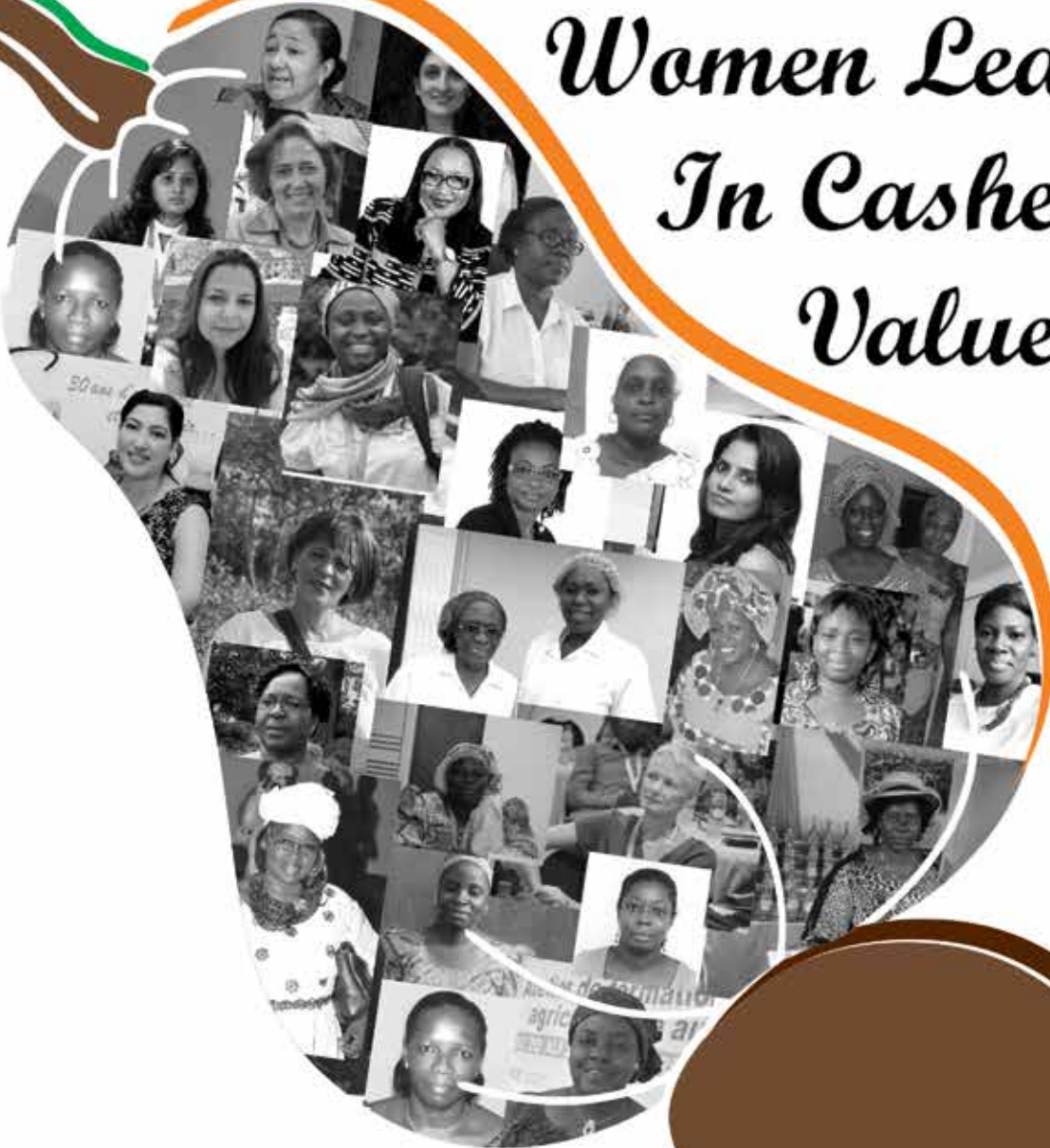




*A Revolution is in the making....*

# *Women Leaders In Cashew Value Chain*



An initiative of

**CashewInfo.com**



**TECHNOSERVE**  
BUSINESS SOLUTIONS TO POVERTY

# Women Mean Business in the Cashew Industry



TechnoServe works with enterprising people in the developing world to build competitive farms, businesses and industries. We are committed to engaging, empowering and benefiting both women and men to achieve maximum impact.

For nearly two decades, TechnoServe has worked with women in Africa's cashew sector to create thousands of jobs and generate millions in income, helping create lasting prosperity for their families and communities.

Whether teaching women how to maximize cashew farming profits, run cashew processing factories, or start cashew apple juice businesses, TechnoServe harnesses women's entrepreneurial potential to create transformative impact in cashew-producing countries.

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A Revolution is in the making....

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An initiative of

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# Preface

Women form more than 80% of the labour force involved in collecting raw cashews from the farm. Yet women ownership of the farm is estimated at less than 10%. Likewise, women form more than 80% of workforce in any cashew processing unit. Yet, women ownership of cashew factories is less than 5%. Women leadership is far and few even in the downstream activities such as value addition of kernels, retailing, logistics and support services.



Why has cashew sector not attracted women entrepreneurs / leaders? Is it not a natural advantage for a woman to manage an enterprise that predominantly employs women? Or is it too difficult for a woman to manage a cashew business successfully?

We felt the best way to understand these issues is to engage with women entrepreneurs / leaders who are successfully running their businesses along the cashew supply chain for a reasonable period of time. Hence, we launched this project in July 2015.

Women Leaders in Cashew Value Chain, an initiative of [cashewinfo.com](http://cashewinfo.com), aims at three things.

1. Profile women entrepreneurs / leaders engaged in cashew business (across the value chain) for a reasonable period of time in any major cashew producing / processing countries and cashew consuming countries;
2. Understand the perspective of women entrepreneurs / leaders, their view on what can be improved to encourage more women entrepreneurs / leaders into the cashew business; and
3. Identify key enablers or inhibitors that drive or discourage women leadership in the cashew industry.

Identifying women entrepreneur /leaders in cashew value chain is the first task. We engaged with (a) cashew associations of cashew producing and processing countries; (b) NGO and government organizations working in cashew sector; (c) Prominent trade intermediaries in raw cashew or kernel trade for their reference; and (d) published research on the subject. Next, we conducted a survey of the shortlisted candidates (over telephone or direct meeting) to understand their role, their business, opportunities and constraints. Post the fact finding, we compiled, verified and published the findings. So, this initiative would not have seen the light without the support of all the stakeholders of cashew value chain across the world. We thank the stakeholders for their encouragement.

Each of the women profiled here is unique. They have strived hard. Had a strong desire to succeed and make a difference. And, each has seen phenomenal success in their endeavor in cashew sector. We salute each one of them. We thank them for sparing time and taking part in this initiative.

There are quite a lot of successful women leaders in cashew business who are not a part of this publication. This was mainly due to time constraints at our end. We plan to launch a website to continuously update the list and include them all in due course of time. We take this opportunity to invite readers in identifying exemplary women leaders in cashew sector and help us reach out to them.

Further, we believe that each of the women leaders can inspire a dozen other potential leaders in their region or sphere of work. From our end, we intend to provide as many opportunities to these women leaders to reach out and inspire upcoming leaders. As a first of a series of initiatives planned in this direction, we have provided a special session at the World Cashew Convention 2017, where we would not only invite some of the leaders profiled in the publication but also would felicitate them.

We have presented a detailed list of people in the Acknowledgement to place on record the time and efforts they have put in to help us complete the project. My sincere thanks to our client and sponsors -GIZ (now Com Cashew), TechnoServe and Caronut. In particular, special thanks to Ms Rita Weidinger and Ms Mary Adzanyo of Com Cashew, Mr Shakti Pal and Ms Femmy of Technoserve and Ms Sarah Sherman and Mr. Kalifa Behlem of Caronut, Addo Nunana of GIZ, and Mr. Partheeban Theodore of Olam, who were decisive from beginning to end with their commitment, open and flowing communication, as well as moral and technical support. Special thanks to Ms. Nguyen thi Nhung of Tanimax , Vietnam for her support. Truly, the publication is dedicated to them and their teams.

The team at cashewinfo headed by Ms Swapna comprising Ms Hiba Yacoub, Ms Radhika and Ms Chandana Shiv has been working on the project for over 18 months, tolerating my irritation many a time. I acknowledge the support of Ms Sarah Mehmood Kursiwala, story editor, for providing a refreshingly fresh perspective to narrating the stories. It is their persistence that has helped in completing the project well before World Cashew Convention 2017. I am happy to share with you that my colleague Vinayak Meharwade has planned a web-based platform for Women Leaders in Cashew that would link up all the women leaders and facilitate continuous update of the programmes and activities.

The cashew industry is at the cusp of major transformation. Women leadership would be a tremendous enabler of the transformation. Be its innovation in technology, promotion of best practices at farm or popularizing cashew consumption, women can lead. It is our sincere belief. Towards that, this publication is just a beginning. With the support of the entire industry, a lot more can be done and should be done.

We are always encouraged by your suggestions and comments. Please do send in your valuable suggestions to [gsv@fbspl.com](mailto:gsv@fbspl.com)

Best wishes and good luck.



**G. Srivatsava**  
President

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# KNOWLEDGE is POWER

*Rita Weidinger*



Ms Rita Weidinger, the Executive Director of Competitive Cashew initiative (ComCashew Formerly African Cashew initiative/ ACI) has a long list of accolades to her credit. A well-read woman that believes in joint efforts and team work for higher success and better life, she is the kind of person that the cashew industry is blessed to receive.

Ms Weidinger has lived and worked in Ghana, Benin, Sierra Leone, Tunisia, Ecuador, Argentina, Honduras and India. She holds an MSc in Agricultural Economics and Sociology and a post-graduate certificate in Rural Development from universities in Germany. She is a practitioner in organizational and institutional development from the Cleveland Gestalt Institute (U.S).

### ***Agriculture attracted her even as a child***

Her interest in agriculture is probably as old as her, for from the time she was a child, she remembers being attracted to it. Growing up with her seven siblings, she was deeply involved in the work carried out on their family farm. For example, after school and during holidays, her siblings and friends helped out on the farm by milking cows with machines and collecting stones from lands to enable smooth ploughing by help of equipment.

She also learnt other talents such as driving, accounting, doing wood and mechanic works on the farm.



As a school going child, the relationship she built with the farm that gave her the base to engage in practical work, grew stronger once done with school. Keeping her past experience in mind, she decided to enter a 2-year apprenticeship in agriculture. During this time, she learnt a lot about animal husbandry, as well as crop farming, seed multiplication and pasture management. Being the only woman in a male dominated area, she strove to be better than her mates.

### ***Work shaped her interest further***

Her efforts have paid off for today, Ms. Rita Weidinger is the Executive Director of the Competitive Cashew initiative (ComCashew/GIZ, formerly ACi), a sub-regional public-private partnership programme (PPP), which is jointly financed by the German Government (BMZ), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and several private companies, governments and development agencies. Ms. Weidinger is an organizational development advisor with over 20 years of experience in agricultural and private sector development focusing on PPPs for pre-competitive alliances and sustainable supply chain linkages.

### ***Sensing the opportunity in cashew sector***

While she was deeply involved in agriculture, Ms. Weidinger's involvement in the cashew sector specifically began while she was working in rural development at the German International Cooperation - GIZ. As part of her work, she travelled to various countries of West Africa, including Ghana and Benin, where she observed that cashew trees were often grown through forestry programmes in a bid to control soil erosion and mitigate climate change. She also noticed, to her dismay, that children threw the cashew nuts away after eating the apples. From her interactions with the farmers, she realized most farmers had little knowledge about the high economic potential of the cashew tree.

### ***Making a beginning with right partners***

Over time, she met and frequently exchanged ideas with pioneers who were determined to make cashew kernel and apple processing viable businesses in Africa. Finally, through two trading companies – OLAM and Trade and Development Group both convinced that processing could be competitive in Africa, she better understood some of the bottlenecks for the unorganized African cashew value chains.





***Building the team and spreading the vision***

Using these expert insights, a small development-spirited team kicked off the idea of a large cashew sector project with private and public partners. Starting a first project with one company in three countries in 2006, *the Competitive Cashew initiative (ComCashew/GIZ, formerly ACi), currently operates in 7 countries and has supported the training of more than 400,000 farmers and almost 40 processing companies. This initiative has led to an additional accumulated farmer income of \$250 million, which continues increasing.*



Thus, her observance of the lack of knowledge on the farmers' part to value the potential of the cashew plants helped her to take the first step towards correcting the situation thereby establishing the foundation for change. By spreading valuable information and shedding light on the great benefits of growing cashew, she has been able to provide help to various farmers who were otherwise clueless on such an interesting market.

Her work mainly revolves around cashew sector development and while she does not have any family member in this field nor did she receive trainings specific to it, she learnt much from experts. Some were project partners, others were hired through the project. Up to this day, she believes in continuous learning as the sector changes fast.



***Finding common ground critical for success***

Besides, it goes without saying that a task as big as this was not a cakewalk. As an initiator of strategies that have brought ComCashew(formerly ACi) this far, one key difficulty Ms. Weidinger encountered is the act of dealing with existent hierarchies and bureaucracy when it comes to making urgent decisions. Defending

her vision, opinions and finding a common ground with funding and partnering agencies and companies are significant challenges she has to deal with in the Executive position.



***Introspection and listening are key to continuous growth and improvements***

“Leadership is about having a vision and thriving for it, with a humble spirit, discipline and encouraging teamwork. *Whilst extrovert, rhetoric and language skills are important to keep a multi-stakeholder project in many countries functional, it is equally important to constantly keep a learning mind, do self-introspection and listen carefully to advice and other opinions.* “To date, I enjoy advice and immense support of all partners in the project, as well as technical and leadership consultants - a personal and a team coach, a market

expert and a strategic management consultant, showing me and the team ‘blind spots’, market opportunities and risks, strategic and management options,” Ms. Weidinger says.

“There is a saying which goes like this: The more tasks you manage successfully, the more tasks you receive. Work looks out for busy people.” With these words, Ms. Weidinger and her team are entering a third project phase. ComCashew/ ACi’s secret recipe to success is a blend of practical skills and experiences with sound theoretical background and research linkages. “The German dual education system taught me to always expose staff equally to hands-on experiences, rather than mere talking and teaching perspectives”, she adds.

***Comcashew in a nutshell and Ms. Rita’s role as a catalyst***

When asked to give us a brief summary of her work, she says, at ComCashew, which is a development project addressing all segments of the cashew value chains – production, processing, supply chain linkages, sector organization, she has a big role to play in taking important decisions for a long-term fair business sector. Along with her, she has 16 board members, who meet two times a year and have equal roles in decision making. They analyze cashew sector gaps, search for potential solutions, support private sector led pilot projects, support public actors in policy and strategy issues. ComCashew/ ACi with all its partners to date have initiated change and accomplished great heights. They also take pride in supporting about 40 processing companies with technical and BDS assistance.

***Results along would bring acceptance and acknowledgement***

One challenge Ms. Weidinger has encountered as woman leader in a male-dominated environment is the discriminating perspectives some men hold of women. The only way to discount such behaviors, she advises, is by maintaining solid professionalism and striving for visible results speaking for themselves. For as the old saying goes, actions speak louder than words.

***Balancing work and family- tough but must***

Apart from this, the most taxing issue she faces is continuous travelling in her job. Speaking of her family, she says



that this job requires compromises. With her partner being equally busy and the children grown-ups, enjoying their own space, balancing all roles can prove to be a test. However, she says they are able to manage it through good communication and sometimes, when work permits, she tries carrying out her chores from home so as to be able to spend more time with family.

### ***Women would increasingly take leadership role in cashew sector***

In relation to women's involvement in the cashew sector, Ms. Weidinger has observed that 75% of harvesting and processing activities are done by women. However, very few are in supervisory and management positions. She feels that *factors such as education, self-esteem, social roles interfere in the journey of women to leadership* but is deeply convinced that a transparent and balanced trade can create good income potentials for the underprivileged, especially rural populations and women.

Continuous capacity development and empowerment can serve as equally motivating factors to reach a better situation in terms of development of women in this sector. This is something she hopes to contribute to. For women in leadership positions, she wishes to be an encouraging example, and support them through exposure in trainings and public events.

Balanced and determined, she already has a set plan when it comes to the future. She has decided that in 2018, she will go into a sabbatical year, and work on another commodity/ value chain afterwards.

### ***In summary...***

*To Ms. Rita Weidinger, her profession is the best choice to live her dream. She is driven by development vision and goals. Influencing change and ensuring balanced and fair development for the underprivileged provide her immense happiness, deep fulfilment and a reason to work.*



*“Titles are not what define you - What you do with the title defines who you are”*





# SURVIVING ALL Odds

*Taraf Georgette*



A land of music and dance, housing numerous tribes with unique choices of attire and ornaments, and well preserved flora and fauna, is Benin, a French-speaking West African nation. It is popular for its Beninese cuisine which incorporates exotic ingredients and involves the use of a number of sauces, the traditional trade of this place being agriculture and cotton manufacture and production. Although regarded as a region of economic instability, it is rich in culture while people are wealthy in their hospitality.

Every person who survives the hardships takes back a lesson with them. Success or failure, both are our teachers and the experience received by dealing with the tests of life makes us rich with time. It's never about the adversities; it's always about withstanding the tides and emerging victorious. And one person who is a commendable example and fits perfectly in such a perspective is Ms. Taraf Georgette – a native of Benin, who is the owner and managing director of NAD & Co Industry, a cashew processing unit.

### ***A prominent personality***

With about two decades of experience in this field, Madam Taraf is one of the most prominent personalities of the cashew industry in the country. Having graduated from Benin University Law School, today, she works full time in the



establishment that she initiated and is extremely dedicated to her work. Until recently, she upheld the role as President of the African Cashew Alliance (ACA). Having been involved with ACA since its inception in 2006, Madam Taraf was elected as the first female President in 2012. Seeking this role as an opportunity, she hopes to encourage other African women to actively build careers and invest in cashew value chain.

### ***Taking the big step***

Peeping into her earlier life, we were informed that her mother was involved in the cashew business on a small scale and of the two women she knew in this industry before she took the plunge herself, she looked up to them as strong

people with appreciable managing skills. However, with no prior experience and trainings and limited knowledge from observing her mother's firm, when Madam Taraf started her own venture, it was a mighty step on her part. In 1996, she began her career as a buyer but it was only in the year 2000 that she initiated her very own enterprise. In 2008, she was given the opportunity to export raw cashew through AGRO-PHEN and in 2010, NAD and Co. Industries opened a processing facility in eastern Benin.

### ***Finding the middle path to strike a balance***

With the aim of seeking a livelihood in this field, along with the belief that value addition to the raw material can be a great source of economic progress in her country of Benin, she set up NAD and Co. Industries. But it wasn't easy, to say the least. As a single mother, there were times when she had to stay away from her daughter for extended periods and eventually, they managed to keep a strong bond as the two respected and understood the other's commitments. Now that her daughter is all grown up, Madam Taraf says she is able to spend more time at her enterprise and can entirely focus on her business.

### ***Climbing up the ladder of mastering the business***

Also, with no prior trainings, she took help from people who had enough experience in this field. Going from someone who started with very little information to mastering the business, her thirst for knowledge and observation has been a strong factor in bringing her this far.



Today, her processing unit has 300 workers, more than 200 of which are women. However, it isn't an easy task to hire employees for this kind of work as most of the activities are done manually, which require effort and the processing steps tend to get difficult. Besides, her unit is set up in such a place that is far from the general population and the road that leads to the enterprise is deteriorated, thus making commuting an issue.



***Providing special benefits to the womenfolk***

However, surviving all odds, she continues to excel in her field. For the benefit of women workers, she offers them training, social assistance and incentives are given for the best workers. Also, women who have familial difficulties receive financial support and advices if needed.

***Improvement in policies is the need of the hour***

In order to improve the position of women in the industry, she firmly believes that her country's policies about the cashew sector needs to be improved. She also thinks that, the government must support the processing sector as well as the processors by giving them priority and those willing to initiate their own enterprise should not be imposed with hazards that can be otherwise ignored. For, considering the bigger picture, these are the people who create employment there by benefitting the country's overall development.

***Finding a common ground and staying strong***

Talking about her products, she says they stand out in the market due to their quality, and she is always on the lookout to meet the buyer's requirements. The buyers dictate their prices according to the market prices and they seek to find a common ground together.

Some of the challenges she faces are related to the geographical location of the facility, the supply of raw materials, the lack of electricity, labor concern and the lack of support from the government. To overcome the electricity issue, the factory is powered by electric generators. As for the other challenges, they remain big with no immediate solutions in sight. However, from rising above all concerns and managing her entire enterprise, to getting work done in a remote place and yet promising the best quality, Madam Taraf is a leader in its pure sense as she juggles with hurdles and stays strong on her path to success.



***Passionate about her work***

While talking about her personal life, she comments, given the fact that her daughter respects her job and her siblings are supportive of her career, her entire focus is directed to NAD and Co. Industries. Her work is her passion and never for a moment does she view investing a majority of her time at the enterprise as a burden.

***Aiming to top the charts***

A dedicated woman and an influential personality, she has big plans that she hopes to accomplish within the next five years. In the next half a decade, she envisions herself to be the first and best cashew nuts processor of her country and the whole of West Africa. She plans to extend her factory so as to increase its production capacity and create more employment. Speaking of electricity issues, she is doing everything in her power to gain access to energy in the plant.







