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Introducing Dr. Babafemi Oyewole, ACA's Newly Appointed Managing Director

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On December 3rd, 2015, the African Cashew Alliance (ACA) Secretariat welcomed Dr. Babafemi Oyewole as ACA's Managing Director. Following an extensive recruitment process, Dr. Oyewole was selected by ACA's Executive Committee to lead the organization.

A native of Nigeria, Dr. Oyewole joins ACA with over twenty five years experience in finance, private enterprise development, and management consulting.

The ACA Communications team sat down with Dr. Oyewole for an interview to discuss his experience in the public and private sector, his vision for ACA, as well his short-term and long-term goals for the cashew industry. Please find the interview below.

Why did you want to become Managing Director for the African Cashew Alliance (ACA)?

As a Development Economist, I have always had a passion for initiatives that generate economic developmental outcomes and poverty reduction. The agricultural sector and food production particularly attract my attention. I am therefore interested in contributing to the development of the cashew value chain by promoting the economic development of producing countries via expanding processing capacity, export and foreign exchange earnings, and empowering farmer groups, which can thereby, improve income and generate employment. All of which are major challenges in this sector. This aptly captures my desire to lead ACA.

What are your short-term and long-term goals as Managing Director?

Our short-term goal is to build the confidence of our stakeholders so that we can continue to enlist their support. This will be done through the re-organization of our personnel and processes to ensure that we professionally operate in line with international best practices. In the long-term, we are going to put in place a transformation strategy that will enable our organization to effectively meet the expectations of all our stakeholders in terms of technical support, market linkages, access to finance, quality improvement with the intention to build an African cashew brand that will be respected and sought after in both the local and global markets.

How do you envision the role of ACA changing under your leadership?

The role of ACA is to provide technical assistance and facilitate investments, promote market linkages and international standards, sharing information, and best practices. If these roles are performed effectively, it will result in increased processing of raw cashew nut (RCN) in Africa, improve the competitiveness and sustainability of the African industry, facilitate public-private partnership and cooperation for the benefit of the cashew industry. We are going to be committed to making ACA perform these roles effectively and efficiently through innovative and professional delivery of our services, as well as improve our advocacy efforts by enlisting the support of the public sector, particularly in promoting the implementation of enabling policies for the benefit of the cashew industry.

What interests you most about working in the cashew industry?

My interest in the industry is to implement programs and projects that are aimed at adding value to RCN through increased processing and high quality standards. I am also interested in ensuring that the industry is well organized along the various stages of the value chain so that all stakeholders can derive maximum benefits from their operations.

What will be your level of engagement and contribution to ACA and its members?

ACA has a very interesting membership base that consists of public and private sector stakeholders within Africa and internationally. This is where I believe that my experience in both the public and private sector will enable us to effectively and strategically engage with various stakeholders in order to achieve our organizational vision, mission, and objectives. Our engagement will be targeted at enlisting their support and mobilizing all necessary resources for the projects and programs of the Secretariat. This will be achieved through regular consultation and strategic communication to inform them about our plans and performance. We will also seek their inputs for our programs and projects to ensure that they are effectively involved in the activities of the organization.

What is your vision for ACA?

My vision is to make ACA a professionally run international organization that will be able to achieve the vision of its founders which is to create a "globally competitive African cashew industry that benefits the...

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value chain- from farmer to consumer,” as well as assist ACA to achieve the objectives set out in the Maputo Declaration. The guidelines outlined for the achievement of the declaration will be vigorously pursued and these are: support and training for farmers and exporters, empowerment of farmer groups, investment in research and development (R&D), implementation of investment incentives for best practices in processing, and a sustained global marketing campaign to ensure donor investment.

How do you intend to solve some of the challenges experienced by the cashew industry?

A major challenge in the cashew industry, particularly in Africa is increasing value addition. Africa grows about 49 percent of the world's crop. Domestic value added processing is estimated at 10 percent—which is very low. We are therefore going to implement innovative strategies that will enable ACA to achieve the set target of processing 35 percent of African produced RCN by year 2020. We will enhance strategic partnerships with stakeholders to mobilize financing, facilitate investment, support research and development (R&D) and provide direct technical assistance for investors in Africa. Furthermore, there are tremendous opportunities for intra-African raw nut trade and processed cashew, as well as its by-products, which are not currently being exploited.

Also, ACA seeks to facilitate a free-trade dialogue among the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the South Africa Development Community (SADAC). Furthermore, our objective is to strengthen African cashew consumption via market linkages among African countries. We will continue working with local governments to try and put in place advocacy strategies to promote this trade and expand regional cashew policies. The quality of cashew is also very important for both regional and global markets. In this regard, I will support the ACA Seal program and also explore other quality certifications for African cashew to improve market acceptance and traceability in both the African and global markets.

What is your favorite quote to live and work by? Please explain?

My favorite quote which defines my life and work is “With God nothing shall be impossible.” When we involve God in our lives, then we can draw from His immense wisdom, knowledge, and understanding to confront the challenges of life. In reality, we discover that nothing becomes impossible for us to achieve as we manifest faith in God. As human beings, we have limited wisdom and knowledge but when we allow God to assist us in our endeavors, we tap into His infinite wisdom and we are able to achieve more than we can when we depend on our human wisdom. This has helped me to face challenges and responsibilities without fear or limitation.

ACA ACTIVITIES

ACA Hosts Second Workshop in Côte d'Ivoire under USAID WATIH

From the 24th to the 25th of November in Abidjan, ACA held its second workshop under its partnership with the USAID West Africa Trade & Investment Hub (WATIH). The US Agency for International Development administers the U.S. foreign assistance program providing economic and humanitarian assistance in more than 80 countries worldwide.

