the Port of Cotonou for imports destined to Benin's landlocked neighbors of Burkina Faso and Niger. Foreign importers have complained, however, that corruption in the Port of Cotonou makes it difficult to benefit from this entity.

The government plans on constructing an additional free trade industrial zone in Seme, located on Benin's coast east of Cotonou. Initially, the site will be 200 hectares in size, and then doubled during its second phase.

Foreign Direct Investment Statistics

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According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Benin received 63 million dollars in foreign direct investment in 2006 (the latest statistics available).

Much of the foreign investment that has entered Benin since 1990 has been through the acquisition of interests in privatized companies. The principal foreign investors in Benin are from Lebanon, India, Germany, France and other European countries. Chinese companies have also begun making investments in Benin. Foreign investors have purchased textile, cigarette, cement, and brewing companies in Benin.

U.S. companies Texaco/Chevron and Kerr-McGee have a substantial investment presence in Benin. Texaco/Chevron provides aviation fuel for the International Airport in Cotonou and owns local gasoline stations. Houston-based oil company, Kerr-McGee has acquired rights to a deep-water block off Benin's coast and drilled two exploratory wells in March 2003.

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The International Monetary Fund www.imf.org

The World Bank www.worldbank.org

The Government of Benin www.gouv.bj

The Overseas Private Investment Corporation www.opic.gov

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Chapter 7: Trade and Project Financing

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- [How Does the Banking System Operate](#)
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- [U.S. Banks and Local Correspondent Banks](#)
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How Do I Get Paid (Methods of Payment)

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Letters of credit, bank drafts and bills of exchange are commonly used to make payment for imports. Within the country, cash is the most common payment method. Businesses may accept check payments from customers with whom they are familiar. U.S. exporters, new to the Beninese market, should request an irrevocable confirmed letter of credit drawn on one of the major banks.

How Does the Banking System Operate

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Benin has eleven private commercial banks belonging to groups of banks. They all have branches in most WAEMU members' states and some of these ECOWAS countries. These banks are often reluctant to lend for medium and long-term loans.

Foreign-Exchange Controls

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The West Africa Central Bank (BECAO) is the central bank of the WAEMU countries and the only currency issuing institution within the monetary union. The currency used in this monetary union is the CFA Franc which is pegged to the Euro at a fixed rate of 655.956 CFA francs to one Euro. As a result, in foreign currency conversions to CFA francs the foreign currency must be converted first to euros and then to CFA francs and vice versa.

All payments performed in foreign currencies between Benin and foreign countries and between residents and non-residents must be done on the official exchange market.

For foreign transfers executed through BECAO, it is requirement to communicate the following information: instructing party, the amount in CFA Francs, amount in foreign currency, the name and address of the beneficiary, account number and banking domiciliation of the beneficiary, and the purpose of the transfer and supporting documents.

U.S. Banks and Local Correspondent Banks

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No U.S. banks operate in Benin. Citibank's correspondent bank in Benin is Ecobank-Benin while the French bank, Societe Generale, operates both in the U.S. and the Benin.

The banks operating in Benin follow:

ECOBANK—U.S. ExIm Bank has signed a Master Guaranty Agreement with ECOBANK to encourage medium- and long-term loans for businesses, the first agreement of this type within francophone Africa. The bank can be reached through:

Mr. Check Travaly, Directeur General
Rue du Gouverneur Bayol
BP 1280
Cotonou, Benin
Tel: +229 21-31-40-23
Fax: +229 21-31-33-85

Email: ctravaly@ecobank.com

Financial Bank—French national Remy Baysset founded Financial Bank and remains its CEO-equivalent. Financial Bank can be reached through:

Jean-Luc Labonte, General Manager
01 BP 2700
Cotonou, Benin
Tel: +229 21-31-31*00 / 03 / 04
Fax: +229 21-31-31-02
Email: jeanluclabonte@hotmail.com

Bank of Africa—U.S. Exim Bank has signed a Master Guaranty Agreement with Bank of Africa and ECOBANK to encourage medium- and long-term loans for businesses, the first agreement of this type within francophone Africa. BOA can be reached through:

Mr. Tidiane Cheick N'diaye, Director General
BP 08-0879
Cotonou, Benin
Tel: +229 21-31-32-28
Fax: +229 21-31-31-17
Email: information@boabenin.com

Diamond Bank—Diamond Bank is based in Nigeria and, since opening an office in Cotonou in 2002, has experienced rapid growth. You can reach the bank through:

Mr. Benedict Ihekire, Director General
01 BP 955
Cotonou, Benin
Tel: +229 21-31-79-27/31-79-28
Fax: +229 21-31-21-42
Email: bihekire@benin.diamondbank.com

Societe Generale des Banques du Benin—SGBB can be reached through:

Jean-Luc Dubling, Director General
01 BP 585

Avenue Clozel
Tel: +229 21-31-83-00
Fax: +229 21-31-82-91
Email: jean-lucdubling@socgen.com

Banque Sahelo-Sahélienne pour le Commerce et l'Investissement— BCIS, a sub-regional Islamic bank, opened in April 2004 and can be reached through:

Mr. Zeedan-Dref Budeeb, Director General
131 Rue Dakodonou,
Lot 26-F Guinkomey
08 BP 485
Cotonou, Benin
Tel: +229 21-31-87-07
Fax: +229 21-31-87-04
E-mail: bsic@intnet.bj

Banque Atlantique du Benin—BAB opened in 2005 and can be reached through:

Mr. Edgar Anon, Director General
08 BP 0682
Cotonou, Benin
Tel: +229 21-31-10-18/31-10-19
Fax: +229 21-31-31-21
Email: Not available

Banque Régionale de Solidarité—BRS opened in 2005 and can be reached through:

01 BP 097
Cotonou, Benin
Tel: +229 21-31-80-16
Fax: +229 21-31-80-01
Email : brsbenin@intnet.bj

African Investment Bank—AIB opened in 2006 and can be reached through:

Mr. Charles Roger Rabet, Director General
Tel. +229 21-31-80-80
Fax. +229 21-53-53
Email: aibank@intnet.bj

Banque Centrale Des Etats De L'Afrique De L'Ouest—BCEAO can be reached through:

Mr. Marcel A. de Souza
BP 325
Cotonou, Benin
Tel: +229 21-31-24-66/31-24-67
Fax: +229 21-31-24-65
Email: mdesouza@cotonou.bceao.int

Banque Ouest Africaine de Developement—BOAD can be reached through:

Mr. Nicolas Kloffi, Resident Chief of Mission
01 BP 325
Agence Principale
Av. Jean Paul II
Cotonou, Benin
Tel: +229 21-31-59-35
Fax: +229 21-31-59-38
Email: nkoffi@firstnet.bj

Project Financing

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Lack of access to project financing is a problem because it is a barrier to businesses growth. Bank loans are a minor source of investment financing and working capital for business in Benin. The majority of local businesses finance their own organizations.

For businesses that resort to the formal banking sector, the access to the traditional forms of project financing depends on the size of the company, verification of the borrowers financial records by an external chartered accountant, access to the export markets as well as the reputation of the business. Businesses will find it difficult to obtain project financing by local banks if they are not well established in Benin and do not have good credit records. The West Africa Development Bank may be of interest for any businesses undertaking large project financing.

The U.S. Trade and Development Agency, along with the African Development Bank (ADB), offers funds for feasibility studies.

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Export-Import Bank of the United States: <http://www.exim.gov>
Country Limitation Schedule: http://www.exim.gov/tools/country/country_limits.html
OPIC: <http://www.opic.gov>
Trade and Development Agency: <http://www.tda.gov/>
SBA's Office of International Trade: <http://www.sba.gov/oit/>
USDA Commodity Credit Corporation: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/cc/default.htm>
U.S. Agency for International Development: <http://www.usaid.gov>
West African Economic and Monetary Union or UEMOA: <http://www.uemoa.int>
West Africa Central Bank or BCEAO: <http://www.bceao.int>
West Africa Development Bank or BOAD: <http://www.boad.org>
Ecobank: www.ecobank.com
Societe Generale or SGBBE: www.sogebenin.com

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Business Customs

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Business relations are often conducted in person in Benin, or when each party has personally met. The official dress is suit and tie regardless of the weather.

Travel Advisory

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Please see the State Department's travel advisory for Benin at http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1066.html

Visa Requirements

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American visitors require visas to travel to Benin. Please obtain the appropriate visa from the nearest Benin Embassy prior to arrival. The Benin Embassy in the United States is located at 2124 Kalorama Road, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008, telephone (202) 232-6656.

U.S. Companies that require travel of foreign businesspersons to the United States should be advised that security options are handled via an interagency process. Visa applicants should go to the following links.

State Department Visa Website: <http://travel.state.gov/visa/index.html>

United States Visas.gov: <http://www.unitedstatesvisas.gov/>

U.S. Embassy Cotonou Visa Unit:
<http://benin.usembassy.gov/informationandservices.html>

Telecommunications

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There is only one landline telephone provider in Benin, the parastatal Benin Telecoms S.A. Potential subscribers to this service need to send their completed request for a

landline connection to this company with relevant supporting documents including copy of their identity card, property tax receipt or lease agreement.

High-speed internet connections are available at cyber cafes and hotels. Long term residents who wish to subscribe to internet service at their homes or businesses can choose between several ADSL or wireless internet service providers.

The use of the cellular phone (GSM) is largely developed and coverage includes most of Benin. There are presently five providers of mobile telephone service, and they offer monthly subscription and prepaid services.

Transportation

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Visitors can arrive in Benin by air or by road. The different transportation options within the country are bush taxis or buses for intercity transportation and motorbike taxis or car taxis within Cotonou and most other cities. Chauffeured cars can also be arranged in Cotonou.

Language

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French is the lingua franca of Benin, which has multiple ethnicities with distinct languages. English is not commonly understood.