Apart from these, her biggest desire is to see several Beninese entrepreneurs embark the journey in the field of raw cashew nut processing to create more jobs and thereby contribute to reducing the levels of unemployment in Benin.

### ***Managing the tedious sector***

She firmly believes that she is acknowledged in the cashew processing business and being a woman does not prevent her from receiving such recognition. Although she admits that it is a tedious sector to work in, hard work, resilience and perseverance, she says, are the three factors that can help one flourish in the business.

### ***Confidence is key***

For current women entrepreneurs and women aspiring to enter cashew industry she advises, “We need more women in the industry. You must be confident in your abilities and judgments. You must have self assurance, not only in your personal life but as well as in your day-to-day life.” According to her, lack of self assurance is one of the leading factors that inhibit women from becoming leaders in the cashew industry.

Madam Taraf is eager to see more women in the leadership positions in the industry and is confident that the African cashew sector will flourish significantly with these valuable additions.

After all, she is a living example to her own theory! As she encourages young women to take up this field, from her advices it is clear that she is a woman of strength and perseverance. She is not the one to let shortcomings dictate her life and come what may, her dedication to rise above the odds speaks about her brilliant contribution in this field.



# A TRAILBLAZER FOR FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN THE CASHEW SECTOR

*Filomena Maiopue*

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*Contributing to the cashew sector magnificently, Ms. Filomena Maiopue has made sure that everyone in this field gets a taste of success. In this write up, we celebrate and acknowledge her tremendous efforts!*

## ***As the director of INCAJU***

Until recently, Ms. Filomena Maiopue was the director of Instituto de Fomento do Caju (INCAJU), a government based cashew promotion institution responsible for the development and revitalization of the cashew sector in Mozambique. During her tenure as the director, she worked tirelessly and enthusiastically towards building a sustainable cashew industry, welcoming the various opportunities and challenges the cashew sector presented.

## ***Adapting well to the environment***

She began her career in the agricultural sector as a technician at the Cotton Institute of Mozambique (IAM). She was later transferred to INCAJU in 2001 and appointed as the head of the INCAJU Delegation in the northern region of the country. The region consists of the provinces with the highest production in the country and these are Nampula, Zambézia and Cabo Delgado. In 2005, she was nominated by the Minister of Agriculture as the National Director of INCAJU.



With the vast experience she had acquired from working with a team of technicians and producers, as well as in her position as a project coordinator for seven years, she adapted easily to the position. She was tasked with overseeing cashew-related work nationwide while working with the Ministry of Agriculture to develop policies and strategies for the cashew sector. She also collaborated with the Ministry to develop activities for and addressed pertinent issues concerning the cashew sector.

## ***A committed leader***

Throughout her work, Ms. Filomena has demonstrated exceptional leadership in various capacities. Her commitment to the industry has also been evident on several occasions. She led the promotion of the cashew nut production and processing industry in Mozambique for 11 years. Despite being confronted with difficulties as director, she managed to hold the organisation together with her unique leadership style.



### ***Keeping her head high amidst challenges***

Although reputed as a primary source of income for more than 1.4 million households in Mozambique, the cashew sector was faced with challenges such as lack of interest and the limited value attached to the cashew crop. She was committed to a paradigm shift in the sector. “A lot of mobilizing and advocacy should be done at all levels so that more families and producers would grow cashew,” she said.

### ***A strategized plan***

Her wish over the years is to contribute to the development of informal processing of cashew nuts which currently takes place in most parts of the country. This, she believes, could be achieved firstly through survey of domestic and informal processors in order to get relevant information on them. Based on data collected, training sessions should be organized on topics such as processing techniques and procedures, improving packaging and identifying markets for cashew products.

### ***Working for women and the youth***

Her biggest target groups have always been women and the youth. Through her efforts, a large number of the youth in Mozambique were encouraged to join the cashew sector as entrepreneurs. During the cashew festival which was held in September 2015, some of these young men and women set up stalls to sell products like cashew kernels, juices and alcohol.

### ***Need for motivating women and providing valuable trainings***

Ms. Filomena believes that talking about the benefits families have derived from cashew is an assured way of encouraging more women to become entrepreneurs or leaders in the cashew sector. She also proposes that training programmes be organized





in agro-business for women. In addition to this, small-scale funding for women, promotion of market access and linkage would encourage more women to become entrepreneurs in the sector. “Most of the workers in these factories are women, especially in the grading of the kernels. In most African countries, women are in the frontline developing the informal processing of cashew nuts and marketing them,” she said.

***Cashew sector has helped to better the lives of people***

Her contributions to the growing cashew sector in Mozambique are evidence of her good visionary leadership. “I feel happy working in this sector, because I can see that cashew nut production is increasing in the country and many families are improving their lives from the sale of raw cashew nuts and kernels, processed secondarily by the informal sector,” she commented.

***Recognized and appreciated***

Her excellent efforts and contributions to the cashew sector in Mozambique are recognized and appreciated by all. In acknowledgement and appreciation of her commendable contributions and exemplary service to the cashew industry, we’d like to congratulate Ms. Filomena Maiopue for her giant strides in Mozambique and wish her well in her new endeavors!





# SUCCESS IS A COMPANION OF COMMITMENT

*Kone Minata*

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*Success takes months, years and sometimes, even decades. However, when you're passionate and committed towards your goal, no matter how far you have to travel to taste your rewards, you wouldn't be tired. For you know that good things take time, but certainly, they come to light.*



## ***Burkina Faso – A land rich in culture***

Ranked as one of the most financially unstable countries according to statistics with a poor literacy rate, Burkina Faso in West Africa is known for its rich culture, art and music. In land of such normalcy, it's mesmerizing to follow Mrs Kone Minata's life and her ascent to the peak of success.

## ***She knows the meaning of hard work from a tender age***

After losing her father at the age of 8 and working tirelessly to help her mother to fulfill their family's needs, it may be well understood that Mrs Kone is used to working hard from a young age. Not one to compromise on education, as a child, every day after finishing school, she would involve herself in meager trade and the money she'd earn was used to ensure the next day's meals. On Sundays, which were regarded as market days, she'd assist her mother in her trade.

## ***Taking her mother's advice***

Many a days passed similarly and once she had obtained her master's degree in technology, she worked as an archivist at the Ministry of Agriculture. After completing 15 years of service in this field and having retired, Mrs Kone decided it was time she finally accepted her mother's suggestion from the year 1992, which was to grow cashew nuts in the field that she generously offered.



***Starting a one of a kind factory***

Thus, in 2003, she established the Industrial Cashew Processing Society in Burkina Faso (SOTRIA-B), specializing in raw cashew nuts processing into white kernel, cashew butter or cashew flour. Mrs Kone's factory was the first Burkinabe private enterprise made up of completely national capital, to exercise in cashew nuts processing.





### ***Small steps led to her glorious success***

What started as a small scale enterprise with around 100 employees, today houses more than 2000 people with more than 90% being women. Presently, SOTRIA-B has a production capacity of 2 ton per day. Since 2010, Mrs Minata has also been able to sell her products exclusively in the American market which are also distributed across the world.

### ***A bumpy ride***

As impressive as it is to see her rise to success, it hasn't been a smooth ride. Not only did she have to mold herself to the transition from an archivist to an industrialist, she had to also ensure that she had the necessary skills. Although one of her aims to join the cashew business was to generate employment for women, before she could fulfill it, she had to do her bit.

Thus, it is for this reason, along with the minimal knowledge she had from being a trader and also observing well established businesses in her neighborhood in terms of cashew nut processing, she frequently travelled to factories in foreign lands to educate herself on production and processing. Although she did not receive trainings per se or know any women personally in this field, as it is said, travelling is the best teacher!

### ***Providing employment and related facilities to women***

And true to herself, a majority of employees in her enterprise from the beginning to this day are women. She believes that it is the social character of the enterprise that attracts the female population to the cashew sector. After all, along with monetary benefits, Mrs Kone's enterprise also offers advantages like facilities to access bank loans, infirmary, nursery, financial support to buy school supplies of their children and a literacy center for those who are in need.





She strongly believes that by trusting women and providing them with necessary funds for their business, their status in the cashew sector can be enormously improved.

***Hard work pays off!***

With 13 years of experience in this field and years of commitment, it is a moment of pride to be a witness to her long days of hard work that seem to finally pay off. Working full time at her enterprise, she admits that she spends more hours at work than with her family, nevertheless she does her best to be available for her children. Also, she has no family members who work with her in this field.

***Commitment is key***

Coming to her personal views, she believes that her commitment helps her stand out in the market along with the impressive years of experience as well as permanent and stable labor. For Mrs Kone, only her enterprise isn't associated with work for her job starts at home before proceeding to the unit due to which, she cannot specify her working hours. She is involved with all levels of the job, which include purchase of RCN/Kernal, processing and operation monitoring, marketing and negotiation with kernel buyers, technology selection as well as financial transaction with banks.



***Effective communication is a skill***

When it comes to dealing with men workers in her unit, she says fluent communication is the key and it helps break barriers. She also believes that she is not denied rewards based on gender.

In her opinion, access to funding in time, at a reasonable rate at the local level stands to be a challenge and she backs on her research from around the world to overcome it.

***An impressive role model***

Married and mother of two children, Mrs Kone, is the very model for successful female entrepreneurship. Her experience and efforts help her receive recognition and she is of the opinion that although women are the pioneers, they hardly become leaders because of the negative practices in the field. In her view, the government should take specific protective measures to protect national industry.

***Receiving accolades for her work***

Today, in spite of business world difficulties, Mrs Kone Minata has succeeded. And in an effort to appreciate her humongous contribution to Burkina Faso social-economic development, she was awarded a national honor, the Medal of the National Order. Recently she was elected as President of the Interprofessional body of Burkina Faso, as well as in October 2016 a Member of the Executive Committee of the African Cashew Alliance (ACA).

***A novel entrepreneur***

Mrs Kone is a modern entrepreneur and a model who is always on the lookout to improvise and hopes to run a higher growth company in the coming years. Her life story can inspire many others and encourage those who want to try entrepreneurship.

However, it is important to note that one needs to be passionate about it, for when asked, Mrs Kone confidently replied that to her, her work was like her last child. This clearly gives us the idea of how dedicated, committed and invested she is in her profession.

***A story filled with lessons***

A symbol for courage, strength and success, Mrs Kone's story can serve as a motivation factor to all the women across the globe seeking a career in the cashew industry or otherwise, as long as they are willing to stay committed to their passion.

For, as we all know, success is the companion of commitment!



# GOING BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES

*Vidya Kamath*

*“If I don’t learn, I will be left behind. And you have to keep pace with what’s going on and to manage the industry, you have to keep your eyes and ears open.” - Mrs Vidya Kamath of Bola*



India, as a country, is known for a lot of reasons ranging from mixed cultures to the trendy attires, spicy food and varied languages. In a land of such diversity, until a few decades back, it was an unspoken choice that most of the women chose to become home makers.

Despite this, we’ve had a number of Indian women in politics, businesses and education fields and their career orientation is worth appreciation. Adding on to the trend, it is commendable that over the years, women have realized they can go beyond the boundaries they’ve set for themselves and identify their skills to make a mark in the world.

### ***Surprised by her success!***

And one such woman is Mrs Vidya Kamath- the lady who along with the world, has surprised her own self with the amount of feathers that rest in her cap due to her hard work and zeal to extend the boundaries she had once set.

### ***Brushing aside the idea of seeking a career***

Like a lot of Indian women, when she got married, without any second thoughts she knew she’d be a home maker. Although she had a Business Management degree and stood second in the whole of her University, after tying the knot, she didn’t think much of it. Her husband and his family were famous for the Bola brand of cashew and the thought of joining him didn’t strike her.



It was only in the year 2005, when two partners walked out, that the company witnessed a rebirth. It felt like starting all over again, and in such a scenario, Mrs Vidya joined the firm with the only thought of lending a helping hand. Even at this point, she did not see herself as someone who'd play a critical role in the future.

### ***Getting used to the workforce and facing challenges***

Since this was a family business, there was division of work and every member involved had a department he looked into. She initially took care of managing, booking for containers, signing contracts and marketing.

Considering that this was a growing industry, there was no one tailor made format to get things done. There were day to day variations in almost every department ranging from financing to the machinery. Hence, due to rapid changes, it was a challenge to decide whether they were worth implementing in the company or not.

Thus, encountering such situations, an important lesson she learnt was that, one should be flexible and adopt changes while taking advantage of the situation they're forced in.

### ***Crediting her life's events to The Almighty***

Even to this day, she looks back to the time when she initially joined, and believes that it was God who put her in this situation. As a housewife in her initial years, she had no driving force or a role model to look up to. When she joined the company, she took baby steps and looking back, she is awed at how much of a success story she has become.

### ***Learning all along***

Speaking of some of the lessons she picked up along the way, she says eventually, there comes a time when you have no choice but to become tough. The world is not kind to you always and she has witnessed cases when due to a slight negative, the positives from over the years were ignored. Giving an example of this, she says, during one of their exports, it so happened that there was slight leakage. Although they were trading with the company for numerous years, this one mistake was highlighted, momentarily ignoring the commendable work over the years.

This taught her to become clear and specific with every minute detail, thereby giving no chance for complaints.

### ***Always looking out for opportunities***

"You have to be firm," she further adds, speaking of her job and day to day activities. Since she is the head while handling marketing, financing and logistics department, she says it is a challenge to understand bank offerings, given the innumerable schemes and policies. She believes that to survive such encounters, you have to be on the lookout for new opportunities but at the same time weigh all the pros and cons before taking the final call.

### ***Her take on becoming successful***

"Customer satisfaction is the most," she believes, and this probably is one of the key ingredients to her success. For those who are on the lookout for others' happiness eventually are bestowed with their own.

### ***It hasn't been a cakewalk***

Although this was a business run in the family, it isn't as simple as it looks. One would think she had her entire family to

lay the foundation to her path to success and it must have been a cakewalk. While it is true that she received immense family support, the credit for the empire she built out of the foundation given to her goes to her commitment and strength.

There were times when she had to take critical decisions all by herself, and despite what it may look like, when she joined, she had taken the position of a person who left the company to start a similar venture. And in a scenario like this, it was a humongous task to stay afloat, restart and maintain the expected standard. Also, due to a split in the business, it became a challenge to retain the old customers and convince them of no compromise in originality and quality. But the fact that she was able to overcome all the hurdles and help bring the company to where it is today, speaks for itself.

### ***Taking the extra step***

Being a wife and a mother, she did not compromise on her family life to support her career. While it is easier for she is involved in a business that runs in the family, she still takes the extra step to make sure she does not miss out on her daughter's activities. For this, she keeps her working time frame such that she is present at home when her daughter returns from school, for she believes in maintaining a work life balance.

### ***With recognition comes responsibility***

As we look back, it is incredible to witness her active participation and the manner in which she has carried herself. She had to start from the scratch which required immense work, take independent decisions, incorporate bank schemes, and live up to the standards set for her because she was recognized in the international market. Although it feels pleasurable to receive such recognition, it brings with it a responsibility which she is required to live up to.

As modest as she is, she believes that her family and her teammates have helped her reach this day. She is thankful to her father in law and her entire family for giving her the independence to take decisions and for trusting her to help take the company forward.

### ***Setting an example***

While talking about her clients, she says, she has been told, "You are very tough to handle". She laughs as she quotes them, wondering if they say this because women are expected to be soft. Dismissing it, she believes she is a straight forward person and considering her efficiency, it is not hard to digest that being a lady, she has managed to stand tall in an industry where the higher posts are mostly reserved for men.

### ***Content with her achievements!***

Talking about her journey from a housewife to representing her company in the international market, she says you have to be true to yourself. You must be willing to take the opinions of those working with you or under you and should build a good rapport with them, for you can't achieve your goals all by yourself. Her experience has been similar to that of a school, she says, for you learn something new every day.

She strongly believes that instead of only focusing on personal growth, you must focus on treading forward with those who work hard along with you. This, she feels, is a huge responsibility and ten years later, as she looks back, she is nothing but content with her achievements.



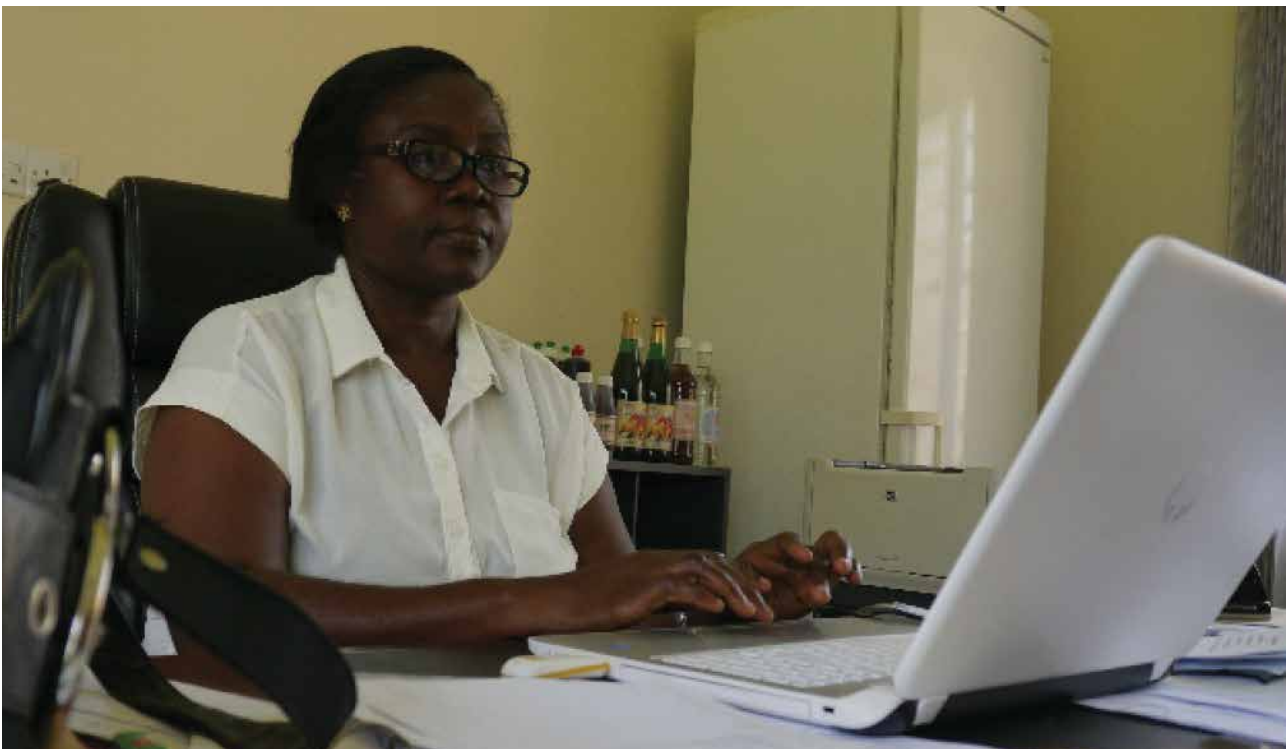


# ON THE JOURNEY TO ZENITH

*Dr. Esther Gyedu-Akoto*

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*A flower doesn't bother about the land that it is planted in, it is not concerned of the surroundings. All it focuses on is to bloom and spread the fragrance to everyone around. And such is its attitude, the flower even give its fragrance to the hand that tries to crush it.*



## ***The theory of one of the most accomplished women***

One who believes that she can perform excellently no matter where she is, Dr. Esther Gyedu-Akoto is tailor made to prove the above metaphor true in every letter. She is certain that with focus, determination and hard work, she has made the best of wherever God has placed her in and she is of the opinion that everyone can do the same. This is the theory by which one of the most accomplished women in the Ghanaian cashew sector lives by.

## ***Many degrees to her name***

A well-read woman, with a deep rooted love for learning and progress, she has a vast educational background. Dr. Esther Gyedu-Akoto studied at the University of Ghana, where she graduated in 1992 with BSc Food Science and Biochemistry. She proceeded to do her national service at the Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana (CRIG) in New Tafo-Akim in the Eastern region of Ghana. After she had finished with her national service, she became an assistant researcher in the New Product Development Unit at CRIG. Between 1997 and 2000, Dr Gyedu-Akoto studied for and obtained an MPhil in Food



Science at the University of Ghana. On completion of the course, she became a Research Scientist which is the same as a Deputy Manager of the New Product Development Unit.

### ***Her contribution as a food scientist***

Today, as we applaud her for her mighty contribution to the field of cashew which has in itself initiated an array of future changes and opened avenues for innovation, we reminisce and are glad for the time she was allotted work in this field. Dr. Gyedu-Akoto's career in the cashew sector began in 2002 when the agricultural sector in Ghana started a cashew development project and CRIG was appointed as the research wing. She was selected to be the food scientist on the cashew research team and thus worked extensively on cashew processing, including researching into and developing new ways of processing cashew nuts and apples. Her involvement in cashew research led her to conduct more in-depth study into unexplored areas of cashew in 2005 when she decided to continue with her education.

In 2005, Dr Esther Gyedu-Akoto enrolled in a doctorate degree programme in Food Science and Technology at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST).

