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GOAN EXPORTERS TRADE OPPORTUNITIES WITH BENIN

The world today is a complex marketplace and each country is trying its best to get a better understanding of the heritage, culture, fashion, trends, likes and dislikes of the citizens of other nations, so that they can find international markets for their goods and services. In order to fulfil this objective and to facilitate bilateral trade, World Trade Center Goa organised a webinar to explore untapped trade potential between Goa and the west African country Benin. The webinar was addressed by senior officials from The Directorate General of Foreign Trade, Goa State Biodiversity Board, Goa Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Goa Chamber of Commerce - Women's Wing, Goa Cashew Manufacturer's Association and the National Council of Cashew Exporters of Benin. Goa can offer Benin a host of products and services which include agro commodities, pharmaceuticals, IT and engineering, to name a few. However, in order to take the first step, this webinar concentrated on the agriculture sector where trade potential in two major crops viz. rice from Goa and Cashew from Benin were discussed. In his introductory remarks, Mr. Cyril Desouza, Assistant Director - Trade Promotion, World Trade Center Goa shared the objective of the webinar with the delegates. He also spoke about the strengths of Goa and Benin which could benefit the export of rice from Goa and the import of Cashew from Benin. Mr. Anil Velde, DGM- Trade Promotion and Marketing, WTC Mumbai, in his opening remarks, spoke about the significant strides that have been taken in bilateral trade between India and Benin since the historical visit of India's Hon'ble President in the year 2019. He informed that currently there are close to 90 Indian companies successfully operating in Benin and the E-Visa facility that has been made available has significantly helped trade between the two nations. Mr. Ramesh Holeyachi, Joint Director of Foreign Trade, O/o DGFT Mumbai, in his address, said that India and Benin are two secular and democratic countries having good trade relations with each other. He went on to speak about the line of credit of USD 50 million made available to Benin by Government of India to help build its information technology ecosystem. He further mentioned about the allocation of HS Code 120 onwards that gave certain concessions to agricultural products on transportation. Mr. Holeyachi informed that the Indian Embassy in Nigeria looks into all trade related matters between India and Benin. Dr. Pradip Sarkokadam, Member Secretary - Goa State Biodiversity Board, in his address, spoke about the rich agricultural resources that Goa has, especially the 43 varieties of rice that are available. He went on to say that the projects currently under Biodiversity resources include Rice, Banana, Coconut, Cashew and Jackfruit. Dr. Sarmokadam concluded his speech emphasising, "We need to cultivate the land in a sustainable way so as to keep it fertile for a long period of time." Mr. Mahesh Patil, Chairperson - Goa Chamber of Commerce and Industry, (GCCCI) - Agriculture Committee, and Founder and Managing Director - N V Eco Farms Pvt. Ltd., highlighted that in the Pre liberalization era, agriculture was the only economic activity in the state. However, in the last few years, the state has transformed itself into a hub for pharmaceuticals, engineering and the service industry. He also lauded the excellent sea port and airport facilities that Goa has, which would play a significant role in facilitating movement of exports from Goa. Mrs. Pallavi Salgaocar, Chairperson, Goa Chamber of Commerce and Industry - Women's Wing, CA and Entrepreneur, while speaking on the exports from Goa remarked that Goan rice is quite popular and it is supplemented by pulses, spices, ginger and turmeric. Flowers such as Orchids and Antorims enjoy a huge demand and the "Mancurad" variety of Mangoes add significantly to Goa's export basket, which is further enriched by pharmaceuticals, light engineering, tourism and services such as information technology and engineering. Ms. Slagaocar was of the opinion that a strong research base along with the idea of long-term inclusive livelihoods and nature-based farming could give a unique character to exports from Goa while sustaining its biodiversity. Mr. Rohit Zantye, President, Goa Cashew Manufacturer's Association and Owner, Zantye's Cashews Goa, in his address, informed that Goan farmers fetch the

highest price for cashews in the world. The state of Goa has 25 major processing plants with 14-15 thousand tonne capacity which helps produce almost 24 thousand tonne of Cashew each year. While explaining the history of the Cashew crop, Mr. Zantye said that in the 16th century cashew was planted in Goa by the Portuguese to avoid soil erosion in the hilly regions and the first commercial production ON TRADE was undertaken in the 19th century. This is when cashew was first exported to the USA. Mr. Nestor Rangel, Agricultural Reformist, was happy to inform that community farming is helping Goa increase yield of rice and affordability of production. He further pointed out, "Goan rice has very low glycemic index and thus proved to be good for Diabetic patients. We need to bring more land under cultivation of rice to fulfil the demand in Goa and also augment the availability of rice for the export market." Mr. Peniel Fanou, President, Council of Cashew Exporters of Benin and Managing Director, V P International and ACIS SAS, while speaking about the Council of Cashew Exporters mentioned that it was created in 2012 and is governed by an Eleven Member Board of Directors. The council currently has 89 cashew exporters as members. Mr. Fanou further shared that each year more than 100,000 metric tonnes of cashews are produced and the council's partnership with the Ministry of Trade and Industry helps to regulate the Cashew exporters. Mr. Hermann Abihona, General Secretary, Council of Cashew Exporters of Benin and Managing Director, H-Power Group mentioned that in 2020, Benin exported 168 thousand tones of Cashew. He further informed that the government gives a good price which helps in healthy competition and maintenance of the quality of cashews for the international market and that the climatic conditions in Benin are very conducive for the growth of Cashews. Mr. Guillaume Razack Ishola Kinninnon, Administrator, Ste. Access Celebre Sarl and President & CEO SWCM Group shared that Benin currently produces more than 90 million tonnes of rice, which is a staple diet for the locals, and a few varieties of rice are also exported to Syria. Mr Kinninnon was very happy to note that this webinar helped plant a focus on exports of certain varieties of rice to Benin which have a very good potential. At the same time, there is further potential to increase the production of rice in Benin by the year 2030, pointed Mr. Kinninnon. Mr. Yogesh Jare, Proprietor, Suhasini Impex proposed vote of thanks for the event.

The webinar was held on August 5, 2021