Health

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Visitors should consult with a physician expert in tropical diseases regarding the advisability of a malaria suppressant. Although the U.S. Embassy cannot offer medical advice to the public, some medical professionals here recommend that visitors begin taking malaria suppressants (e.g. mefloquine) at least two weeks prior to arrival, and to observe all health practices appropriate for West Africa. All visitors must have a valid international health certificate ("WHO" Yellow Card/Carte Jaune De L'OMS) with proof that they have been vaccinated for yellow fever within the past 10 years. New vaccinations must be at least 10 days old to take effect; visitors who are vaccinated less than 10 days prior to arrival in Benin may be denied entry into the country.

Local Time, Business Hours, and Holidays

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The official workweek in Benin is Monday to Friday. Most offices close for two to three hours at midday but remain open until 1830 or later.

The holidays are January 01 and 10 (New Year and Traditional Religion Day), March 24 for Easter Holiday, March (to be determined) for Maouloud, May 01 for Labor and Ascension Days, May 12 for Pentecostal Day, August 01 for Benin Independence Day, , August 15 for Assumption Day, October (to be determined) for Ramadan or Eid-El-Fitr Day, November 01 for all Saints Day, December (to be determined) for Tabaski, and December 25 for Christmas Day.

Temporary Entry of Materials and Personal Belongings

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Benin allows the temporary entry of material and personal belongings subject to customs clearance. Customs officers may decide to levy duty on these belongings depending on their use. Please see temporary entry in chapter 5 for more information.

Web Resources

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State Department Visa Website: <http://travel.state.gov/visa/index.html>

United States Visas.gov: <http://www.unitedstatesvisas.gov/>

U.S. Embassy Cotonou Visa Unit:

<http://benin.usembassy.gov/informationandservices.html>

Benin's Embassy in the U.S.: www.beninembassy.us

U.S. State Department's Travel Advisory for Benin:

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1066.html

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Chapter 9: Contacts, Market Research, and Trade Events

- [Contacts](#)
- [Market Research](#)
- [Trade Events](#)

Contacts

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Agence Beninoise de Promotion des Echanges Commerciaux (Benin Agency for Promotion of Trade)

Mr. Chakirou Tidjani, Directeur General
BP 1254
Cotonou, Benin
Tel: +229 21-30-13-20/30-13-97
Fax: +229 21-30-04-36
E-mail: micpe.abepec@otitecoms.bj

Association de Developpement des Exportations-ADEX (Export Development Association)

Mr. Paul Agbangla, President
01 BP 3554
Cotonou, Benin
Tel: +229 21-31-78-21/31-82-20
Fax: +229 21-31-78-22
E-mail: adex@intnet.bj

Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie du Benin (CCIB)—Benin Chamber of Industry and Commerce

Secetaire General
BP 31
Cotonou, Benin
Tel: +229 21-31-20-81/31-43-86
Fax: +229 21-31-32-99
E-mail: ccib@bow.intnet.bj
<http://www.ccib.bj>

Agence Beninoise de Promotion des Echanges Commerciaux (Benin Agency for Trade Promotion), ABEPEC

Tel: +229 21-30-35-48
E-mail: micpe.cbce@otitelectm.bj
www.beninbusinessinfo.com

Direction de l'Alimentation et de la Nutrition Appliquée (Food Safety Control Office) This office is under the Ministry of Agriculture and can be contacted through:

Dr/Col. Denis Mikode Ahoukpo
BP 295
Porto Novo, Benin
Tel. +229 20-21-26-70
Fax. +229 20-21-39-63
E-mail: admikode@yahoo.fr

Direction des Pharmacies (Pharmaceutical Products Control Office) This office is under the Benin Ministry of Health and can be contacted through:

Tel : +229 21-33-21-78
Fax: + 229 21-33-04-64

U.S. Embassy Commercial Service
Tel. +229 21-30-06-50
Fax. +229 21 30-06-70
Email: LotsuMC@state.gov
Website: www.cotonou.state.gov

Market Research

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To view market research reports produced by the U.S. Commercial Service please go to the following website: <http://www.export.gov/marketresearch.html> and click on Country and Industry Market Reports.

Please note that these reports are only available to U.S. citizens and U.S. companies. Registration to the site is required, but free of charge.

Trade Events

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Please click on the link below for information on upcoming trade events.

<http://www.export.gov/tradeevents.html>

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Chapter 10: Guide to Our Services

The U.S. Commercial Service offers customized solutions to help your business enter and succeed in markets worldwide. Our global network of trade specialists will work one-on-one with you through every step of the exporting process, helping you to:

- Target the best markets with our world-class research
- Promote your products and services to qualified buyers
- Meet the best distributors and agents for your products and services
- Overcome potential challenges or trade barriers

For more information on the services the U.S. Commercial Service offers U.S. businesses, please click on the link below.

<http://www.buyusa.gov/westafrica/en/7.html>

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U.S. exporters seeking general export information/assistance or country-specific commercial information should consult with their nearest **Export Assistance Center** or the **U.S. Department of Commerce's Trade Information Center** at **(800) USA-TRADE**, or go to the following website: <http://www.export.gov>

To the best of our knowledge, the information contained in this report is accurate as of the date published. However, **The Department of Commerce** does not take responsibility for actions readers may take based on the information contained herein. Readers should always conduct their own due diligence before entering into business ventures or other commercial arrangements. **The Department of Commerce** can assist companies in these endeavors.