### ***Cashew sector piqued her interest***

Since winners are those that pave their own path instead of travelling someone else's footsteps, we are glad that the cashew sector piqued her curiosity, enough to encourage her to discover the field deeper and share her valuable insights. "Researching on cocoa had become an exhausted topic and to me, it was time to sniff around for new areas of research," she says in this reference and thus, this led her to do a doctoral thesis on the production and utilization of cashew tree gum. Her study revealed that cashew gum can be used in both pharmaceutical and food industries.

Thereafter, having completed the doctoral study in 2009, Dr. Esther Gyedu-Akoto was promoted to the position of a Senior Research Scientist. In this position, she researched further into other uses of cashew as well as good processing practices to aid the improvement of nut quality. In 2013, she was appointed as the Acting Head of the unit.

### ***Creating a link between research and industry***

Since her appointment, Dr Gyedu-Akoto has been working hard to contribute to this rapidly growing market to help take it to greater heights. She has made efforts to develop a link between research and industry and accomplished this through the organization of trainings for processors, her fellow researchers, business owners, agricultural extension officers, farmers and non-governmental organizations on cashew processing. Through these trainings, she imparts education on new discoveries which research has made to help improve the profitability and quality of cashew and its products.

### ***Innovative products***

Her relentless efforts to maximize benefits from cashew has led her to produce cashew jam and juice from the cashew apple. She has also worked with her team to produce vinegar, wine, gin and brandy from cashew. The team also developed a new method of roasting cashew which gave the nuts a unique taste.

### ***Finding motivation in the challenging oppositions***

However, even with such humongous contributions backed with authentic research to ensure higher success rates



for everyone in this field, she has had to face a fair share of challenges as a woman leader. “The main problem I have had to face as a researcher and woman leader in the cashew sector and at CRIG is the domineering nature of some men. They think a woman’s views should not be taken seriously. They ridicule my ideas and don’t appreciate anything I do and accomplish,” she comments.

In spite of this, Dr. Esther Gyedu-Akoto stands tall and has made significant contributions to the Ghanaian cashew sector with focus, hard work and determination. To her, opposition is not a reason to give up but rather a source of motivation to spur her on.

### ***The hurdles in the path of women***

According to her, the cashew sector is a lucrative one. However, even though many women are involved in processing cashew in Ghana, very few of them are entrepreneurs. She attributes this to a generally low level of education of women in the rural areas in Ghana. She explains that educating women would equip them with skills like account keeping and documentation of information.

“Another reason which accounts for the low number of women in the cashew sector is the non-availability of financial capital for educated women who want to venture into cashew business,” Dr. Esther Gyedu-Akoto adds.

When asked to give her views to improve the status of women in this sector, she states that supporting them with financial capital and other incentives like shelling machines could help play a mighty role.

### ***Staying practical***

Speaking of her plans as the head of her unit, Dr. Esther Gyedu-Akoto aims at creating a strong link between research and industry so that discoveries made in the laboratory would be used to improve yield, quality and profitability of cashew. As a sensible and practical person, she believes in the lab work being a foundation for the field related chores to be carried out for such a pattern would ensure better results.

### ***An outstanding role model***

As a mother of two, she tries her best to excel in all the roles that she is entrusted with. She enjoys reading motivational and religious books and given her positive growth chart, she aspires to own a food processing business someday.

Dr. Esther Gyedu-Akoto is a phenomenal example for all women in this field, and her knowledge and contribution is worth appreciation. She continues to serve as an inspirational figure and hope that if you are willing to open your eyes, your dreams aren’t too far away to become a reality.







# BELIEVE IN THE POTENTIAL

*Dr. Gniré Mariam Ouattara*

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*Some ideas result in moderate fruits. Others lead to revolutions that promise tremendous outcomes.*

In order to meet food, ecological, socioeconomic and political challenges related to the development of agro-food sectors favorable to the poorest people, several intervention approaches can be used. Grassroots development strategy is part of those approaches.

### ***A strong woman in the cashew field***

In complement with some macroeconomic measures and big projects, the strategy is advocated in developing countries, promising better results. This method is used by many players, such as Dr. Gniré Mariam OUATTARA, a combative woman in Ivorian cashew sector. With a doctorate in Economy, specializing in Local Development, Dr. Mariam OUATTARA holds the position of the Cashew Technical Director at the Board of Regulatory, Monitoring and Development for Cotton and Cashew Development (CCA) in Ivory Coast.

### ***It all began as a theme for her thesis***

Her involvement in the cashew sector has been very interesting. In 2004, when she was looking for a theme to write her Ph.D thesis, she stumbled upon this field. She decided it to be an ideal topic for she was willing to work on a new, special and practical product on which there were few writings. Considering it to be a huge potential for rural population, especially for young people and women, she zeroed down on cashew, contrary to cocoa, coffee, cotton which has enough literature available.

Since this complied with all the above mentioned criteria, she decided to work on it. After all, it was the beginning of an exalting career!

### ***Benefitting the rural women***

During her thesis, she worked as a rural facilitator for RONGEAD, a French NGO that has contributed to her research works





as part of the implementation of a project supported by the European Union, to promote craft processing of cashew for the benefit of rural women. During the span of five years, from 2004 to 2009, Dr. Mariam worked directly and closely with more than 500 rural women, reinforcing their abilities in craft shelling and local consumption. At the end of those operations, four handcraft units with a capacity of 100 TM per annum were installed in four villages, managed by four groups of women.

### ***A cashew lover***

With this strong background, she joined GIZ by the end of 2009, as National Coordinator for the project 'African Cashew initiative (ACi)' also known as ComCashew. In this regional project team financed by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Government of Germany (BMZ) and the private sector, this woman who became a cashew lover, was given charge to coordinate all the operations of ACi in Ivory Coast. A function she assured with self-abnegation and courage until the end of 2012, yielding satisfactory results.

### ***Implementation of policies important for development***

After a year of independent consulting activity and field works with rural community, Dr. Mariam repositioned herself in the Ivorian cashew sector as Cashew Technical Director at the CCA. For this mother of two pretty girls, the development of cashew sector will not be effective without the implementation of policies favorable to the enhancement of the basic initiatives undertaken on the field since 2004.

This is why, at CCA, she and her colleagues are working hard, along with technical and financial partners of the value chain, to implement the strategies of the reform undertaken by the Government of Ivory Coast in 2013, permitting to raise Ivorian cashew at the international level.

### ***Her list of tasks***

Research programs on cashew sector, coaching farmers, organizing the sector's direct and indirect players and managing CCA's projects on cashew are dealt by Dr. Mariam every day. She is assisted in her tasks by 5 direct collaborators including two women. She relies heavily on the capacity-building of her colleagues, men or women.

### ***A woman with a vision***

What makes her unique is her long-term vision, her spirit of creativity, conception of innovative projects, her quest for perfection but most of all, her perseverance. She places a high value on the activation and the valorization of latent resources to operate qualitative and quantitative changes.

### ***Words of wisdom***

According to Dr. Mariam, appropriate planning, prioritization and delegation are the watchwords of success in her work. Her current challenge is to always defend her ideals in the context of reforms for a prosperous sector. "Properly formulate your ideas, share them with your colleagues to get advices, contributions and adhesion from them following a participatory approach are strategies that can help meet this challenge," she comments.





***Focusing on the communities***

When asked what her work means to her, she replies, “To me, it is a way to contribute to the well-being of rural population.” This is also proved in the field of incomes and social exclusion. Several studies has, for instance, shown that inequalities are even more important when we “go down” in geographical scales; economic and sustainable development will not become a “reality” unless one focuses on the local level, that means on the communities, initially.

***Grateful for the support***

The unfailing support of her husband and the family warmth are factors that reinforce her and give her a strong spirit to always do better. She can further improve her efficiency in the company with solidarity and team work.

In her view, the improvement of women’s position in cashew industry requires the strengthening of their capacities, the valorization of their work and particularly their accompaniment to take the sector to a new high. These measures reassure women and encourage them to give the best of themselves for an added value.

***Hoping to share her rich experience***

Five years down the line, Mariam sees herself running her own business in the education area in order to share her experience with young people, so she can contribute to facilitate skills transfer in agricultural sectors in Ivory Coast and worldwide.





# A JOURNEY OF LESSONS

*Else-Marie Fogtmann*

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*A diligent woman who lives and loves the cashew sector since 1995, Ms. Else-Marie Fogtmann's story is one of passion and dedication.*



## ***An educator by profession***

Born in Denmark in the year 1956, she is an educator by profession but only worked as a school teacher until 1988. From 1989 to 1993, she coached volunteers of a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) called ADPP and went with them to Zambia, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and South Africa, respectively, for periods of 6 to 9 months. Later, she completed her post-graduate degree in rural development in London. Fluent in Danish, English, Portuguese, and German, she is a well versed woman.

### ***Working with a vision***

Ms. Else-Marie came to Mozambique in 1993 as an employee of ADPP-Mozambique with the task of starting-up commercial agricultural activities in Nampula Province in the North of Mozambique. The vision of ADPP was to plough back surplus from farm production into social activities and share lessons learnt in production with local communities.

### ***Her journey to discovering the essence of cashew***

During her time with ADPP in 1994, she started a farm in Itoculo, Monapo district. Initially, the intention was to grow annual commercial crops. She had no interest in cashew production at that time, not seeing cashew as a profitable venture to go into. However, discussions and an introductory training on cashew production in 1995 by the Cashew Rehabilitation Project in Nampula made her realize the potential of the crop and its importance for the small-scale farmers in the Province of Nampula.

### ***A challenging first step***

At that time, Mozambique had just come out of a long civil war and the initial steps to starting the ADPP cashew from scratch were challenging in terms of cashew information about good yielding trees. The information was then collected visiting local cashew farmers. However, the access to planting materials has greatly improved in the present time and the production of a variety of improved seedlings by the Cashew Promotion Institute – INCAJU is much valued.

### ***A time consuming procedure***

Initially, cashew farming was an isolated activity. This changed when results started to be visible. Speaking of her experience, Ms. Else-Marie stated, “It takes time to get acceptance in any society as a newcomer.” For a woman, this period might even take longer, she said, “Especially because in rural northern Mozambique, in those years, hardly any women were involved in business enterprises. Their role was to take care of the family and produce staple crops for the consumption. Under those circumstances and surely with lack of capital it is difficult for women to enter into business; and you must be able to deal with a multitude of tasks.”

### ***Providing trainings to impart cashew related knowledge***

While extending the ADPP cashew farm up to 110 hectares, trainings of young cashew farmers also started on the premises with a regular intake of 40 participants per year from 1997 to 2005. Later, new trainings started on request by African Cashew Initiative (ACI)-GIZ and Fair Match Support, when they started working with cashew production in Mozambique in 2010.



### ***Expanding her skills***

Her learning and involvement in cashew processing initiated in 2004 when the ADPP Cashew Centre got involved with a project supporting the establishment of 10 small-scale processing units. She learned and gathered experience through factory visits in India and Sri Lanka as well as by participating in the initial training of the owners and managers of the 10 small-scale factories.

She said, “We also took this up at the ADPP Cashew Centre that now processes their own cashews for local sale as well as produces a variety of



products from cashew apples during the season. "ADPP was able to enter cashew apple processing after a support from UNIDO that provided basic equipment and training on the Cashew Centre in 2006.

### ***A number of products***

Besides cashew apple juice, cajuina and molasses, she enjoys a dish called 'cashew beef' made from the leftovers of the cashew apple after the juice extraction, slicing, frying, and adding spices such as garlic and chili.

### ***Establishing a consultancy***

In 2013, Ms. Else-Marie established a consultancy Emalink, and worked with a team of 6 people. Through Emalink, they work on the ComCashew's Matching Fund activities and training of cashew farmers in the Nampula Province, where she lives.



### ***Learning through personal experience***

She obtained her skills and learnt mostly from gathering experience on her own. Various consultancies with GIZ including trainings on economics and management of a training center helped her to deepen her skills.

### ***An educative process***

Speaking of her dealings in the cashew sector, she said that working with public and private sector partners has been fulfilling and educative. Through the interactions with actors in the entire value chain as well as policy makers, she has come to understand the complexity of development at large, and, especially, the concrete implications of all policy changes on field level.

"I have grown to understand better the multi-faceted picture of an export-oriented agricultural sector," she said. Also, a 7-month-cashew master training program with 70 participants from 12 countries, organized by ComCashew and ACA, has helped her to deepen her broad understanding of the sector, and built a broad network amongst other experts in the sector.

"Since 2013 we trained thousands of cashew farmers and it is a big gift to see farm families prosper because they are using good agricultural practices and apply simple management tools in their daily life," she stated.

### ***Equipping workers***

The ACi program has prepared promoters to train cashew farmers in their communities in specific topics and most of her work is to ensure they are well prepared and equipped for the sessions.

She likes to experiment and try new practices in the field. The hands-on experience helps in making her a better and qualified consultant.

### ***Making the best use of her time***

Since the consultancy work didn't occupy all her time, she started farming in 2014-15 after establishing a 50 hectares cashew farm, which is managed and taken care of by a team of 7 people. The plantings on her farm are still quite young with 3.800 cashew trees between 0 to 3 years.



### ***Her daily activities***

Besides her farm, she started micro-scale cashew processing in July this year in hired premises. There is only one other woman in the region who is running a similar business. Ms. Else-Marie employs a total of 16 people in her factory, out of which 9 are women. She visits the factory for quality checks regularly where she collects data, provides feedback for her team, and helps to ensure the equipment is in good condition.

### ***Maintaining a good relationship***

So far, she has not faced any problems while dealing with male workers neither in her factory, nor outside, where she maintains a good relationship with neighbors and district officers.

Challenges she currently faces are related to general economic difficulties and high inflation in Mozambique. People have less buying power and simultaneously, the bank interest rate is on rise as well as the price of the primary material for raw cashew nuts. She believes it is time to revise her marketing strategy.

### ***Installing new equipment***

The TechnoServe project, 'Mozacaju' has been supportive in developing her agri-business by providing a grant that made it possible to buy a tractor, install running water at the factory and equip the peeling section with appropriate tables.

According to her, there is still need to improve the infrastructures and increase in size and she considers this to be an ongoing process. Facing challenges is not a new thing for her.

### ***A peek into her thoughts***

Giving us an insight into her thoughts, she says, "Stimulating female entrepreneurship in the cashew sector with inclusive policies covering various elements in the value chain can enhance social changes. In general, women have a high sense of responsibility that can prosper in business and extra efforts in supporting access to education, trainings, advices, credits will pay off. With increased local consumption of cashew nuts, it is easier to take the initial steps in the cashew business as, for example, less capital is required. Gradually, the experience and the potential to grow can be build-up."

### ***A challenging mindset***

From her point of view, the main challenge for women to become leaders in the cashew sector is their limited access to capital to invest. Also, in her opinion, less attention is given to what women say, compared to men. This refers to her own experiences and such a mindset poses a challenge, for example, in meetings where women have to be very explicit in order to give weight to their words.

### ***A structured plan for the future***

As for the future, she hopes her consultancy work will continue to make her happy and maintain her basic financial stability. When asked about her dreams, she says in five years' time, she sees herself with a processing factory of around 150 tons which would be well supplied from her own farm and form a network around the farm that is in its early phase.

We wish her all the best to reach her goals!





# Build Your PATHWAY TO SUCCESS

*Ferdjani Dalada*

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*As humans, we're created to adapt to change. To mold ourselves in situations that life puts us in, or better still, fulfill our inner cravings of trying out something new. Change is the only constant in life, and at some point or the other, we will find ourselves witnessing it. The only difference is that for some people, it is a series of small changes while for others, they have few, but big revolutions. The winners, in either case, are those who during this process, come out better than they were before.*



### ***A successful step***

Mrs Ferdjani Dalada, a 42 year old Franco-Italian and Nigerian is one such woman who can be quoted in this reference. Chief Executive of FMA Industry (Cashew processing unit in Ivory Coast), although it has been only two years since she started the journey in this field, she is incredibly happy for taking this plunge.

Hailing from a family of many entrepreneurs, Mrs Ferdjani is a well-read woman, with a bachelor's degree in letter and sciences, she also has done her post-graduation along with an addition training as a bank manager.

### ***She was encouraged by the idea of valorization of local products***

While she did not have any direct relations with the vast cashew sector, she learnt about it from a cashew importer in Algeria and the opportunity to contribute to the valorization of African local products triggered her to join the field. Besides, she was also aware of Madam Kone at Banfora in Burkina Faso. The fact that she had a significant

career and her appreciable initiative to include other competences to progress in this sector also served as a boosting factor.

### ***Seeking help and launching a magnificent industry***

To aid her through the course, she used the services of a consulting office in strategy and project development (CATEK). They accompanied her in the process of putting the project in place and its exploitation.



Thus, after educating herself in this field and receiving valuable advice from many other processors and the consulting agency, the industry she launched a few years back is now growing splendidly. With a work force of more than 170 women among others, as the Chief Executive, her contribution involves the coordination and arbitration between the various options, by making decisions based on targets and in accordance with the strategy.



Not surprisingly, this is a task that requires major investment of self and time, due to which she spends approximately ten hours per day at work, weekends included!

### ***Aiming to leave a significant impact***

Speaking of availability of labor in the region, she is happy to say that labor is available in abundance, so much that they couldn't absorb all the job applications. Every morning, the industry receives at least 20 women asking for a job at the factory. Given their contribution, when asked about the facilities provided to women workers, Mrs Fredjani comments the scope of work is huge, due to which they are considering setting up a true social responsibility policy for the enterprise. She believes their impact should be significant in the community in a lasting manner.

### ***Working with a vision***

Elaborating on her enterprise and its uniqueness, she says they want their company to be particularly committed in valorizing cashew value chains for the benefit of all shareholders. This vision leads them to develop the processing method for a better output, a greater local processing capacity and to provide a range of cashew products with a high added value. At the moment, although they receive the market price, they are committed in a quality system and the research for a higher added value in the processing method continues.

### ***Staying professional***

When asked about the situation when it comes to carrying out or discussing work with men, she says, for her part, there is no particular problem. There are some functions and responsibilities to assume.

However, she also recognize that she does not directly deal with men workers; maybe that could be different. She directly manages the senior officials who are men (the manager of the factory, the administrative and financial director). At the board meetings, she doesn't see any difference between the senior officials, men or women. "You should always be professional," she advices.



### ***Supply remains a primary concern***

As for some of the challenges she faces in this field, she says that supply in sufficient quantity, quality and reasonable prices, a key factor of success in processing in Africa, remain the primary concern. The most competitive supply of raw materials permit them to compensate their non-competitiveness in the others production factors including access to industrial land, electricity, returns on labor and access to the financing cost.

Secondly, adequate and competitive funding remain mighty challenges in their field of work.

### ***Looking for solutions***

As for overcoming them, they are looking at an involvement in the supply up to the farmer level, through a specialized division, and cooperation with more organized

cooperatives. Regarding access to funding, the purpose is to ensure a full transparency on their financial operations through exhaustive and complete financial information production.

### ***The need for rigorous organization***

Moving on, when asked about her family and striking a work-life balance, she comments that her children are all grown-up and live in Switzerland. A part of her family is also a shareholder in her company FMA. She admits that during the start-up phase of an industrial unit of this size, the balance goes in favor of the work and at the expense of other personal activities. However, she still hopes that, after the setting-up, the starting and the consolidation phase, the focus of activities will be on the coordination and the control, and that control should allow her to focus on more aspects of the daily lives. It remains true that to achieve this, she needs a rigorous organization.

She adds that the family's support is essentially moral, which is important, along with being financial.

### ***Women were the first investors***

Commenting on the position of women in the cashew industry, she believes women have been the first to invest in this sector, through some small artisan products workshops. Today, they are the first employees in cashew industry. They know the product, the circuits and the capacity for work, they are just lacking the financing and the technical assistance to manage more important capacities through industrialization.

### ***Definitely not a male dominated sector!***

She refuses to believe that cashew is a male dominated sector. Men may rule the land property, so the orchards belong to men, but raw cashew nuts export, mostly trading is ruled by men only because of the difficult access to funding for women. Otherwise, the cashew collection and processing activities are ruled by women, cashew hand-made processing is also ruled by women; even the majority of the industrial employment is occupied by women in cashew sector.

### ***Success is not based on gender***

Thus, she doesn't feel like an intruder in the sector. After all, her first practical advice in the processing business has been given to her by a woman who owns a cashew processing unit at Banfora in Burkina Faso. Her success will come from the organization she is putting in place, which is beyond the gender-sensitive.



### ***Access to financing is a path blocker***

As for the hurdles that prevent women from emerging as leaders in this industry, she thinks access to financing is what blocks them the most, and access to non-financial services specifically the strategic and technical advices.

Apart from this, when asked, she is quick to admit there is scope for improvement in the job. Elaborating on this, she hopes to improve the industry's organization, production and management efficiency, on a continuous basis. In her view, cashew industry is in its early stages in Africa, so there is a lot that can be done.

### ***A tremendous ambition***

Putting her future plans forward, she hopes to gain the trust of the financials in order to implement the target to reach a processing capacity of 100,000 tons by 2020 and also offer high quality roasted kernels to African consumers. She firmly believes that this would be great for the industry and the employment in Africa and although this is a tremendous ambition, they would definitely strive to work towards it. She also hopes that by this, she will be able to set up a model for all those who still hesitate to process locally in such countries for after all, with hard work and persistence nothing is impossible!