The workshop, targeted at cashew processors in Burkina Faso, Mali and Côte d'Ivoire, was held for a series of two days and welcomed a total of 15 participants. The goal of the workshops is to significantly increase the capacity and technical knowledge of cashew processing in the West African cashew value chain.



Mr. Soungari Sekongo, from ACA's partner organization RONGEAD N'kalô, gave the first presentation on international market behavior, market trend analysis, cashew marketing, price fluctuation, and overall status of the industry. This information is crucial to the ability of processors to negotiate and succeed in the international market.

ACA Seal Coordinator, Mrs. Dorcas Amoh facilitated the training sessions for the cashew processors on subjects of food safety, such as good hygiene practices, good manufacturing practices, HACCP implementation and the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act, as well as environmental protection strategies. The trainings also included interactive activities where participants staged an HACCP application for various scenarios, such as finding insects in a batch of cashew. These standards are highly important for any processor who hopes to produce quality nuts and export internationally.

Mr. Ouattara Bassifou, from COCOPRAGEL, attended the workshop and represented le Conseil du Coton et de l'Anacarde (CCA). CCA, a long time partner of ACA, is a government institution whose mission is to strengthen the industry in Côte d'Ivoire. He delivered the opening and closing remarks to participants and stressed the importance of capacity building and collaboration within the industry. During the workshop, the presence of a CCA representative allowed for constructive dialogue on possible areas of collaboration between the agency and local companies.

The topics learned at the training are crucial to building the technical skills and long-term potential for West African cashew processors to be competitive in the international market. This workshop will be followed by four more throughout West Africa to complete the workshop series under ACA's joint project with USAID WATIH.



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ACA ACTIVITIES

ACA works with MIM Cashew via USAID Global Development Alliance (GDA) Assistance Program

In December of 2015, ACA Business Advisory Manager Mr. Sunil Dahiya traveled to the Brong-Ahafo Region of Ghana under Phase II of the USAID GDA Project to assist MIM Cashew Ltd (MIM Cashew). MIM Cashew is an established Danish Cashew processing company, a processor of 7,000 TPA capacity, and a long-standing member of ACA.

This second phase of GDA aims to improve rural livelihoods by increasing the competitiveness of cashew processing in West Africa and, in addition, enabling local processors to expand their value-added product exports.

During the factory visit, Dahiya met senior management of the company and delivered “Business Management Training” to MIM Cashew’s production management and supervisory staff in order to improve their management skills. The training session focused on cashew processing economics, budgeting, quality & pre-export control, equipment maintenance, safety best practices, and waste management. Dahiya also took advantage of this opportunity to deliver an on-site “Sorting & Grading Training Session” as per AFI Standards to nearly 50 of MIM Cashew’s Sorting and Grading production staff.

This training is crucial to building internal capacity and increasing international market competitiveness. ACA is eager to work with many other companies in West Africa under the GDA program.

Overall the training was a success and ACA looks forward to this continued partnership with MIM Cashew, owing to the support of USAID.



ACA MEMBER HIGHLIGHT

Largest Cashew Processor in Africa Begins Operations in Ghana

Ghana has recently become home to the largest and most automatized processing facility in Africa, known as the Usibras group. Originally founded in 1979, the Usibras group is one of Brazil’s leading cashew businesses, with two fully operating factories in Brazil. Since being introduced to the African market by ACA in 2008, Usibras has gradually become involved in business across the continent, exporting raw cashew nuts from Ghana, Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, and Burkina Faso. The majority of their products are consumed by the United States and Europe.



Usibras began building the processing plant in 2013 and finalized the expansion in 2015. At the factory, located in Tema, Ghana, they have already employed over 300 workers and have invested over US\$ 15 million. They expect to employ over 800 people when they are running production at full capacity. As an ACA member and one of Brazil’s leading cashew businesses, the ACA Secretariat welcomes their arrival in Ghana as an extremely positive development for the local cashew economy. Usibras expects to have a substantial impact in the community

through the purchase of raw materials and employment opportunities.

On November 30th, 2015 ACA Business Advisory and Communications staff visited Usibras’ cashew processing factory in Tema, located just outside Accra. The company’s general manager is Mr. Tarciso Falcao. The ACA team was given a tour by Factory Manager, Mr. Antonio Raposo Caramelo in order to observe the food safety and product quality practices and to learn about the machines being used in the factory. In a follow-up interview with Managing Director, Mr. Guillermo Luis Assis, he noted that key challenges of training staff and managing Ghana’s erratic power supply remain a factor in the company’s development. Usibras has been a member of ACA since 2010 and has enjoyed the support given through the partnership. Mr. Guillermo Luis Assis commented that ACA’s network “gave them the trust to invest here in Africa.” ACA looks forward to working more with Usibras in the future and congratulated them on their successful start-up.



The Recipe Room: Cashew Flan



INGREDIENTS

- 3 large eggs
- 250 g skimmed milk
- 100 g cream
- 90 g cashew nuts
- 70 g sugar
- Walnut oil (use canola oil if you do not have walnut oil handy)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 180°C.
2. Finely grind the cashews.
3. Add the other ingredients (except oil) and mix.
4. Oil ramekins with walnut oil
5. Pour mixture and distribute ramekins in a bain-marie and cook for 35 minutes.
6. When the surface of the custard browns and trembles slightly reduce heat to 165°C and cook further for 5 minutes.
7. Leave to cool before serving or refrigerate.



Cashew Calendar 2016

January

19 National Cashew Dialogue in Accra, Ghana

February

2-3 ACA and USAID WATIH Workshop in Bissau, Guinea-Bissau

18-20 World Cashew Convention in Al Bustan, Dubai



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