# ONE MAN'S WASTE IS ANOTHER MAN'S WEALTH

*Randa El haddad Filfili*

*Most often than not, we value what seems important to us, forgetting to give credit to the underlying factors that contribute to the uniqueness of the article.*



### ***Valuing the left over***

When Mrs Randa El haddad FILFILI joined her father in law's enterprise over a decade ago, while she was attracted due to the firm's unique product offering and the will to offer social service, her main aim was to participate in waste minimization because it was a common practice for people in that area to throw the cashew apple after they collected the nuts, which are now prized at their firm.

### ***She has come a long way***

Currently holding the grand position of the CEO of Zena Exotic Fruits, which is a processing unit, Mrs FILFILI has come a very long way when compared to the time she had just stepped into this sector. The company was initiated by her father-in-law, who in turn was inspired by his father, who was a farmer in his time. Since it was a family business, she was motivated to do her part as well even though she did not have any prior work experience in this field.

### ***Deriving encouragement from other women***

Although she was not aware of other women before stepping into the cashew business, she later got in touch with a wonderful set from whom she had the opportunity to learn innumerable lessons. Elaborating on the same,



she comments that she has always seen these women as brave personalities which sparked the urge in her to help them in their processing activities at the local level. They also motivated her to develop some new cashew-based products intended for export.



***She is a well-read woman***

Fluent in French, Arabic and English, Mrs FILFILI is a well-read woman with a bachelor’s degree and a number of trainings in management, finance for non-financial people, HACCP, ISO 22000 export programs. While the company was started with only ten workers, it now has more than hundred workers who work with excellence and contribute to the company’s success.

***Putting her heart and soul into her work***

To manage such a large firm, it goes without saying that Mrs FILFILI is always on her toes, ready to take action when required. She works from 9.00 am to 7.00 pm, sometimes even without taking a break and majority of her work involves dealing with administrative paperwork and the products’ export segment. She also looks into the human resource department in spite of the presence of the new HR manager because the personnel are accustomed to coming to her when they have problems or when they need some service.



***She takes pride in her company’s products and service***

Speaking of the company’s products, she takes pride in saying that their products are known to be of high quality with good taste and new flavors. Apart from that, they are natural, chemical-free and without additives. They offer competitive prices, a satisfactory high quality service and boast of a very dynamic and ambitious marketing team.

Deaf Employees are uniformed in RED in Zena Exotic Fruits

***They’re appreciated for their excellence***

Their SME is the first food processing plant created in Senegal and the company’s know-how has been proved and appreciated. The products offered meet food safety standards and flavors are appreciated by all. The packaging is attractive, a professional and experimented team looks after the smooth flow of all affairs. Some of the wonderful policies offered by the firm include job creation for women, the disabled and for young graduates. The willingness for a fair trade approach with the producers and having won several national and international Oscars for quality, the firm promises to be one of the best in the cashew sector.



### ***Offering innumerable benefits to the workers***

Since Mrs FILFILI is part of such a large enterprise, when asked about the team and any problem when labor is concerned, she was glad to inform that the workers were attracted to be a part of the unit at the highest degree. As for the women workers in specific, trainings, professional integration, recruitments for open-ended contracts, fixed-term contracts or seasonal, social security care, help for their children's school fees, trainings about health, hygiene are some of the many benefits that their firm offers. They also look towards improving their living conditions by stabilizing their monthly incomes.



### ***Patience and perseverance helps overcome the tough tasks***

When questioned about the situation when it comes to dealing with men workers, she admits that at first it was very hard, because they used to act ignorant, pretending to not hear or understand her orders. She also adds that it required a lot of patience and perseverance to own their respect. At this point, she gives credit to her husband and comments that his presence in the company has benefitted her because sometimes when he is not around, employees are difficult to manage.

### ***Gender discrimination is a challenge***

As for being denied rewards in comparison to men, in her previous jobs, in her opinion, she and all her women colleagues were always marginalized when compared to men. Discrimination based on gender was and still is in the larger perspective, quite prevalent. This also forms one of the challenges while working in the cashew sector because sometimes, some of the clients, suppliers or bankers do not want to deal with a woman; or think that a lady will not live up the expectations, or it is not in her power to understand how to handle a case.

In such scenarios, the talk ends before it is even started, and deals are lost. In a few cases, she confesses that she is also treated lightly and mockingly! It is gone so far that men even take the liberty to make indecent proposals, just because they see a woman in this position.



### ***She believes in following a ZEN attitude***

In order to emerge victorious and rise above the mindless opinions of others, she has adopted a ZEN attitude and gives very firm and clear answers. She does not believe in beating around the bush and maintains clarity, conveying to the person her exact feelings and thoughts.

In cases where the employees pretend to ignore her, offend her or back answer, she adopts the strategy of effective communication and clearly highlights to them that she is not one to encourage such behavior. This strategy makes work easy, for then people know they cannot play around and each person, whether man or woman, needs to be respected.

### ***A step to help women in the cashew sector***

In her opinion, lack of financing, initiative and the fact that women don't take interest in the sector are some of the reasons that prevent them from emerging winners in the cashew industry. As for improving the position of women, given their commendable participation in this field, she has a number of suggestions. A lot of awareness and trainings for women, investment for the purchase of material, processing and trading; investment for packaging, non-rupture of the cold chain before the processing (air-conditioned collect center, cold room for the stocking, trucks to carry the raw materials from the collect area to the processing unit) and trainings for marketing in order to propose adequate products are some of the aspects, she believes, that could be looked into.

### ***Working extra during the season***

When asked about her personal life and the support of her family, she beams that having her husband in the same company as her makes things a lot easier. Since cashew apple is a seasonal product in Senegal, they manage and try to get an important quantity in order to ensure the annual production of all of the by-products. This implies that, during the season, she spends a lot of time dealing with suppliers and the production and is away from home for long hours.



### ***Organization helps keep things in place***

But thanks to her dynamic team, she eventually is able to spend some time with family. Besides, her family is extremely supportive and she works together with her husband, in cashew nut processing, making them into juices and jams. While striking a work life balance at all times is difficult, with effort and organization they manage to do their best.



### ***A meaningful drive***

She considers her work in the cashew sector to be a meaningful purpose in her life, and every successful project fills her with joy. It gives her the wings to work towards other great projects and gives her the courage to think of new ambitions.

Hoping for new innovations

And one of her bigger dreams is to build a reputable company and expand it such that along with

Senegal, it has its branches worldwide. She is glad that in the region, theirs is the only company in the food sector that processes cashew apple. With a financing of 120,000 euros max, she wishes to also develop three new processed by-products of cashew apple and cashew nuts.

### ***Scope for improvement and discoveries***

She believes that there's a lot more that can still be discovered and improved in this field. While she has received immense recognition for her contribution in the cashew apple processing sector, for this is a rare job when women are concerned, she still has a lot that she wishes to accomplish.





And given her positive attitude despite a competitive market and the urge of men to overpower their female counterparts, we hope that she continues to look at her dreams and focuses on them even when hurdles arise in her path!





# If you can dream it, you can do it!

*B. K. Menik Buddhini*

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*With team work, big issues become tiny entities to solve. With co-ordination, the unmanageable becomes organized. With education, one is equipped with the tools to tackle problems. And with small but steady steps, one can reach their destination.*



Working as the Director of the company Board and Director of Admin and Marketing, 37 year old Mrs.B.K.Menik Buddhini has achieved great heights in the cashew industry. The Sri Lankan has over a decade worth of experience in this field and holds an Advance Diploma in Entrepreneurial Business Management and National Diploma in Teaching English Language.

### ***Daddy's little girl***

Born in a poor household, she grew up admiring her father who invented practical machinery solutions for problems existing in food processing industries. As a child, she was fascinated by this and used to help him out in his works. She obtained patents for his inventions & did some documentation works at his proprietorship organization, Buddhi Industries. She even painted and cut iron for the machinery.



### ***Building a formal organization***

Such a family back ground made her quit her government job as a school teacher and inspired her to build Buddhi Industries Private Ltd. And Buddhi International Engineering Private Ltd. Essentially, her primary role was to convert the informal set up to a formal organization.

Although she did not have any prior experience or education in the cashew field as such, seeing her mother struggle to extend a helping hand to her father and undertake all chores within her reach taught Mrs Menik to never underestimate the power of a woman.

### ***Attracted by the sector's unique product offering***

Thus, although their initial goal was to manufacture machineries, through their research and findings, they found out about processing techniques as well and decided to explore it. Mrs Menik was especially attracted towards the cashew market due to its unique product offering. In order to acquire the skills for the job, she attended some short term training courses conducted by various government and non-government based organizations along with doing her bit of research on the internet to educate herself on the formal procedures including International Marketing, Production, HR and Accounts among others.

### ***Passionate to learn everyday***

Following this, she applied for higher studies in University of Sri Jaywardenepura, Sri Lanka and enrolled for a Diploma and Advance Diploma in Entrepreneurial Business Management which is equivalent to a B.Sc Entrepreneurship degree. Currently she is pursuing her Master's Degree in Entrepreneurship from the same University.

The academic aspect aside, to top it all, she is of the opinion that her experience and self-studies have made her skilled to handle such an important post.



### ***It's a planned routine***

Giving an insight of her everyday schedule, Mrs Menik states that her day starts early in the morning which involves doing her household chores followed by dropping her children to their school. She begins her office work around 8 a.m. by checking and responding to her e-mails, conducting short meetings with the staff of all departments to help them with their daily works, clear any doubts they may have and also provide assistance in decision making.

She makes sure to engage in meetings with the MD to get his consultancies or clearance on any of the decisions that she may have taken. They also go on to discuss the various long term plan progress of the company. While this keeps her busy in the morning, she takes a break from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. before resuming with the office work. In this segment, she spends time leading the corporate planning process which involves conducting annual meetings, annual planning of all departments, monthly planning of all departments, progress review meetings; scheduling & holding Director Board meetings, monthly management progress meetings, general meetings and scheduling various events.

She also takes care of coordinating with the top management in critical decision making, welcoming visitors, undertaking marketing related works as the Management Representative of Company, initiating market research and making the rest of the employees aware of the top trends in management. Apart from all this, she interacts with banks and other stake holders to strike the best deal along with intermediating issues of the staff and the workers by simply assisting all departments.

While that is a long list of her activities, she tries to do justice to every field of her work, never compromising on the



standards. She says that every day comes with new challenges and although sometimes it's hard to find a fixed pattern of it, she is extremely satisfied with her current position.

### ***Standing out and taking the lead***

In her enterprise of about 100 employees, only six of them are women and the fact that she plays such



an important role in the industry is commendable. She also says the company offers benefits to the women staff by providing maternity leave and flexible working hours.

Speaking of their products in specific, she guarantees they are unique because they are always updated with innovation from the field of Research and Development. She takes pride when she informs us of the high value their brand name holds in the market.

Going by their vision, they hope to enrich people's lives through invention & innovation. That is their uniqueness, she smiles.

### ***A fair policy and promoting equality***

When asked about the labor activity in the region, she admits it gets difficult to find skilled labor. Most of the workers in the company are recruited from vocational training centers and they are annually given trainings directed towards receiving the next NVQ level. All facilities for the trainings and Practical exam are provided by the company. They also adopt a fair policy and have an equal salary pay scheme for both men and women workers.

### ***Respect is the first lesson***

Elaborating on the situation when it comes to dealing with the male staff, Mrs Menik lets us know that during the initial stages of the work, it was a rocky ride but as she spent more time with them and gathered experience, she could feel things getting easier. At this note, she stresses on the importance of respecting all humans for who they are and not for the position they hold.

### ***The voice of the organization***

Speaking of some of the challenges she encounters, Mrs Menik points out that the main hurdle is to acquire the management knowledge to make it a well-established and smooth flowing organization. She confesses that when she entered in to international marketing in 2009, she was unaware of the basics, let alone mastering the bigger objectives.



Thus, acquiring knowledge related to the field and gathering authentic information along with taking care of the export was another task, she recalls. Right from the beginning, she has been the voice of the organization and while she does not complain about this, it has earned her both stones and flowers on behalf of the company.

### ***Thank God for technology!***

Speaking of her family and how she strikes a balance with personal life, she credits technology for easing many issues and when she is required to stay outdoors for long hours or work from a distance, she is glad to be able to communicate with her family through her phone. She also takes a break from work every day to spend time with her three children and manage her household chores.

She admits that juggling between her work, study and personal life sometimes poses to be a challenge and she is still struggling to manage it all. However, she gives credit to the flexible working hours and the invention of smartphones that ease the affairs a great deal. Besides, considering that she chose to correlate the assignments of the higher studies she did based on her organization ensured the parallel fulfillment of her objectives towards the company.

### ***Working alongside family – boon or bane?***

While she is glad to have her husband, parents, her siblings and their spouses work alongside her in the same field, she does not deny the interference of the family ties in the business which can sometimes become a matter of concern. However, for the most part of it, they are able to coordinate well. It was when the enterprise was still forming when she felt it a task because as she recalls, although the family ties were very strong, they did not have a very positive effect in converting the organization into a formal setup. This was the case because the relationships were brought into the professional setting and business decisions were influenced by them. Due to this, she found change management a demanding affair.

To overcome such a hurdle, she says, having a good coordination among all family members and making them feel as part of change initiators comes in handy.



While that is just a glimpse of it, she acknowledges her husband and the family as a whole for their love and support throughout her life.

### ***The advantage of a solid educational platform***

Speaking of her ambitions and bigger dreams, Mrs Menik dedicatedly says that her profession constitutes half her life. She reminisces the time in 2010 when she was working hard and struggling to achieve the goals of the organization without management skills of theoretical knowledge. This was followed by her receiving the dual diplomas in the years to come which helped her be thorough with the root courses behind work success and failures. This enabled her to lead the process of building the company's quality management system while complying with the ISO and made her more competent in management practices.

As for her current stance, her urge to pursue a Master's in Entrepreneurship has equipped her to lead the process in incorporating Buddhi International Engineering Private Ltd. which is approved under the Board of Investment of Sri Lanka.

### ***A successful woman, a recognized personality***

Since her father is the MD who introduced her to the international market, she credits her success to him, along with all the hard work that she has put in. This also makes her confidently state despite men outweighing the women in number, she is recognized in the cashew sector.

As for the obstacles that prevent women from emerging as leaders in this industry, she is of the opinion that many a times women tend to be within their comfort zone. She sites her own example where she used to live such a life but a strong belief and enough courage helped her to strive for more, and inspired her to not drown in the stream but to swim with her head high. Thus, if a woman wishes to, there's nothing that can stop her!

Another reason she sights is that women usually immerse themselves in household chores which includes raising children all by themselves and this in turn prevents them from seeing beyond. If they can manage their priorities and time, Mrs Menik is sure they'd be surprised by their brilliance.

### ***Advice inspired by her experience***

Education of women, she says, helps them build a good and positive attitude and inspires them to take up tasks outside the household. Also, finding ways to stay connected with the world, updating their knowledge on cashew processing trends and trying to better the traditional methods and the said thinking pattern, following role models, making use of every opportunity for moving with the giants in the cashew sector, are some of the many suggestions she generously provides to help women dream bigger.

The most prominent of all this, she reinforces, is in helping them build their mindset and inspire them to become successful Entrepreneurs in the industry.

### ***Focusing on dual growth***

Mrs Menik, we can thus see, is a woman of vision who believes that if she can dream it, she can do it! Her vast knowledge and her quench to still learn has helped her imbibe a number of great values that has not only helped the industry grow, but has contributed to personal growth as well. Her active participation in the organization innovated by her father and her desire to take it to greater heights is worth appreciation. We hope she continues to be the strong woman she is, and with her positive outlook and confidence, she is definitely a woman to watch out for in the cashew industry!

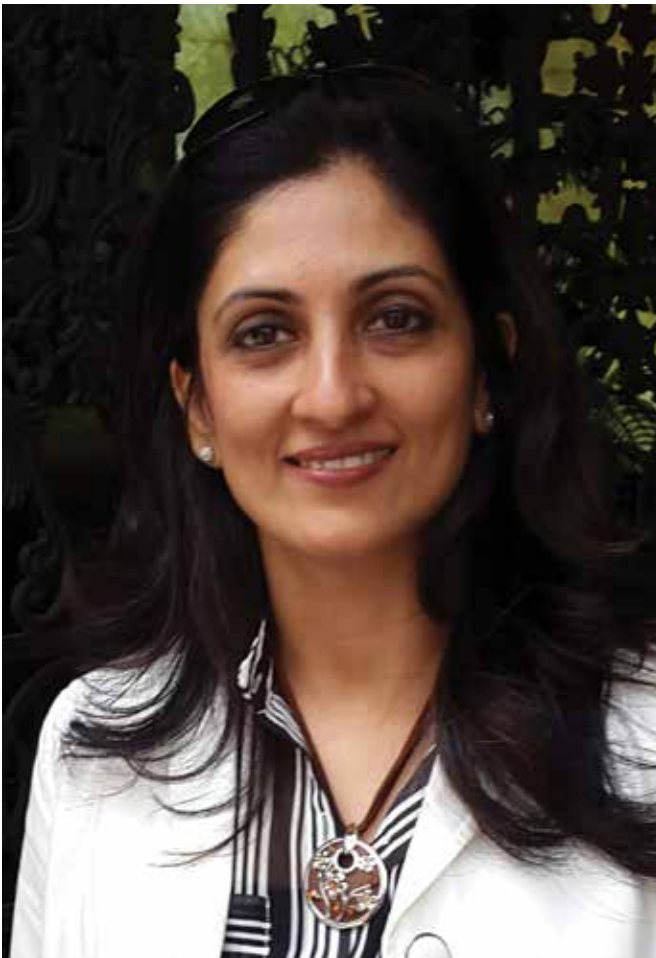




# STRIKING THE PERFECT BALANCE

*Lakshmi Harikrishnan Nair*

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As humans, more often than not, we predict our future from our past events. It's normal to imagine life that way, where all the dots are connected. It gives us a sense of control, to be able to envision the next course of affairs. But somewhere between all this, destiny takes its course and we find ourselves in a situation we never may have imagined, let alone prepared for.

### ***A twist to her tuned life***

Born and raised in Trivandrum, in a nuclear family where both her parents were scientists, Mrs Lakshmi Harikrishnan Nair of 'Wenders Cashew' was accustomed to her tuned life.

However, she was in for a change when she married into a business family and had to live in a joint household, a stark contrast to her earlier life. As it is with all new things, she eventually learnt to adapt and enjoy the changes in her life, and when asked, she gushes that her husband and his family were very supportive, be it allowing her to finish her studies after marriage or otherwise.

### ***The first step***

Mrs Lakshmi was used to travelling extensively with her husband and the experience she gathered during those days, she realized, helped her later when she joined work. It was quite a big change and a new move in her family because no one in the cashew business had a lady family member working in the sector. Her husband had come into contact with a fellowship program by the United States Department of Agriculture on food safety and she was selected through the interview. It was around that time that the business was also taking a new route, focusing on quality and food safety. The training she received in the US was an eye opener for her which changed her perspective of how things could be done differently in the traditional cashew business.

When she joined the business, she only had the training she got in the US but she discovered that there was more to the quality and food safety aspect which was unknown to the cashew industry. Of what she has seen, she summarizes that the American and European systems were way ahead in the field and this was and still is unknown to many processors in the cashew industry.





### ***A herculean job that she eventually managed***

After careful examination, Mrs Lakshmi concluded that while some systems were being followed in her company, her main focus was centralized to upgrade the factories to a world class facility. She knew it would be a herculean job and it did consume a lot of her energy and time, but she was determined to reach the goal she had set. Besides, to instruct workers and show them the actions that needed to be carried out was easier because they were

willing to follow the directions, but to make the supervisor level and middle managers do the same thing was the challenge she faced.

Elaborating on this, Mrs Lakshmi further adds that working in a factory environment was tough and understanding the people and motivating them was even tougher. But the important aspect she picked up in all these years is that, if you are convinced of your good intentions, then everything else will fall in place one day.

### ***Her assumptions went wrong and she couldn't be happier***

Today, she takes pride in saying that they are way ahead in the Quality assurance systems in the industry. In a company of 550 employees, she is in charge of processing and operation monitoring as well as technology selection. The fact that a few years back she imagined herself nothing more than a housewife, this is a mighty achievement!

Some of the courses she has done so far include Training on food safety from Michigan State University, USDA Cochran fellowship program, Snack Nut production course by European Snack Association and training in Quality management and technique by Warwick University, organized by CII.

### ***Employee growth remains their priority***

Speaking of the labor activity in her region, she says initially, the cashew industry was such that women willingly came forward to work. But today, in Kerala, which is an educationally and socially forward state, it is difficult to get people to work in this labor intensive job. Despite the situation, she is glad they have managed to retain their workers and are able to attract them because they maintain their corporate social responsibilities, creating a safe and sound working atmosphere for everyone. It had always been and still is their priority to offer their employees a steady monetary security which they carry out through their ethical responsibility. They are also encouraged by providing incentives.

### ***Attracting or retaining – What's the challenge?***

In her opinion, cashew industry is the kind where majority of the work force is women. But as we see the hierarchy, we realize the big positions are all occupied by men. Mrs Lakshmi admits that even in their factories, 80 percent are women but more than attracting, retaining the work force is the challenge. However, it is overwhelming to see that in spite of the strict hygiene and manufacturing practices they follow, they are able to attract and retain their employees.



### ***Managing through knowledge and experience***

As an organization, they believe in gender neutrality and have women officers at the processing units and corporate level in finance, administration and quality.

But despite this, she admits it has always been an area of concern for women when it comes to working with men. Certainly she has had issues and tensions but with experience and the knowledge that she gained in the field and by learning ways to keep good interpersonal relationship, she is able to manage well. Out of her experience, she thinks in every level, men have the feeling women 'do not understand math'.

### ***Staying firm in her established foundation***

From day one to now, she received the complete support of her family and they are also the reason why she is able to do justice to her work. As a mother, initially her working hours depended on the school timings and at times of need, it extended to late nights. With her husband as the director of the company and brother in law the CEO, she has a good backing but at the same time, has her own stand.

### ***Women are just as capable as men***

Speaking of the kind of support women in cashew industry need, she says that they must be encouraged to be entrepreneurs. The government and bankers should not have any reservations against extending financial assistance to women entrepreneurs for they are equally capable of running an organization like men. They are ready to take risks, ready to experiment and ready to adjust to any changing demands. Thus, they become good managers and should be given opportunities as well as the freedom to let their talents flourish.

### ***Staying in touch with new innovations***

Since their business believes in continuous improvement, adopting new technologies has been the key focus. This has been the aim since the last 10 years where they continuously update their business model, which means adopting better and efficient technology. Today, their factories have the state of the art technology which caters to the business



demands. When new technology is introduced, the challenge is to have people who understand them and work along to improve the production.

The company also has many proprietary processes which meet the demand for food safety. However, Mrs Lakshmi discloses that understanding these and developing them were a challenge, but training the people who operate these systems required patience and in depth training.

### ***Bagging the mighty awards***

Furthermore, in the company, processing equipment, monitoring and packaging systems are in tune with the latest technology. In this way they offer a wide range of superior products which the customers can choose from. They are also regarded as the first in the industry to introduce the bulk packaging system from the traditional tin packing which has now become the industry standard. This introduction of an innovative technique also helped them receive the National Award for excellence in packaging machinery design from the Indian institute of packaging in 2000.

### ***Proving her worth***

Speaking about being a part of such a huge company whose current turnover is 180 crores, aiming for 240 crores this year, she says in the beginning, people asked her if she opted to join the factories just for the sake of it while all the work was taken care of by others. However, with time she was able to prove herself and demonstrate her capability by adapting well with the environment. By building a good team of people, the changes and improvements which were made in the factories were recognized and accepted by customers. The systems they adapted have now become a habit among the workers, rather than an act.

### ***Beating the unbeatable***

As a final note, she advises that enjoying the work you do convinces you of the results you are looking for. It took her sometime to get her employees to understand that what they could not do, could be done through a collective effort but eventually, she accomplished it.

Hard work, perseverance, the belief in others and yourself and with good team work, it is possible to beat the unbeatable, she smiles, making us believe that if we truly try, we aren't that far from achieving our dreams, after all!





# PASSIONATE FOR CHANGE

*Mary Adzanyo*



Born in the beautiful city of Kumasi in Ghana and having spent most of her childhood in the Volta region of Ghana, on the alpine Kabakaba hill which looks across the neighboring towns and villages, Ms. Mary Adzanyo is passionate about nature from the word go!

***Her grandmother was one of her motivators***

She says that the greenery and natural surroundings in which she grew up under the guidance of her loving grandmother motivated her to later venture into the agricultural field. As a child, she followed her grandmother to her vegetable garden where annual crops such as yam and vegetables were grown for household use.

***She has spectacular degrees to her credit***

However, she only studied a bit of agriculture in school. She majored in science at the secondary school level studying physics, chemistry, biology and mathematics. Today, Ms. Mary Adzanyo holds an M.Phil in Food Science from the University of Ghana, Legon and has certificates in marketing, export diversification and market analysis tools as well as Stakeholder Dialogues. From the Michigan State University (USA), she studied International Food Laws and Regulations.

Since 2013, she has been a Gestalt practitioner in organizational and institutional development, has graduated from the OSD-Center of Ghana in collaboration with Gestalt Organization and Systems Development Integrative Study Centre – Ohio, USA and the International Organization & Systems Development Program, Ohio, USA.

That is a tremendous list of degrees giving us an idea of the knowledgeable and intelligent woman she is!

### ***Her role as the Director of ComCashew***

Ms. Mary Adzanyo is currently the Director of Private Sector Development at the Competitive Cashew initiative/ GIZ ComCashew where she leads ComCashew's objective of increasing the competitiveness of cashew processing and private sector development in Africa. To add to her accolades, she has lived and worked in Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Ghana, Gambia, Senegal, Kenya, and South Africa. Her expertise is in the area of international marketing, processing, food quality, food safety and sustainability. Her professional life has been connected with several value chains including fruits, vegetables, shea, fish, macadamia and cashew her current love!

### ***Her forte***

Her main area of focus is in private sector development. Prior to joining the Competitive Cashew initiative, Mary Adzanyo was the Trade Development Manager of the multinational retailer Koninklijke Ahold NV in West Africa and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in Ghana.

### ***Playing a key role in development***

She indicated that while working with the giant supermarket chain, Koninklijke Ahold NV, an international retailing company with several stores in Europe and USA, one of her key roles was to look for and link up African suppliers to the Ahold stores. It was not an easy job as few suppliers could not meet the Food safety requirement of the supermarket chain. Ms. Mary therefore conducted trainings for new suppliers on quality, food safety and certification as well as requirements for exports into international markets and as pre-audit by international food safety and sustainability auditors.

Working with Ahold was very exciting and insightful as she played a key role in education of suppliers to ensure compliance to the Global Food Safety initiative standards, which are the main requirements of Ahold. She says that she enjoys linking value chain actors to market and promoting African products and suppliers.

### ***The challenges set her on a bigger journey***

However, she indicated that her biggest challenge while in Ahold was that it was extremely difficult to source cashew kernels from Africa due to the limited quantities. Cashews are one of the special nuts sourced by Ahold because many consumers love it, first as one of the healthiest snacks and secondly, due to its great taste. Ahold needed thousands of tons annually and this was not available on the continent in the form required by the supermarket chain. The lack of cashews was what inspired Mary Adzanyo to join the GIZ/Bill and Melinda Gates Funded project on cashews in 2010.

This project, then called the African Cashew initiative has had many strategic drivers that could make it succeed. It was a value chain project looking at all segments of the cashew value chain from farm to shelf (of Ahold and all other buyers); with multi-stakeholder experts providing both technical and financial backing.

### ***Leaving an impact***

Speaking about it, she said, "My main goal was to stimulate investment in cashew processing in Africa. I wanted to advocate advice and facilitate increased investment and profitability for the cashew sector. I wanted to contribute to the education and motivation of investment into local processing for the profit of Africa and the global cashew sector knowing very well that that would benefit all actors along the cashew supply chain. I wanted a change and market opportunities for the hard working cashew farmers, competitive African processing businesses and kernels for buyers and consumers."



It is with happiness she let us know that today, more than half of the world's cashews are produced on the continent. And it will be great to have more processed locally to meet the market demands of traceability and high quality and safe products which every consumer loves.

### ***A positive growth curve***

She has been active in the field of cashews since 2003. Looking back, she indicated that cashews remain promising with high potential for private sector investment and growth. The Competitive Cashew initiative and all its partners have done a great job. Cashew processing in Africa has increased more than 400% since Mary joined the project. Yet, a great lot needs to be done.

### ***Her ideas for a better sector***

Productivity/yield levels have room for increment to at least 1500kg/ha to ensure higher income for farmers, including the youth, men and women. This would directly ensure that the current gap in global production volumes closes further and assures a better supply and demand balance. Both local and international investors from experienced processing countries are welcome to start their processing businesses in Africa to feed the growing global consumer demands which stands today at 8-10% per annum.

### ***A close knit community***

Competitiveness of the processing sector requires a strong linkage between the processor and both its supply (farmers and banks) and demand (buyers) bases. Government also has a great role to play in creating suitable business environment for private sector businesses.

### ***Their efforts have paid off***

ComCashew (ACi) under GIZ lead is a price winning development program due to its approach. In March 2016, it received the OECD DAC prize for taking innovation to scale.

Congratulations to all the team and partners for such a wonderful achievement!

### ***Hoping for a bright future***

Ms. Adzanyo said that continuous capacity building, creation of enabling business environment; private-public dialogue and cooperation as well as regional integration of cashew producing countries would further ensure the growth of the cashew sector. She is looking forward to the future with hope! A future she says looks bright for the young African cashew sector.

As for the women in leadership, she has an inspiring advice. She says, "Continue to be yourself and best. Many great nations are built on efforts of women who took the lead and brought about positive changes and growth."



# GROWING SEEDS OF PASSION

*Quattara Minata*

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*Our dedication and efforts determine the direction of our life. Just because we may be at the bottom of the ladder today, it does not mean we're going to stay there forever. The journey to reach the pinnacle may be long and tiresome, but it's our will power that helps us tread each step with zeal and undying hope. Everything is temporary, and it's the vision to reach the shore that helps one swim in troubled waters.*



## ***The passionate spark***

A widow and mother to seven children, Mrs Ouattara Minata may have been a witness to many downpours, but she never backed down from striving for shade.

An Ivorian citizen, residing in Banfora, Burkina Faso, she arrived in the country 33 years ago with her husband who was a Burkinabe. Since passion is the spark that eventually becomes a guiding light, it caused her enthusiastic husband to seek a career in agriculture, a field that he was genuinely interested in.

## ***Welcoming a change***

To begin with, he took over the management of an orchard of approximately 50 hectares in Toumousseni, 15 km from



Banfora and the couple, together, started growing mangoes. However, in the year 1990, they welcomed a change in their field by growing raw cashew nuts, thanks to the cashew project that was initiated in Burkina Faso.

### ***Experience over education***

While the advice from project cashew nuts in their region caused them to take the plunge in the field of cashews, when they started, they hadn't received many trainings. It was their experience over the years that became their biggest teacher, and helped them take slow but steady steps towards fulfilling their goals. Also, within a few years, they eventually received trainings provided by ACi (African Cashew initiative, now ComCashew)) that added to polish their skills on farm keeping, pruning, fruit picking, drying and packaging.

### ***A quick learner***

With a modest educational background where the most she achieved was a certificate in secondary education, no prior trainings and work experience in terms of dealing with the cashew market, Mrs Ouattara quickly caught on about the dos and don'ts of the trade as she started helping her husband.



### ***A challenging variation***

Life went on in such momentum, a routine, until the year 2004, when her husband passed away, and she was left alone to deal with the enterprise that they initiated decades ago. Having no other person to share the load and burdens of her firm, it was a change that required tremendous effort to get used to.

Up to this day, she has been single handedly monitoring her firm. Although she has two employees that help her in the maintenance of trees, pruning, and growth monitoring, a major chunk still weighs on her shoulders which is also the reason for her to work full time.





### ***Handling responsibilities single handedly***

While her two employees lend a helping hand, when it comes to the selling and negotiation with raw cashew nuts buyers, she is the sole in charge of it. Her other works involve monitoring the flowering and fruiting, checking if the cashew trees are healthy; and with her employees, she picks the cashew nuts, dries them and puts them in the warehouse after the packaging is done.

### ***Gold mines pose as a big competition***

At this note, as she speaks of the labor activity in her region, she says it is quite a hassle finding employees. Labor is not available as lot of people are interested in working in the gold mines where they can quickly become rich if they are lucky. Thus, workers are not entirely attracted to work in cashew farms, thereby leading to a scarcity of workers in Burkina Faso because of the gold mines.



She feels women can be attracted to this sector and their conditions can be improved by providing them with farm inputs and by training them on ways to maintain their orchards.

### ***The boon of an understanding family***

Speaking of striking a work life balance, she says it is not easy as she is a mother of seven children, along with being a widow. While only two of them stay with her for others are all grownups and have moved out, she still finds it difficult to spend a lot of time with them in between her tight schedule. However, her children understand her concerns and appreciate the fact that ultimately, she is doing this for them. They support her in her activities and even help her with her chores whenever possible.

### ***Scarcity of accurate products are a cause of concern***

Furthermore, as she is questioned on the challenges that she faces in this sector, she elaborates that in capacity to know if trees are sick is a mighty trial, as there is no way to figure this out. She says that at times, they can see some leaves



drying or turning yellow for no reason, they also notice some brown spots on the leaves without being able to determine the reason. There are times the sap flows from the tree and coagulates and within two years, the tree dies. The difficulty is that they don't have a specific product to find out if the cashew trees are sick and what kind of disease it is.

To add to her woes, so far, they have no solution in sight for this problem.

### ***Aspiring to be a leader***

Although it is male dominated sector, at her level of work, she says she does not have a problem while dealing with male workers nor does she think she is denied rewards.

Between her role as a mother and her entrepreneurial business, Mrs Ouattara spares no effort to achieve her goals to be a leader in cashew nuts production and to be respected by men and women in this sector. And the fact that despite running a small firm, with her dedication and hard work, the annual production rounds about up to 3 MT, it is a mighty achievement.

### ***No hurdles are too big to reach your goals***

Thanks to her determination, Mrs Ouattara has been elected President of farmers' cooperative in Toumousseni. About her future projects, she has the desire to increase her farm productivity, improve her cashew nuts quality and become a leader in the cashew sector. She believes that if women wish to be leaders in the industry, they can, and absolutely nothing can come in the way.

With the amount of love she puts into the career that was initiated as her husband's passion, her profession holds a high place in her heart. It means more than what she can describe, for it is the livelihood of her family.

### ***Success is not a numerical measurement***

Mrs Ouattara is an outstanding example for all women across the globe, a testimony to the fact that one mustn't measure success in numbers. If you're better than what you were the day before and are keeping your head high in every situation, you've already embarked on your journey to success!





# Juggling In Style

## Swapna Bidadi Eranna

*While we generally assign the attributes of strength and power to men, we fail to acknowledge the hundred thousand women who have proved to do justice to these adjectives. Gone are the days when Indian women chose to stay at home, for now they are present in every profession, giving their valuable ideas and unique solutions to develop some mind-blowing techniques. They are innovators, they are originators, they are synonymous to multi-tasking and they've proved time and again that a lady who can take care of her family and look after the household is also capable of managing an empire and an army of soldiers.*



### **A story of passion**

Bold, bright and beautiful is Mrs Swapna Bidadi Eranna, one such woman who has been juggling her professional and personal life in style. Although she was married at the early age and is now a mother of twelve year old twins, her story speaks of passion and commitment, one that proves the super powers women possess which helps them manage the numerous roles assigned to them with dignity, never leaving room for complaints.

### **A woman of varied talents**

Working as the Assistant Vice President of Cashewinfo.com at Foretell Business Solutions, as we speak to her, we can't help but be impressed by her professionalism. With a degree in Service Marketing and Company Secretarial Practices, along with over a decade worth experience in the cashew field, Mrs Swapna is definitely a woman of many talents.

### **Learning valuable lessons from a young age**

Born and brought up in Bangalore, India and having spent most of her childhood in police quarters since her father was a cop, Mrs Swapna learnt abundant lessons from a very young age. Qualities of cooperation, sharing, bondage, sportsman spirit, uniformity and perseverance were all imbibed during her stay in the gated community.

As she looks back, she describes her childhood as colorful, thanks to her vast encounters with a variety of people. Besides, she was aspirant in participating in various competitions organized by the government, every contest leaving behind precious lessons.

### **Putting her education to use**

Given her enthusiasm, marrying at an early age and being a young mom did not prevent her from pursuing her dreams. An amazing family and a cooperative husband as the backbone, she put her education to use as she joined the company she is currently working at.



While she did not have prior knowledge or work experience in regard to the cashew sector in specific, her work revolved around the service sector, which by large demanded powerful communicational skills. She was able to fulfill the requirements excellently due to her confidence and by application of the useful knowledge she had picked up during her under graduation.

### ***Grateful to her colleagues***

Besides, she acknowledges the fact that she had some of the most talented senior colleagues whom she looked up to as her role model. Learning lessons from them and working alongside such people helped her develop the overall skills required to move ahead in her professional career.



“Experience has been my best teacher,” she quotes, adding that along with the support of her company, she has become the sophisticated person she is today. Having said that, she humbly points out to the number of areas she still needs to excel in.



### ***She works round the clock***

Elaborating on her tasks at the firm, Mrs Swapna says that she works full time from 9:30 a.m to 6:30 p.m, where she starts the day by interacting with her team who update her on the current happenings in the industry. This is then followed by her own research where she invests her time in finding new technologies and studies carried out in the world. Her work also requires her to reach out for new contacts, convey accurate information of the services provided, and convince her clients about the positive attributes of the company.

While these activities fill up her working hours, she is always available for her clients via social media and electronic communication. Since she is in Service Sector, it is different from a factory and unlike having designated working hours, it's fair to say that she works round the clock.

### ***Playing an instrumental role***

Over the years, Mrs Swapna has been instrumental in projecting and positioning the brand 'Cashewinfo.com'. She and her cashew team have been able to leave such a huge impact that the entire cashew sector knows the company by the name of cashewinfo.com, which, in fact, is a sub brand of Foretell. This positioning, she informs, has played a pivotal role in contacting relevant services.

### ***Some mighty achievements!***

Since their initiation, they have been able to conduct cashew week, have released four handbooks, and successfully organized World Cashew Convention in 2015 and 2016. The third edition of World Cashew Convention will be conducted in Singapore and keeping in mind the magnanimous effort the team has put in, they look forward to the participation of the entire value chain.

### ***Her second home***

Speaking of the company, she says that Foretell Business Solutions to her is not just a firm, instead she sees it as a family. It holds a very high place in her heart since her professional life began in Foretell from 2006 and although she has completed a decade, every day is a new experience.

She admits that since the time she joined the firm, she was especially attracted towards the cashew sector as it was a unique concept, so much that many a times the fact that their employees were making a living out of research in cashew even raised curious brows from family and friends.

### ***A reliable company***

The uniqueness of their product lies in the fact that they are the only newsletter providers and information suppliers to all cashew sectors. Due to their accurate findings and research, they are considered reliable and a number of people in the cashew sector look up to them. While such a job demands a lot of investment of time and effort, she is glad to have a supportive team and gives them credit for their constant help so she isn't overburdened, especially during times of printing of publications and collection of information.

### ***Aiming for all round growth***

The cohesive work environment with demarcation of responsibilities and respect for each other ensures a fair policy with no discrimination based on gender. Her bond with the firm is so strong that when asked if she would like to work independently and move out in the years to come, she remains true to herself and answers that her aim is to grow with the company.

### ***She loves her job!***

Mrs Swapna also comments about the vast geographic spread of cashew which can bring out a lot of cultural experience. One of the best parts about her job is the fact that she gets to travel and explore different lands and meet new faces.





She is glad to be part of the cashew sector for it encourages the involvement and empowerment of women. She takes pride in the statistics of the firm, where 50 percent of the team comprises of women and is exceptionally grateful for being blessed with the wonderful opportunity of working with people who believe in her and serve as a continuous pillar of support.

### ***Staying true to her roots***

Since she has the opportunity to travel around, she is also one who believes that it is important to learn the language of the region she travels, to understand their culture, behave in the same manner, but at the same time, it is equally essential to retain the own tradition and stay true to roots.

### ***Blessed with a considerate family***

While she admits that some days her schedule is busier than ever, she is glad for the support and cooperation she receives from her husband and family. When she has to take crucial and competitive decisions of life, her husband is always by her side, assisting her throughout with his valuable inputs. Her children also understand the nature of her job and are quite independent, managing their studies well and require minimal elderly intervention.

### ***Hoping for the best***

When asked for her opinion on her job, she says that for her, work is worship. She wishes to utilize all possible opportunities she encounters in the path and holds her profession in high regard. In the years to come, she hopes to gather more information and be well versed in the field, being more supportive to the industry. Given the loyalty and encouragement she receives from her clients, she wishes to serve them to the best of her ability.

### ***An advice to live by!***

As a piece of advice, she says one must possess a lot of determination and hard work to move ahead in life. She strongly believes that just as a woman stands behind every successful man, in the same way men should also serve as a means of support and mutual help in order for women to emerge with flying colors.

While women have personal commitments towards the family which prevent them from progressing in the cashew field or any sector for that matter, with Mrs Swapna's inspirational story, we cannot agree less when she says women can break the barriers they've set around themselves for where there is a will, there is a way!



# STAYING TRUE TO HER ROOTS

*Adelaide Laourou*

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*In the journey of life, we may reach different destinations, travel various paths, go places and explore the world, but like the trees that stand tall and monuments that are positioned erect, we always come back to our roots the component that keeps us firm no matter where our circumstances lead us to.*

## **Worth the sacrifice**

A native of Bantè, Mrs Adelaide Laourou is a wonderful example of someone who has remained true to her roots. An overview of her life leads us to the conclusion that she has made huge sacrifices for the comfort of those around her, but as it is with kind people, her sacrifices did not go for a waste. No matter how difficult they were at some point of time, years later, she found the pieces of puzzle falling in place, and bearing sweet fruits as her reward.

## **Her mother played a crucial role**

Peeking into her early life, we are informed that Mrs Adelaide spent her childhood in Dassa until she obtained her bachelor degree, after which she was required to step out to Abomey Calavi in order to pursue her Master's. Having lost her father at a young age, her mother was a strong figure in her life. However, as life would have it, around the time she started university, her mother passed away, leaving behind her two siblings under her guardianship.

## **Setting her priorities straight**

With a challenging economic condition, two siblings without a guardian and her being away in a distant land, she had to set her priorities right. At such a crucial moment of her life, where she was given the choice between pursuing her own dreams and stepping into the shoes of her deceased mother, she selflessly chose the latter option. She quit her studies in order to be a support system to those who needed her.

## **She quit her studies to provide for her family**

By quitting her studies halfway, she started working at an NGO in her village, Akpassi, so that her siblings would not be deprived of education. She did not succumb to the humongous tides of difficulties, and did her utmost to make ends meet. She shouldered the responsibility that she was left with and since opportunities knock on the doors of those who are seeking for it, in 2000, she witnessed one that proved to be a blessing in disguise. In that year, she heard about a call for candidature by a local structure and succeeded to obtain a scholarship, thanks to which she was able to





resume her studies and thus achieve her Master's degree in Local development and decentralization.

### ***Using her degree to start her project***

After obtaining her degree, she went back to Bantè in order to value local fruits and vegetables. However, due to the lack of financial resources initially, she sought help from her town nationals. She was thereby able to start her project in 2008, by working with a group of 35 women named OLORE, in which she was responsible for processing and external relations.

### ***Succeeding through much needed support***

Taking baby steps, as a team, they started setting goals and working towards achieving them. Gradually, they started processing local products such as cashew apple juice, which is their key product, pineapple juice, mango juice, baobab juice and tamarind juice. In 2011, the group received the support of the African Cashew Initiative (iCA) which trained them on cashew processing methods. Considering that Mrs Adelaide did not have much experience in this segment and hadn't received many trainings, it proved to be extremely beneficial. This was also followed by the support of the project GiZ in 2014 which provided them with equipment for cashew apple processing.

### ***Establishing her enterprise***

In 2013, Mrs Adelaide reached a milestone where she established her own company named "AGBARA" and her processing unit in Dassa. This was also the center for processing local fruits and raw cashew nuts into roasted kernels which were then marketed under the brand VITA'LINES. Presently, Mrs Adelaide's unit has a capacity

of roughly 7 MT of roasted kernels processed and about 6,000 liters of cashew apple juice. She has 20 employees, mostly women.

### ***Providing added benefits to the women employees***

While elaborating on the topic of labor availability in her region, she comments, people these days do not prefer tough works, especially women, and as the processing methods used in her factory are difficult and manual, it's not easy to find workers, so she deals with those who are available.

Since she has many women employees, she works towards giving them added benefits from the job, which include, sensitization on rural women empowerment and emancipation by executing many trainings on agri-food processing methods, fruits juice production technics, good hygiene and good manufacturing practices, HACCP method, food safety and many more. Along with this, she generously offers advices and help when they face some familial issues. She believes that through trainings and modification of market policies, condition of women in this field can be improved significantly.

### ***Standing tall in a male dominated sector***

Similarly, commenting about her male employees, she says she has no problem when it comes to dealing with them as everybody knows their place in the factory and are aware about their contribution to ensure smooth flow. Also, she does not think she is denied rewards in the market or discriminated.

This is generally a male dominated sector, but she feels being a lady does not stop her from being recognized in it. After all, with the motto to keep working hard and never give up, she is bound to receive recognition.





### ***Not an easy job***

However, she faces her own set of challenges in the cashew sector, shortage of raw materials being one among them. Also, when it comes to roasted cashew kernels, the work is very difficult as it is done manually, by craftsmen.

So far, quite unfortunately, these challenges remain unsolved although she is working hard to be able to buy modern equipment to make work easier and produce more.

### ***Catering to many fields***

While discussing about her firm, we see that as the Managing Director, she shoulders many responsibilities. Working full time, she monitors the production chain from the beginning to the end; she enters in contact with the customers, the suppliers to make sure everything is going well with their commands, also ensuring their delivery on time.

### ***Juggling to the best of her ability***

While looking into the management of these processing units, she is heavily involved in educating her children and does her best to be there for them. As she has the full support of her husband, he is comprehensive when she is busy at work. Her children are getting familiar with the idea as well, even though it is difficult for her to go weeks without seeing them. Nevertheless, she does her best to juggle her role as a spouse, mother and owner of her firm.

Having such a supportive family is a boon definitely, for her profession is her passion. It is a source of mighty happiness to her as she is doing it for her community, her people and her family.

### ***Self-made woman!***

Considering the fact that she had no family members working in such a sector whom she could look up to, and not much experience when she started with the aim of valuing local fruits, especially cashew apple since in her village, people discarded it after using the nut, it is a moment of pride to be a witness to her beautiful journey. It is safe to say that she is a self-made woman, as she ended up in the sector through her own research, findings and dedication towards her land to offer social service.

While staying true to her words, we see that her products stand out in the market as they are available in the natural form, sans the chemicals as she holds customer satisfaction in very high regard.

### ***Aiming for growth***

About her future projects, Mrs Adelaide comments she is working hard on getting certification for her products, getting modern equipment to be able to satisfy her customers because of the growing demand. She is also aiming to make her products known abroad.

Above all, she sees herself as a leader in the industry in the years to come. And this statement of hers is proof enough, a message and a hope to all women across the globe who wish to work in this sector, to pursue their goals. For if you can dream it, you can do it!





# THE CASHEW FIELD THROUGH THE EYES OF A YOUNG WOMAN

*Cherif Ibn Achta*

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## ***Taking after her father***

Daughter of one of the pioneers in the cashew sector in Côte d'Ivoire, Ms. Cherif Ibn Achta is a quality controller for Caro Nut, an American purchasing company of Cashew Kernels. She experienced cashew through her late father Mr. Cherif Ibrahima who was the President of the Cashew Exporters Cooperative and promoter of the Agri Business Company.

Thus, it was through her father that she was introduced to the cashew field and developed a liking towards it.

## ***Qualified and well equipped***

Aged twenty nine, she holds a bachelor's degree in Management from the University of Abidjan and has worked in the cashew industry for six years now. She also graduated at the end of October 2016 from the Master Program training of ComCashew ACA after a 7 months' duration.

## ***Providing a link***

She works full time as an employee and is in charge of quality control of kernels, price negotiation and the monitoring of shipping on the boats for the American firm Caro Nut. The goal of Caro Nut is to offer a chance to industrial sector of African cashew processing to have access to the American market.

## ***Love for travelling***

Speaking of her hobbies, she says she is passionate about traveling and loves to explore and discover various countries across the globe, while gaining experience all along.

## ***Her previous encounters***

Before joining Caro Nut Company, Ms. Achta has worked as production supervisor in a processing company in Ghana. She has learnt the necessary tools on quality control and food hygiene.

## ***Motivated to look ahead***

Her determination and desire to move forward are motivational elements to progress in her field. Her family is her

main support. She is the sole woman in the branch based in Côte d'Ivoire, which makes her all the more admirable.

### ***Her biggest goal***

For her, working in the cashew sector is a real pleasure and a dream come true. She hopes that with the years' experience in the cashew sector, she will also be able to achieve one of her biggest dreams which was also her late father's vision, that is to own a cashew processing unit.

### ***Women can succeed if they aim for it***

According to her, there is no barrier for women to become pioneers in the cashew sector. Proving her point, she says there are already some women who are Chief Executive Officers in the cashew sector. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, there is Madam Kone and Kanate Namaro who is the Manager of CajouIndustrie. Madam TOURE Massogbe Diabaté, CEO of SITA-SA and Madam Kone Minata of SOTRIA-B in Burkina Faso are also influential.

### ***Hoping to better with every passing day***

In the years to come, she aims to accomplish a higher responsibility which is of decision making. To help achieve this she would also like to reinforce her abilities in the field of financial management, of safety control audit, and hygiene of agro-nutrient products.



## **“Saphalam”, an initiative towards Women Empowerment in the Cashew Sector**

Saphalam is a livelihood promotion initiative taken by Kudumbashree Mission in Kerala implemented in Kasargod district. Kudumbashree, conceived as a joint programme of the Government of Kerala and the NABARD, implemented through Community Development Societies (CDS's) of poor women serving as the community wings of local governments to promote the collection and processing of cashew grown in the district by the local women living in the rural areas.

Around 36 processing units and one cashew apple processing unit are being set up involving 12 grama panchayats with a project cost of INR 151.45 lakhs and expenditure of INR 123.36 lakhs supporting 36 beneficiaries with an income of INR 3700/month. At present, there are 12 units and 1 grading and packaging center and has processed and sold around 15 tonnes of cashew nuts for INR 45 lakhs under the brand name 'PARANKY NUTS'.

Saphalam Vanita Kasuvandi samskarana samiti, Chattanchal (Saphalam Women's Cashew processing Society) comprises of 80 members out of which 78 are women. The women of the society in the 12 primary processing centers located in 12 different taluk panchayats are engaged in the procurement of cashew directly from the cashew farmers in their respective geographical areas. The members negotiate the prices, wherever possible with the cashew farmers, pay the price on the spot and then transport the raw cashew nuts to the processing units for first level processing. After completion of primary processing, they supply the cashew from their respective village centers to the central processing unit in Chattanchal for further grading and packaging. The members of the society are also engaged in direct door to door selling of cashew nuts which generates 40% of the total sales revenue through this mode.

The supply of cashew is on decline, but the success of intervention for the promotion of workers critically depends upon scaling up of operations, market expansions and development, introduction of technology and infusion of huge working capital. An approach to enhance the availability of cashew is to have the cashew growers a part of the entire value chain by enrolling them as members of the society and ensuring equitable returns to the farmers and adequate income to worker members. Lastly, the intervention can be sustained only if the operations are managed along sound business lines professionalizing the entire value chain.





# A POSITIVE APPROACH TO LIFE

*Marian Lamptey*

*The experience gained during the early years serves as a tool to reach greater heights in the later stages of life.*

As the Chief Corporate Services Officer for the African Cashew Alliance, 32 years old Mrs Marian Lamptey has had a very interesting life!

## **Early life**

Born in a small town near Ghana's industrial city, Tema, to parents who were both working in the field of Education, she is the youngest among her six siblings. As a child, she grew up observing her father who was enthusiastic about farming. Along with his regular job as an Education Officer, he managed an animal and crops farm where he grew maize, tomatoes, pepper, vegetables and reared animals like rabbits, goats and poultry.

Besides this, he also involved his seven children and allotted them an individual piece of the farm to manage after school. Thus, the love for farming had been instilled in Mrs Lamptey from a very tender age.

## **She credits her success to her interest in farming since childhood**

Reminiscing about the past, she beams that her ability to stay working in cashew for 7 years now, starts from the inbuilt interest in farming as part of making a living right from childhood. At that age, she could see how her parents took farming seriously because the regular income was not enough to take care of seven children.

Although she did not have any experience or trainings in the cashew sector in particular, it so happened that her first job after university was cashew. In fact, she laughs that apart from the fact that cashew tasted delicious, and would spend her last penny to buy a packet to enjoy; she had never paid attention to how the delicious packet came about or taken any step to research on it. In fact, she did not have the least experience in commodities.

## **Not hesitant to learn new skills**

However, when she found herself in the sector eventually, she developed great interest and considered it as a good opportunity to offer her services in support of making life better for others by improving their livelihoods. When she first joined ACA, given her limited knowledge on these nuts, she had a big task of learning from her colleagues, reading,





researching and understanding the dynamics of the industry in her own way.

As for some of the skills she already possessed, she says that when she took up the job, she had a great language background which was essential to working across West Africa. Being proficient in French and English gave her an added advantage. However, in order to acquire good administrative, communication, analytical, HRM, and PP presentation skills, she allowed herself to be taught and mentored by her supervisors along with taking up courses in all the above mentioned areas. Being part of organizing the famous ACA conference every year and also in charge of administering the ACA membership program, gave her the opportunity to learn the skills of events and relationship management as well as marketing.

### ***Offering valuable services***

Currently working alongside her co-workers, seven of which are women, when asked to give us a layout of her daily schedule, she says she works eight hours a day and is in charge of corporate services. This includes overseeing membership, Human Resources, Administration, Conference and Communication.

A normal day for her is packed with ensuring adherence to office policies and regulations, staff well being and satisfaction, writing, ensuring smooth running of the office by acquiring all necessary tools, ACA member satisfaction and acquisition, organizing of and organizational implementation in collaboration with the MD and Management team as directed by the Executive Committee.

In a nutshell, she contributes to the provision of services that enhance, inform and equip cashew businesses in Africa and worldwide.



### ***Managing an otherwise predominant mindset***

Speaking of working alongside men, she comments that although men in the African setting always have the feeling of being superior, in her work place, they are able to manage this very well. There are equal opportunities offered to all and men are not over emphasized in any way. Both men and women respect and learn from each other.

Keeping this in mind; she does not think she is denied rewards in their comparison. Salary or promotions are based on qualification, experience and competence as well as ability to achieve organizational set goals and targets

### ***A tough yet satisfying job***

Given the enormous amount of work, she confesses that it's not always easy. Combining busy work demands with family commitments is an enormous challenge. Her husband and two toddlers who need full attention from their mother, in the face of work related travel, meetings and commitments that take her away almost the whole day, sometimes even a week or more, has not been easy to manage. She always has to find a way of making up for lost time with the family and sometimes it conflicts with work needs.

But she still does her best not to compromise on either side, trying to balance both areas perfectly. She makes sure that after every job commitment that takes her away for a long duration, she takes some days off to spend time with her



family, thus making up for lost time.

### ***Striving for a perfect balance***

She makes a conscious effort in this area, to commit work hours to work and hours after that to family and personal endeavors. She considers her weekends very personal and a much needed break, hardly trading it for work. Because of this, she spends a lot of time working during the week, sometimes even staying longer so she does not carry work to the house.

### ***Thus, this way she is able to do justice to all tasks at hand!***

### ***Blessed with an encouraging husband***

When asked about her family, she is grateful to God for having blessed her with a husband who understands

her job commitments and extends his complete support. In fact, she says that he looks after the children so well that sometimes her absence at home is hardly felt. While he is extremely committed at his work place as well, he stands up for her all the time, playing her role when needed.

### ***A long way to go***

At this stage in life where she is focusing on building a career, she says that her profession means a lot to her. Right now, she sees herself at the beginning with a long way to go. This mindset leads her to take her profession very seriously, making use of every opportunity to learn and add to what she has acquired. In the years to come, she sees herself becoming an influential woman and a resource to the cashew industry, imparting knowledge and expertise to other women.

### ***Women can excel if they try***

In her opinion, women in the industry need more encouragement than they are getting currently. By large, the issue of equality still exists in the African region and women in the industry need to be assured that gender is not a barrier. She firmly believes that they can equally excel if only they are willing and push themselves a little harder. She thinks women generally are still fighting or battling with a complex and a negative mindset already kills dreams.

### ***Recognized in the sector***

As for being acknowledged for her work, she states that she is recognized in the cashew business even in the midst of a male dominated industry. Consistency, commitment, perseverance and the will to make it at all cost has driven this success. She confesses that there is scope for enormous improvement in the job and while proper funding might not be the answer, capacity building will serve as a greater tool to achieve a better post and recognition.

### ***Determined and motivated***

Thus, we see that Mrs Marian Lamptey is an ambitious woman with a practical approach to life. Her interest for the cashew sector lies deep and her love for her work makes her look beyond the impossibilities. Besides this, her positive approach is reflected in the quote she shares as at the end of the interview, where she says,

“Cashew is a hard nut but can be cracked by any human being, provided you have the right tool!”

We couldn't agree more to these wise words!



# EXPLORING NEW FIELDS

*Adotevi Johanna*

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*For the majority of it, change receives mixed reviews. Some abhor it, others adapt to it and there are few who willingly opt for it, never hesitating to open doors to the multitude of benefits that it can bring along.*



Working as the Marketing Director at Ivoire Coton in Ivory Coast, Ms ADOTEVI Johanna is a German who recently opted to try her hand in the cashew sector. Although her area of specialization lies in cotton production since she was previously working in that field, when she was transferred in the group that she was a part of, IPS, she saw it as a wonderful opportunity.

### ***An unexpected yet welcoming change***

Ivory Coast, being a region where the cotton production areas are similar to cashew production, her experience from the cotton domain she had mastered in, came in handy. While it cannot be denied that the shift from her stable routine came as an unexpected challenge in the course of the actual activity, given the many perks of the vast cashew sector, Ms Johanna had nothing to complain.



### ***Acquiring the skills to master the job***

To start off with, in order to acquire the skills required for the post, she built a number of contacts and participated in numerous forums which helped her understand the field. She even willingly indulged herself in discussions with key people in the sector, broadening her scale of thoughts with the help of their enormous experience.



Besides, as the majority of her work is to do with marketing and negotiation, it provides her the platform to come in contact with a number of people from the same field as her. She is able to collaborate, anticipate, act and decide throughout the course of her work, and at the same time she is required to stay result-oriented to achieve the goals set by the TOP management.

### ***Stabilizing the foundation to ensure steady growth***

While the company has about a 100 employees, it is wonderful to know that she works alongside 75 other women who put in their sweat and blood to help maintain the high standards, which in turn is needed for the firm to keep up to its brand image, fulfill its social responsibility and continue to ensure that it stays the innovative company it is. Associated to the cotton company's social actions, the company holds an excellent reputation, the credit for all of which goes to those working in the backdrop, making their efforts count.

### ***Focusing on the success of womenfolk***

As we skim through, we are enlightened that the company has achieved quite a lot so far, and they only wish to grow even further and have bigger plans to enlarge their base. Being one of the biggest providers of female employment in the area, they have also initiated training plans so as to attract more women towards the sector. To add to this, the various benefits they offer, including a fair gender policy and activities aimed at female promotion, serve as additional perks to support their aims.





Through a better valorization of the work and local market, she is positive that innumerable women can have higher and stable footings in the cashew market. In her opinion, prejudices and lack of self-confidence prevents them from becoming leaders.

### ***Experience as a mother comes handy***

As for her male counterparts, she is not one to feel like she is denied rewards in their comparison. Apart from that, given the situations when working with them becomes an issue, she says being a mother of three and her experience in motherhood helps to tackle problems in this sphere at work. When asked if she thinks she is recognized in a sector where the men occupy bigger positions, she refuses to comment. She reasons that she is still new to the sector, and while she does not dismiss the possibility of receiving enough acknowledgement, she puts an end to it by saying in the next three years, she will be better equipped to give a clear answer.



### ***Conquering big forces with a positive attitude***

Still considering herself fairly new, we see that Miss Johanna is looking forward to everything the sector has to offer with a welcoming smile. Given her attitude, we're sure she'd be able to conquer all forces, whether big or small.

Moving on to the bigger challenges that she encounters, she says the need for developing new markets and obtaining international food safety certifications are some mighty tasks. In such situations, the knowledge she has received through her post graduate degree comes in handy. She is also on the constant lookout for training sessions that focus on her field so as to gain and imply beneficial knowledge not only to overcome the challenges, but to also inculcate new practices that will yield positive results. Apart from this, she believes in involving herself in constant research and reading through the published studies to help her gain more insights of the ongoing trends.

### ***Learning the power of women at an early age***

Peeking into Ms Johanna's early life, we see that she was raised along with her 5 siblings in a polyglot family, which explains her fluency in German, French and English. Her father was an entrepreneur and mother an officer. This essential





detail of her life tells us from the very beginning, she was raised to believe in the powerful attributes of women. In her family, since her mother balanced the household and her professional and demanding career with excellence, it's understood she has been familiar with the fact that as long as you are focused, gender does not come in the way to accomplishments.

It was such a mindset that did not stop her from exploring the cashew sector, although she did not know any other women nor did she have prior work experience in the said field.

### ***Plan, orchestrate and discipline all events***

When asked about the efforts that goes in striking a work life balance, she says being a mother of 3 children (18, 9 and 7 years old) and working along side in the company is not easy. She confesses that it becomes difficult to always be there for the kids, but with the support of her sisters and family, she does her best to manage the time between work and children. Since everything is planned, orchestrated and made with much discipline, it doesn't give much room for the unexpected things to spring up.

### ***Hoping for positive growth and staying optimistic***

Five years down the line, she sees herself working with more women and more cooperatives, and being operational in the local market. Her work is a blend of balance, independence and development and she envisions a positive growth curve in the years to come. While she believes there is innumerable scope for improvement in her work and with enough funding women can reach greater heights, when asked if she'd wish to start her own enterprise, she declines the possibility at the moment.

### ***Organization is key***

Right now, she is focused on exploring the cashew sector, and adapting to the environment. She hopes to contribute magnificently to this vast region and also hopes to grow in the process. She believes in pre planning and organization, for one must always think ahead and be equipped but at the same time, embrace the many changes that life has to offer!



# ENLIGHTENING THE CASHEW SECTOR

*Betre Ati-Atcha*

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Residing at Bafilo, in the region of Kara, Assoli Prefecture, Mrs Betre Ati-Atcha is a fifty six year old Togolese cashew producer. This undefeated woman has impacted the cashew sector in such a way that her ideas are seen as a pattern of success.

### ***Emerging successful from a limiting mindset***

In a context where one's standard of living is considered a hurdle for a woman to achieve her aims, she went on to acquire her social and economic independence. Her positive attitude to ignore false thought, retrograde and old fashioned ideas has got her this far in cashew culture.

### ***Starting with a motto to never fail***

Determined and courageous, she has spent a good part of her life in cashew production. In fact, for 27 years, Mrs Ati-Atcha has dedicated her time to take care of the cashew orchard that she inherited from her mother. Deeply touched by the sufferings of her mother who was not able to enjoy the benefits of her work, she promised to take over and never fail.

She started work with this motto and since then, through her excellent work, she has been successful in impacting women's lives and even the thoughts of men. Considering the fact that her family and social standards haven't been encouraging, she has emerged above all hurdles and has set an excellent example.

### ***A self-taught woman***

Widow and mother of four children with six other nephews, nieces, and grandchildren in charge, she has benefited of a brief schooling. With the help of her own research and teachings, she has trained herself in order to reinforce her level of speaking, writing, and reading French. She also speaks other Africans' languages such as Haoussa, Cotocoli and Mina.

### ***Her daily contributions***

A major part of her day comprises of dealing with cashew. At 6:30am after finishing her prayer at the mosque, she cooks breakfast for the family till 9am and takes a part of it to the field for the workers, where she stays up to 4 p.m.

With her experience, Mrs Ati-Atcha involves all her children, regardless of gender, in her work. Especially on Sundays, the whole family goes to the field and in a rotating manner, some family members are assigned the work to cook and bring food to the field every week.





When it comes to raw nuts trading, the family takes part in its sale in the market. The boys help in carrying the load, the girls measure accurate amounts of products according to the customer's demands while Mrs Ati-Atcha cashes the revenues. This way, the entire family is involved in the cashew sector.

### ***Above all obstacles is victory***

Initially marginalized in the midst of prevailing males, she went through a number of obstacles and emerged victorious. Replanting of crops in case of poor rainfall, the risk of being bit by snakes in the fields, the stealing of nuts by unscrupulous people, jealousy in its different demonstrations and multiform, the cold comments and grilled words related to her female condition were the many challenges she faced. However, she was able to overcome all these trials of which the biggest hurdle was the slump of cashew nuts at a given time.

Acknowledging the advent of GIZ in Togo, now known as ComCashew, she says their technical assistance has been beneficial to producers, helping them overcome a number of difficulties.

### ***Going places***

Working with humility and patience, she uses the money earned from cashew to support her family. Her contributions have been appreciated and in 2012 she was sent to Senegal by the Togolese Producers Coordination to attend a training on women's access to land.

The positive outcomes have started to increase since her election to the Vice-Presidency of the Producers of Kernels in Togo, on September 7, 2016. Her background also impressed ComCashew to short list her to take part in the third edition of the Masters Trainers Program in 2016. She achieved her certificate with distinction.

### ***She credits her success to cashew***

Mrs Betre dedicates her personal achievements to her success in cashew production. Without boasting, she claims to own three mopeds that she put at the disposal of her children. She was also able to buy a car in 2014. Thanks to cashew's revenues, she has been able to build two houses and the third is under construction.

A fervent Muslim, she is particularly pleased to have been able to make the pilgrimage to Mecca in 2013, thanks to her activities. Gradually, she has become a reference at the departmental, national and even international level.

### ***A mindset that needs to change***

However, without taking this for granted or as a panacea, Mrs Ati-Atcha admitted that the attitudes which hinder or constrain women's involvement in the cashew value chain still exist. The employees working in her field are entirely women. Men, despite her success, find it humiliating and demeaning to work in women's field.

### ***Solutions that can help better one's outlook***

Aware that communication for a change of mentality and behavior is necessary and that it is a long-term action, her determination is not undermined. She is convinced that cashew is a lead chain with a future. To put this into action, she suggested an awareness seminar on several levels with distinct objectives. Firstly at the local level, to get women to understand the use but also the profitability of cashew. At the national level, for men's change of mentality related to the occupation and positions of responsibility by women and their access to land.

### ***Prioritizing the needs of a woman***

She also thinks that setting centers for women's benefits would be an asset. She has suggested a training to facilitate their speech in public. According to her, taking into account women's needs will help increase their involvement in decision-making at both administrative and family levels. A wink to the youth, especially by the creation of training centers to banish the rural exodus and emigration with help uproot all the disadvantages that this entails.

At a broader scale, she wishes for the government to facilitate access to certain agricultural equipment, including brush cutters, to increase the size of their plantations.

### ***Redirection of activities***

The actions are following her convictions and proposals and her plans for the future include preparing people around to take over. Aware of the handicap that age imposes, she has been training her niece for few years now to take over in production. It does not mean total withdrawal but rather a redirection of her activities. She is thinking of using her third construction to serve as a shop to sell local products derived from cashew.

### ***You can make a difference!***

Mrs Ati-Atcha believes in the future of cashew industry and invites her sisters to embark on this journey for their development and empowerment. Far from encouraging them to laziness, she calls on women with perseverance and determination to make the difference. Besides, she asks men to be open-minded and tolerant towards the other half of the sky!





# Upholding A Legacy

*Annick Tengue*

A land of music and dance, housing numerous tribes with unique choices of attire and ornaments, and well preserved flora and fauna, is Benin, a French-speaking West African nation. It is popular for its Beninese cuisine which incorporates exotic ingredients and involves the use of a number of sauces, the traditional trade of this place being agriculture and cotton manufacture and production. Although regarded as a region of economic instability, it is rich in culture while people are wealthy in their hospitality.

## ***Benin custom propagates balance***

The Benin customs fairly approves of women working to lend a helping hand in the family's economy, but they are also required to look after the household chores. Since not many in the nation can afford the luxuries of refrigerators and other home appliances, it directly means that striking a work life balance may be more difficult as compared to women of developed countries.

## ***Women in the cashew sector – An important highlight***

Amongst these seemingly known facts about Benin, one that does not gain much limelight is the commendable cashew production. The nation is the ninth largest producer of cashew in the world, but the country is still underrepresented on the global cashew market. With this being said, another area that needs to be highlighted in this regard is the active participation of women in the industry which is otherwise ignored.

Thus, in this section, we bring to you the life of Ms Annick Tengue, a Beninese woman in her late adulthood, who has managed to contribute significantly to the cashew market. In fact, her factory is one of the most important in Benin, with a production capacity of up to 1,800 kg.

## ***Following her mother's lead***

Confident, smart, and with a clear vision for a better future, Ms. Tengue has been a part of the market from the past sixteen years. Today, she is the owner and managing director of AFETRAPA (Association of Women Processors of Agricultural Products) with a team of 30 members, more than 25 of which are women.





Talking about her early life, she says, as a kid, she lived in Cotonou, Littoral department, where she studied and then moved to Calavi, where she lives nowadays. Her father owned a chemicals distribution company while her mother was a lawyer before she initiated her own cashew business. Her mother was the first person in Benin to start raw cashew nut processing into white kernels. The lack of finances led to setting up the establishment in a traditional form, with out much modern equipment. Since Ms. Tengue has been a witness to her mother's struggles and efforts that have gone behind stabilizing the factory, this experience, in itself has been a huge lesson for her to deal with her day to day affairs.

#### ***From Accountant to the proprietor of AFETRAPA***

She first joined the business as an Accountant, so as to use her degree in Accountancy and help take her mother's enterprise forward. While this was her initial job, working with a parent as dedicated as her mother, she also learnt the dos and don'ts of managing, trade and processing. This training she received came in handy when her mother passed away and Ms. Tengue decided she wouldn't let the years of hard work die with her, and thus, today, being the owner of AFETRAPA, she continues the legacy left behind.

#### ***Hurdles in the path of flourishing the cashew business***

However, living in a country that is still in the process of developing, it is not easy to establish and flourish the empire that one builds. Even to this day, Ms. Tengue is met with a number of challenges but her effort to overcome them is what makes her admirable. She says, she faces difficulty when it comes to labor, for work in cashew business is complicated as the whole process is made by traditional methods and people do not appreciate getting injured. Since the drying, smoking and shelling are done manually, it opens doors to sickness and in such a state, a considerable amount of workers abandon the jobs. This is one of the reasons why she finds it a challenge to get women to work in her enterprise, another being husbands who aren't willing to let their wives on jobs.

Providing a wholesome package to the women employees  
But Ms. Tengue, being the kind of woman who wouldn't let the problems define her, tries to balance out the





hardships by providing a number of facilities to the women workers. She tries to aid her employees by literacy trainings, for she herself is a degree holder while being fluent in two languages, namely French and English. She also tries her best to raise awareness regarding women's rights and imparts education on HIV/Aids. As a woman, she understands the problems faced by her kind, especially those whose husbands are reticent to their works because they do not wish for them to possess financial independence.

It is this quality of hers, to stay humble and understand someone else's issues, while respecting them that has probably got her so far. She is not only concerned about subjects that bother her, but is also willing to help out her community as a whole with their problems.

### ***The secret remains unrevealed***

Moving on, while commenting on the quality of her products, she says they stand out from the rest in the market because of a secret ingredient she uses. It is this ingredient that makes all the products of her brand

different, the one that is characteristic of her enterprise. However, despite this uniqueness, she does not receive a higher price for buyers settle their rates in the market.

### ***Relishing the demanding work***

Talking about her job, she says the first activity is to receive the raw materials. These are then handed over to the employees where it is dried, smoked and shelled under her watch. Once done, the kernel is buttered, caramelized or left in the natural form. Now, as the products are ready for packaging and sale, she adds in her secret ingredient. These are the activities that are carried out at her enterprise, a brief summary of her typical day at work.

It requires a lot of investment of time and energy, but she isn't one to complain for she enjoys her work.

### ***The boss believes in equality***

Contrary to what one when may think about her being the female boss and having male employees under her, she says she does not face any hassles with such a concept. In fact, all workers, whether men or women respect her as the head and go about their daily chores. Elaborating on the same, she feels largely, women are not denied rewards when compared to their male counterparts. Equality is the key, although sometimes, not all may follow it.

She also thinks that the position of the women in the industry can be improved by government support so as to ease their loan application. They must be given ample





training so that the knowledge shared will aid them to work better and help acquire new processing skills that can prove to be beneficial.

### ***Finding strategies to problems***

Continuing about some of the challenges she faces in the general market, she says supply of raw materials is difficult, add to it the suppliers who taxed them in the beginning for the sole reason that they were women. Also, it is complicated to meet the growing demands.

Another struggle is that when the buyers get used to a specific flavor or type of product, it sometimes proves to be a task to introduce a new product and encourage them to try it. Giving an example, Ms. Tengue says, when her mother introduced caramelized kernels, customers were hesitant to buy the new variety.

But as successful people do not let obstacles in their path stop their climb to the pinnacle, instead of being let down or withholding the production of the innovation, they found a strategy. They increased the publicity of the caramelized kernel and also let the customers taste the product for free, thereby accomplishing the earlier battle and making a place for this variety in the market.

Since getting financial support to continue the enterprise is also a problem, she says they overcame this by applying and receiving fund from the African Development Foundation and this has proved to be helpful in building the factory. The money has helped with the equipment, and work has been made slightly easier by purchasing machinery like crushers.

### ***She is not one to compromise on family***

Talking about her personal life, she confesses that being in a position like her, handling a job that is her livelihood; it takes effort and requires investment of time. Her husband is extremely encouraging and as much as he can, she tries not to compromise her role as a spouse and mother by doing her best and spends time with her husband and four children during the weekends. The support from family means a lot to her.

### ***A clear vision***

When asked, where she sees herself five years down the line, she clearly states her goals. She visualizes herself in her big sized processing unit, with modern equipment, more employees. Since currently she uses breakable bottles for packaging, she hopes that in the coming years, she can replace them with unbreakable bottles with round tips, and printed bags which are more professional. In addition to this, her biggest goal is that by then, she hopefully will be exporting her products worldwide.

### ***No shortcut to success!***

While giving advice, she says, other women like her can survive in such a male dominated market by working hard. She is of the opinion that there is no other way to success because hard work eventually pays off. She does not believe in pitying oneself or cribbing about a situation. She thinks there is no force that can stop women from becoming leaders in the market, provided this is what they want.

If someone still has doubts, Ms. Tengue's story is inspiring enough to gain motivation





# **The Power of Experience**

*Djanie Lydia Sagbo*

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*No matter how tedious it is, and never mind the exhaustion it causes, hard work always pays off. There is no substitute for hard work, and there is no elevator to success. At the age of 75 years, and still working in the cashew enterprise she initiated decades ago, Mrs Djanie Lydia SAGBO is an outstanding example for someone who has given her sweat and blood to kindle the passion that still remains ignited in her heart.*

## ***Small trades set the platform to initiate a large enterprise***

Coming from a Senegalese background, today, she holds the post of CEO in 'SENAR Les Délices Lysa' which is a cashew and peanut processing company. As she recalls her earlier days, she remembers doing a number of small trades at her level, which probably is what set the stage for her to pursue it in her later years. Her tryst with the cashew field in specific, however, initiated with the urge to offer variety and new products other than peanuts to her customers.



## ***Passionate about her work***

With a vocational degree from a Typewriting and Housekeeping School, looking back, she's glad for choosing this career. With no prior experience and no knowledge of any woman in the cashew sector back then, the passion helped her overcome the barriers and she learnt on the job all by herself, setting her own standards to follow and reach. She even visited a lot of processing units in order to understand the process and has tested various methods to develop the taste and quality of her products. With a work experience of 35 years in this field, she has come a long way from when she had just taken her first step.

## ***Involved at all levels***

Her enterprise currently witnesses the involvement of eleven workers, nine of which are women as they aid her with the manufacture and production. While working from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. every day, Mrs Djanie Lydia SAGBO is involved at all levels of the enterprise, be it purchase of kernels, their processing and operation monitoring or negotiating with banks based on their schemes she does it all! Her typical routine involves starting with the sorting and grading of the white whole kernels collected in the processing followed by their packaging after either roasting or the processing, depending on the desired final product, which is based on the customer's demand.



### ***Labor available but not constant***

Speaking of the participation of women to come forward and work in the sector, she says while labor from their side is available, it is not constant for women prefer to do household tasks. Given the circumstances, she tries to offer her workers the facilities that are in her capacity, one of which is providing rooms for them in the factory, where they can rest and sleep.

### ***The products are a result of their excellence***

When asked, she says she does not encounter any problems as such when it comes to dealing with men workers, and given her position, she is also of the opinion that she isn't denied rewards when compared to her male counterparts. As for women, she hopes to better their situation by helping them get settled, and providing financial support so that they can promote the products that are a result of their excellence. She strives for this change as some of the barriers that stand in their way include a difficult sector, which is hardly predictable, and demands a lot of money for investment.

### ***A number of concerns***

Elaborating on some of the challenges she faces in the sector, she says finding the financing to purchase raw cashew nuts every year is a primary hassle. She also admits that it is no easy task to manage her team of about ten people while respecting the customers' delivery deadlines. Furthermore, she sheds light on the difficulty of providing her customers with cashews despite the high costs.

However, we understand what a remarkable woman she is when she gives us insights on her working pattern, the key segments of which involves working hard and being organized along with valuing the products, for one cannot do justice to the job until they truly cherish what they have.

### ***Customers are her top priority***

Mrs Djanie also says travelling in the villages to find the raw materials helps her and her loyalty is reflected by her next statement, where she confesses to selling her products without making any profit a few times, in order to keep the clients.



### ***Blessed to receive her family's support***

When asked about her family, and how she strikes a work life balance, she says since her processing unit is a family company, she is blessed to receive their full support. One of her daughters has also joined her in the company and is working since last year, for which she is glad!

### ***Balance comes along the way***

However, she also admits that it is extremely difficult to balance her personal and professional life in cases when there is shortage of raw materials or when some employees are absent. Although most of the time, she says the balance comes all by itself, since according to her, there is always a break at the end of the day when they finish work, and are able to spend some time with the family.

### ***A satisfying job***

Being a player in the economic and agricultural development of her country, making the most of a know-how, being the ambassador of local and artisanal products of very good quality are some of the components of her profession that give her immense satisfaction.

### ***Improving with every accomplishment***

In her opinion, what makes her products and enterprise stand out among others is her experience, requirement and the constant search for a greater taste quality as she and her team looks to improve with every accomplishment. Over 30 years of experience in the sector; a rigorous management and innovative products usually does the magic to impart uniqueness.

### ***Not recognized enough***

Given her vast contribution and tremendous effort, Mrs Djanie is of the opinion that she is not recognized enough in the market. But this does not stop her from following her success mantra which involves believing in the products and giving them an added value.

### ***Hoping for large scale success***

Speaking of her future plans, in the coming years she envisions herself running a big cashew and peanut processing unit, producing products that will be available both in the African sub-region and abroad. She hopes to establish a brand of products that will be known and appreciated everywhere.

To achieve these aims, however, she admits there is still a long way to go due to lack of funding being a contributory factor. This is clearly the reason why processing is difficult, without resources, it is impossible to purchase raw cashew nuts, so it is impossible to process and sell them.

A proper funding will help expand the business and thereby promote cashew via the products.

### ***A woman of courage***

While the journey is still long with a few battles to conquer, Mrs Djanie is a woman of courage and strength, who we're sure will reach greater heights and accomplish her goals for the amount of hard work she has put and continues to put into the enterprise.





# SHARING HER MOTHER'S DREAMS

*Afi Sylvie Sagbo Gommard*

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*Every little girl looks up to her mother as a role model. She follows her footsteps and draws motivation and inspiration from her mother. A mother is the first friend and the first teacher, she is the one who teaches the first lessons and sows seed to strengthen her daughter's roots. However, as we proceed in life, finish our higher studies, many a times we tend to move out and create our own little world with new people in it. But blessed are the ones who still get to have their mothers in the world they build and continue to have her guidance and diverse experience to learn from.*



And one such blessed lady is Ms Afi Sylvie SAGBO GOMMARD.

### ***An asset to the firm***

Helping her mother as the Deputy Director of SENAR Les Délices Lysa, cashew and peanut processing company, was probably one of the best decisions Ms Afi Sylvie SAGBO GOMMARD ever made. With a Master's degree in Finance and Capital Markets, Ms Sylvie is a great asset to the firm.



### ***Her mother is her role model***

Coming from a Senegalese background and growing up in a family where cashew processing was very important, it is not very hard to understand the reason for Ms Sylvie SAGBO's choice of profession. She has grown up idolizing her mother, who succeeded with a lot of rigor, exigency and work. Her mother, Mrs Lydia SAGBO, is the kind of woman who believes in her products and continues to struggle in order to make them available in all the supermarkets in Dakar.

Thus, being a witness to her mother's hard work and seeing the company grow and improve over the years as they advanced the quality and taste of the products, she was inspired to join the sector as well and lend a helping hand.

### ***An added advantage***

Although she does not have any special training, being the daughter of the cashew processor who has over 35 years of experience, has its own perks. Her mother has been her guide throughout her journey in the cashew enterprise and her visits to numerous cashew nuts processing units have given her the added advantage to understand the market. Besides, since this is a family owned company, she has been blessed to receive tremendous support throughout.

### ***Passionate about the cashew sector***

It would be wrong to say that Ms Sylvie SAGBO joined the business only because it was a family initiative. This is because, apart from her mother's involvement being one of the reasons, she herself was passionate about working in a sector of this kind. Given the fact that cashew is a valuable nut with a lot of potential, she wanted to do her bit in exploring it and bringing out her variations.

### ***Developing strategies to excel***

In order to expand the business and reach a positive growth curve with a leap, she even visited many processing units to learn about the various steps involved. Since this is a competitive business where everyone wishes to excel, along with her mother, she tested their competitors' products in order to enhance the taste and quality of their own.

She has also taken up various trainings in cost accounting for production monitoring. This vast scale of knowledge is required as she is involved in taking a number of business decisions which includes purchase of RCN/Kernel, processing and operation monitoring, marketing and negotiation with kernel buyers, technology selection and financial transaction with banks.

### ***An organized routine***

In particular, her typical day at work involves sorting and grading of the white whole kernels collected in the processing units. Based on the customer's choice, the nuts may be roasted or processed which is then followed by the packaging. The final task in her daily routine involves the labelling and delivery in supermarkets to promote the products. While that is definitely a lot of work, since she loves her job, she doesn't mind the hard work.

### ***Interested, but not constantly involved***

Moving on, when questioned about the availability of labor in her region, she replied that while a number of people are interested in the sector, their involvement is not constant. They offer accommodation to the workers and ensure their best treatment and benefits in order to attract them towards the job.



### ***Quest for brilliance***

When asked about her products, Ms Sylvie SAGBO takes pride in the fact that they are all designed under the guidance of her mother who has such a vast experience. Besides, at the enterprise, their quest for experimentation and excellence to reach the best possible standards makes them stand out among their competitors. They have a rigorous management along with innovative products and are not afraid of trying out different methods to reach a greater taste quality.

When questioned about the male counterparts in the sector, she is quick to say that she does not encounter any problem as such nor is she of the opinion that she is denied rewards when compared to them.

### ***Overcoming the challenges***

While she admits that proper funding, managing her workers and meeting deadlines of the customers are serious challenges, she is quick to add that she tries to overcome them to the best of her ability by planning out her schedule before time and putting her heart and soul into her job.

While this is a family based enterprise, due to the unavailability of labor, it sometimes becomes difficult to strike a work life balance but at the end of the hectic day, priorities have their place and no matter what, she manages to spare some quality time for her family.

### ***A dream she hopes to achieve***

Given the time and commitment she has put into the company, in the coming years she hopes to see it grow many folds and it is her dream to see her products in the African sub-region and abroad where they are valued and appreciated. She also hopes that women will receive better support and funding to take part and continue in the cashew sector, as the lack of resources serves as an inhibiting factor in the participation of women.

### ***Not one to be put down***

Also, like many other women in different professions, she is also of the opinion that they are not recognized in the generally male dominated sector. However, this does not bring her energy down but instead makes her want to aim higher by following the company's standard mantra which is to believe in their products and value them.

Given her positive attitude and endless efforts, we wish Ms Sylvie SAGBO and her mother all the best as they strive to fulfill all their aspirations!





# MATERIALIZING HER GOALS

*Sounlinalia Sèlomé Zoé*

*Sometimes, we don't understand why things happen the way they do. They don't make sense and there's no use digging for the message that may lie underneath, because, simply put, from a human perspective, it really is futile. However, it may take us days or even years, but someday, we'll find the reason for the affairs of the past and that moment, we'll be nothing but satisfied.*

*All we need is a little courage to survive the present as we wait for a beautiful tomorrow.*



## ***An unexpected beginning***

When Mrs SOUNLIN Alia Sèlomé Zoé was in high school, she had to leave midway because of a strike. With nothing to do, she started a small business which included buying and selling tropical products including the cashew nuts. Back then, little did she know this laid the foundation for her to reach the current status of the Managing Director at KAKE 5 Industry SA in Savalou, Benin.



### ***Steady growth over the years***

With about 16 years of experience in RCN collection and trade, she is now involved full time in her company. Over the years, she has improved in her trade. While she started at the small level, in 2004, she undertook processing of raw cashew into roasted kernels for local consumption. She also roasted them into white kernels for sub regional consumption, in order to add value to the raw material and to reduce unemployment in her region.



Currently, her work is to supervise the operations, give advices and if there is any problem, she is in charge of helping the employees while trying to figure out possible solutions.

### ***Obtaining abundant education***

Throughout her journey, she has been blessed to obtain trainings, attend workshops and go on exchange trips. She has received support from an NGO, and was able to travel to Brazil in order to acquire knowledge in cashew processing sector. Besides, they were also supported by the ProCAD (Framework support Programme for Agricultural Diversification) through their project called PADA (Support Program for Agricultural Diversification) with several exchange trips and they helped them research partners for their products, and for the acquisition of modern processing machines.

Besides, she also obtained technical support from Technoserve through trainings on HACCP standards and on factory management in Ghana and Benin. She has been privileged enough to attend some workshops organized by GiZ through their platform comprising all the cashew players.

### ***Believe, and you're halfway there!***

Having seen the vast array of activities that she has been involved with, it's given she is doing a marvelous job at her company comprising of more than 200 employees, most of whom are women willing to contribute to the sector.

Considering their active participation, when asked about the facilities provided to women, she says they have nurseries, transport services and extend financial help. In her opinion, if women can receive proper financing and technical support, their position can be improved.

Having said that, she also advices that women need to be confident and believe in themselves, be persevering and have the love towards work.

### ***Quality – a priority***

When asked about the uniqueness of the brand, BENINLUXECAJOU, she says it stands out among others because of its high quality. They care about their employees, and treat them well so they can be productive in their personal life and at work.



***Overcoming all challenges in her path***

Speaking of the challenges she has faced in her journey, regarding the trading, she says partners were unwilling to work with her as her company was not formal. Financing was also an issue for she did not have any land to use as guarantee in order to attain a loan from the banks.

As strategies, she decided to create a formal

company, and she was determined to make it happen. They had to show to the partners that they were serious and wanted strong relations with them. At the processing level, they needed to have good quality nuts in order to ensure the final products would be competitive and of high quality.

The finished goods were controlled by a laboratory before any selling; this process allowed them to get the certification and they've been able to sell their products in complete quietude. Although they've come a long way, she does not deny the fact that with proper funding and skill, they can extend the company even further and be more competitive.

***Sailing through life***

While all the work she puts in for sure demands her attention and time, we're glad to know her family remains her priority. Despite her business, she always manages to be present for her children and husband at home. She is happy to be part of a family that appreciates her success and most of all, her endurance to materialize the goals. However, she does not deny that while she tries to manage and spend some time with her two kids, being repeatedly absent at home for financial reasons creates some handicaps which she tries to overcome.

With her husband as the CEO and promoter of the company, it makes things a bit easier but that does not mean it's a cakewalk. She still puts in her heart and soul into her work.

***Her work has been nothing short of a blessing***

She has been grateful to her profession, through which her economic situation has improved, and she is financially self-sustaining. When asked, she confesses that her work means everything to her.

Stating her long term goals, she hopes to run a big company and be known on the international market because of their high quality final products. Given her plans and efforts, we hope this turns a reality in the near future.



# PROMISING POLISHED LEVELS OF PROFESSIONALISM

*Sanatha Berthe*

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*The ultimate aim of all mankind is to succeed. However, if one can ensure the success of people around them while working towards self-development, it is sure to guarantee immense benefits.*

## ***Valuing the cashew chain***

As the Managing director of ICAF, Mrs Sanatha BERTHE of Ivory Coast has been able to ensure that her services reach the people in her neighborhood. She has succeeded in forming a collaborative network by focusing on creating a supportive cashew value chain. She has achieved this by helping farmers and producers to control good practices. Her enterprise also provides aid in setting up a traceability system in farms and industries as well as establishes quality standards along with health security that will allow the employees to have an easier access to international market.

The overall aim is to value the chain in order to showcase a better social responsibility while performing their activities.

## ***A well-read woman with abundant experience***

With over a decade's worth of experience in the cashew sector, Mrs Sanatha, without a doubt, has abundant knowledge. She also has a rich educational background, with various diplomas and trainings including a University diploma in the processing of agricultural products and Engineering diploma in quality management.

## ***She isn't new to the market***

As we look back, we're informed that this wasn't a new market that she discovered. She has known about the cashew business since 1992, when her father started planting. However, back then, she didn't really know purpose its. Hence, she started gathering information on cashew production and when the opportunity arose for her to help in implementing standards, she didn't hesitate to take it up as a challenge. Thus, with the aim to propose Ivory Coast and the region with well-processed products meeting the sanitary requirements in the market, she embarked on the journey in the vast cashew market.

While her father was the main source through which she got in touch with the market because he owned a plantation, she herself went through a lot of researches that were conducted on cashew destination countries, while studying its use and the sanitary requirements of the export market. She already had done a basic training in food industry and specialized in processing, but to gather more knowledge, she attended trainings in Europe and Ivory Coast under food security experts.





### ***Promising polished levels of professionalism***

The enterprise currently has eleven employees and when asked, Mrs Sanatha discloses that due to lack of training, qualified labor is rarely available in the cashew enterprise. As for the unique characteristic of the company that makes them stand out among the rest, she informs they help the companies to value their products through quality certification and sanitary security.

They are focused in food industries support, while the other enterprises working in quality management sector are usually multi-field. The fact that they are specialized in this sector allows them to have a greater level of professionalism.

### ***Assuming innumerable responsibilities***

When asked to give a brief layout of the day to day activities, she says, she doesn't have a typical working day. Each day differs with its organization.

There are some days when she has typical training sessions with processors or producers. This involves activities like welcoming the participants, presentation of the theme of the day and displaying the slides while promoting valuable exchange of information around the topic. This is then followed by visit to the workshops to put into practice what has been previously discussed. They have a brief recap at the end and form resolutions for the days ahead.

During the audit days with processors or producers, she is in charge of conducting meetings to present the goals and expectations. She also interviews the persons concerned and gathers the needed information. She engages in discussions with each audited person and looks after compliance monitoring.

When she is working at office, her activities revolve around checking her mails, responding to them and adjusting the agenda to review the daily actions. On ordinary days, she has non-formal debriefing with colleagues around a coffee or directly at their desks. She converses with them on their daily work progress, and gives a hand to those in need. Generally, she does not have a formal end-of-the-day hour. She goes home depending on the work progress and her son's classes.

### ***Her priorities are clearly set***

Thus, by adjusting some time at the end of the day and during the weekends for her children and family, she tries to strike a work life balance. Mrs Sanatha also lets us know that after each mission of approximately 3 to 5 days on the field, she and other workers try to spend a full day with family. They believe in having clear conversations and therefore explain to the children the kind of work they're engaged in and its impact on the community. Since seeds sown at young age are more likely to bore fruit in the later years, she and other employees also teach their children about the cashew sector. This, they hope, will arise their interest in the market and help them analyze the by-products that could be used for daily consumption.



### ***Grateful for the support***

She is happy to have been blessed with a supportive family that encourages her to be engaged in work. They're interested in the sector and wish to lend a helping hand, directly or indirectly. In fact, the enterprise's family members also insisted to come to SIETTA 2016 and were impressed seeing the full-size processing units exhibited and the demos made by the equipment manufacturers.



Considering that her father owns a family cashew plantation of 10 ha and her husband works in the Cotton and Cashew Council for two years now, she is supported all the more. Her husband also encourages the promotion of industrial sector and motivates the population of the north to invest themselves in cashew farming.

### ***Developing a brilliant level of understanding with the male counterparts***

Speaking of gender equality, she smiles that when it comes to working alongside men, she has no complaints. It is such that they almost forget they are persons of different gender for they establish that level of understanding. The men are passionate about their work and respect their lady coworkers.

However, she is of the opinion that the position of women in the industry can be further improved by providing trainings on management in general and business management, including accountancy and finance. The lack of training level and the understanding of the agricultural and industrial sectors is what, in her opinion, prevents women from becoming leaders.

### ***Keeping everyone happy***

When asked about the challenges she faces, to make sure each employee feels good is quite a task. Considering that at the end of the day, she wants everyone to succeed and be satisfied, it requires her to put in extra efforts. Although difficult, she also ensures that the clients, at the end of each intervention, will be able to offer high quality and faultless products to their customers.

Also, making sure that there will be more resources in terms of their job in Ivory Coast and in the region continues to be a challenge.

As a strategy, she says adopting a meticulous attention to work is the way to go.

### ***Additional trainings***

They also offer training courses to students studying agro-industrial specialties while conducting classes, seminars and awareness animation in Graduate schools. She says that if there are some finances opportunities, she would like to orientate them towards the acquisition of necessary equipment for cashew nuts and kernels quality control. She would also make sure to provide support to small producers and processors in order to allow them to set up the necessary minimum requirements to be recognized by the GFSI.

### ***A perfect combo***

When asked about her work, she gushes that it gives her the platform to combine pleasure and business. In the years to come, she hopes to run a company with the task to be an inescapable support for high quality products in the whole region, both West and Central Africa.





# A LEADER IN THE MAKING

*Fatou Ndong*

*If a woman can dream of achieving great heights, then there's nothing that can stop her. But the problem lies in the fact that she fails to see her worth, and neglects her dream and the magnanimous possibilities they promise.*

She has a solid base of education coupled with experience Regional President of cashew players in the Fatick region, the 52 year old Senegalese, Mrs Fatou NDONG is a wonderful lady, with a practical approach to life. Rich with over a decade's worth of experience, and a Bachelor's Degree as well as a vocational training in Marketing and Business Management, she has greatly benefitted the cashew industry.

### ***A frontrunner from the beginning***

Even before she could start work at this enterprise, she has been the leader and President as a partner in the International Relief and Development (IRD), Integrated Development Program of Fatick (PDIF), ENDAPF. As for the cashew business in specific, she was in touch with a number of women who helped and encouraged her to participate in it.

Thus with the aim to earn a livelihood and to contribute to the vast sector, she took her first step in this promising venture. While she reminisces the times when her grandmother was involved in this trade, as she states, it was done on a small scale and was quite different to what it is now.

### ***Managing crucial aspects***

Although she did not have any prior trainings, gathering the courage and finding much needed information, she decided to step in the field. Now, the enterprise she works in has about ten women workers and Mrs Fatou's primary job is concerned with the purchase of RCN and kernel, marketing as well as negotiation with kernel buyers. She also engages in financial transaction with banks.

### ***A motivator***

Apart from all this, she takes up the job to encourage



women in the workforce, helps reinforce their capacity and ensures that they stay motivated all the time. She hopes to instill in them their worth, and let them know that no matter what the world says, they are capable of so much more.

She strongly believes that if they truly wish, women can achieve great heights. It is important for them to believe in themselves. Alongside this, she confesses it is equally essential for them to willingly take up responsibilities. She does not deny that social environment and the related challenges pose hindrance, but she knows for sure that with a clear focus and determination, one can rise above all this.

### ***She's a known face in the sector***

When asked to comment on working alongside males, she says since her team is composed solely of women, she isn't in the place to pass an opinion. But considering the larger picture, she does feel that compared to men, women are denied rewards. That aside, when it comes to receiving recognition in the generally male dominated sector, she is glad to be acknowledged by all the active actors in the cashew processing business.

When asked, she states that proper funding and skills will help women deliver better results. Similarly, adequate technical and financial partners will help to bring about an all-round improvement.

### ***Women power***

Speaking of the availability of labor, she comments that labor is available, the workers are extremely committed and enjoy doing their work. She takes pride in the fact that their team is 100% feminine.

As for her enterprise, she says their attainable prices and the quality of products makes them unique. The members, together, form a united team of strong women who even help their husbands. Besides, their receipts are well managed by the enterprise's members.

### ***She's not one to compromise***

While she lends a helping hand at home, she is glad to have a supportive family that helps her all along. Her family is involved in the cashew business, particularly the children, and this is an added advantage.

She tries to balance her professional and personal life and her typical routine involves completing her household chores at in the morning followed by working at the office in the afternoon, to supervise the work being carried out.

She always tries to strike a balance by maintaining a difference between family and enterprise management, and never compromising on either one.

### ***Crossing all barriers***

As we know, challenges are bound to surface on the path to success. Similarly, she too has her set of hurdles ranging from the hunt to find financial and technical partners, equipment to raw material procurement. Despite them, she tries to find a middle path by renewing contracts and conducting business meetings. It's not always an easy task but at the end of the day, she manages to find profitable strategies to help deal with problems.

### ***Dreams within a reaching distance***

After all, since she sees herself as one of the women leaders in the field of cashew, she is all set to face any crossroads by keeping her cool. Speaking of her big goals she wishes to achieve in the years to come, she hopes to develop the cashew sector in her region, occupy the market in the sub-region.

Above all, she dreams to be identified as the cashew leader in her country and given her efforts, we're certain she isn't too far from accomplishing it!





# LITTLE STEPS TO SUCCESS

*Adewoye Lucy*

Married to a civil servant and a mother of four, Mrs Lucy is a focused entrepreneur with an exciting story to share!

### ***It was time to make the right decision***

Prior to joining the TechnoServe program where she was familiarized about cashew apple, she was into sachet water and flavored drinks processing in Erin-Ile, Kwara state. Giving us an insight of her experience, she said that initially, her product only included sachet water and flavored drinks. This small scale business did not yield the kind of returns she'd like, and even her rent had almost expired in the former factory. Besides, the power supply in Erin-Ile was pretty bad.

These factors, coupled with the fact that she needed more space to accommodate her new Cajuina processing business called for relocation. Thus, she now runs the new unit in Okuku, a border town which is much bigger, providing more scope for innovation. Also, by including the new cashew based product, her condition has improved drastically.

### ***Receiving trainings to enhance her knowledge***

In order to gain enough knowledge in cashew, she, along with five other entrepreneurs generously received trainings by TechnoServe. During the course, she learnt about the production methodologies of Cajuina







as well as business management. The knowledge helped her include best practices in her own business of Cajuina, which is a non-alcoholic, non-carbonated beverage made of blended cashew apples.

***Always on the lookout for opportunities***

One major attribute that has got her this far is the fact that she sees opportunities where many people don't. This was demonstrated through her acquisition of a delivery bus shortly after the commencement of Cajuina production, to aid the distribution of her products. During an interview, she said, "I have just

acquired another bus that is capable of distributing a bulk of my products. The knowledge I acquired during the project has greatly helped me to manage my business and helped me to tap into more opportunities."

***A positive feedback***

Talking about the customers' feedback, she disclosed that she has received many positive feedbacks from them, especially concerning the nutritional benefits of Cajuina. "Many of my customers call me to register their satisfaction at the taste and nutritional values of consuming Cajuina. Personally, I am a witness to the refreshing and healthy attributes





of Cajuina. I used to experienced loud heartbeats in the past, but it has stopped since I started taking Cajuina,” she informed.

### ***Going places***

Currently, her customer base is growing as she supplies her products to many parts of Kwara and Osun states. Her brand, ‘Davey Cajuina’ can be found in many shops within and outside her locality. She also made it clear that her customers are expectant of the new cashew season. This gives us an insight of the wonderful work she has been doing.

### ***Standing out amongst others***

When asked about the impact of her production on the community, she responded, “Right now, I am the only producer of natural fruit drinks in this part of the state. In fact, I can say that I am the only female producer of Cajuina in Nigeria. This makes me stand

out from my peers, I’m unique.”

### ***Heading towards a better world***

She further said that the advent of Cajuina production in her community has led to the generation of jobs and improved lives of many people. Since the time she started producing Cajuina, she herself has employed some people to in the production section.

### ***Breaking stereotypes***

When asked, she says the success she has achieved today and her determination stand as big challenges to many male counterparts who did not believe she could achieve all this being a woman.

Giving due credits, she stated her achievements could not have been possible without TechnoServe and the Vitol foundation. She expressed profound appreciation to both for giving her the amazing opportunity to turn waste into wealth and improve lives.

We congratulate her for her achievements and wish her all the best for her future endeavors!



# REVOLUTIONIZING A MINDSET

*Temilade Dairo*

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Hailing from Ogbomosho, the Oyo state of Nigeria, Mrs Temilade Dairo's story is one that speaks of the importance of an encouraging male mindset to help a woman reach her dreams!

### ***The urge to do more***

She holds a Bachelor's degree in Agricultural Economics and previously was a stay-at-home mum, spending most of her time taking care of her children and carrying other household chores. However, with the urge to do more despite the limited opportunities available, she decided to bring in a change in life.

### ***Traits of a trainer***

Her Husband, Mr. Dairo had been a cashew farmer and the sole provider for the family. Determined to take this a step ahead, she joined the Promoting Cashew Farmer Livelihood program in August 2013 as a local community trainer. She actively took part in the program and was noted to be very receptive to both theoretical and practical aspects of the training. Right from the beginning, she displayed the traits of a passionate trainer and having had and the actual farming experiences he had proved to be an added benefit for the role.

### ***Her husband was reluctant of her participation***

When Mrs Temilade was selected to be a part of the program, she underwent the required training and accepted the responsibility. Despite her interest in the job, her husband objected to her participation. They were at odds over her interaction with other male participants including her supervisor, Mr. Tajudeen. He was reluctant towards any direct communication with her over the phone and would insist the callers dropped a message which he would then relay to her.

He contacted the program extension trainers and expressed his disapproval of her participation, this involved making verbal warnings and demands over the phone as well as barring his wife from communicating with those





involved in the program. Several attempts to resolve the case were made during these phone conversations but to no avail.

### ***The male mindset***

According to Mr. Dairo, “It is a taboo for a woman to make decisions without her husband’s approval.” It is their mindset that a man is the head of the family and without their prior knowledge, no decision can be taken.



In their community, the men make the decisions for their wives on a regular basis and it is the norm. This is the case in many rural communities, where there is a high level of significance placed on men in general over women.

### ***Blessing or burden?***

Her worries grew stronger as what she felt should have been good news became a burden on her family. In order to resolve the situation, she went on to take the necessary steps to keep her dreams intact and contacted her supervisor to relay her situation. She lamented to her supervisor that it was not easy undergoing all the processes to be certified as a female trainer without enjoying an inch of her husband’s support.

### ***Her husband’s concerns***

Her supervisor, Mr. Tajudeen, who initially came to sensitize the community about the program, proceeded to formally visit Mr. Dairo and enlightened him about the program. This eased Mr. Dairo’s concerns to an extent and it was then discovered that he was concerned about the people his wife would be interacting with and the various locations she would be going to visit. Besides, he also didn’t want people disturbing her or creating undue stress. However, since Mrs. Temilade was capable and truly interested in the opportunity, his worries were pointless.

### ***Supporting each other***

After the discussion with the supervisor, Mr. Dairo agreed to drop her over to the next couple of trainings that Mrs. Temilade organized and anchored. However, as the program progressed, he then committed to even picking her up afterwards and in some cases, assisted her with demonstrations, and escorted her to the various farms she visited.

Mrs. Temilade also assisted her husband on his farm with her newly acquired knowledge. He saw the improvements and became more supportive of the program. Overtime, he became one of the strongest advocates, sharing the program information with his friends and recommending the program to both male and female farmers.



### ***Her productivity was appreciated***

Mrs. Temilade was extremely happy with this change. Although this development came as a surprise, she was certain it was because he noted that instead of spending

her free time being at home and doing nothing, by actively engaging in good work, she had become productive. This also earned her another good side of him.

Speaking of his positive attitude, she said, “We lived more happily now that he understood my role as more of a change agent. Other men I trained also admired and appreciated the training I delivered. My female counterparts looked up on me as their mentor. I could see and feel it, that most of the women I trained wished to be like me. Thanks to TechnoServe for helping me engage in the act of nation building. I am glad to say that I have trained many farmers, hundreds in number, both men and women, across Oyo.”

### ***Respected by all***

Till date Mrs Temilade has trained over 1200 people, including many women, who respect her and are relaxed enough to call and ask for advice on their farm. They do not fear of reprove from their husbands and community for they too are trying to keep pace with the trends.

### ***Witnessing an overall development***

She now earns an additional income that is used to supplement the household funds and has reduced the burden on her husband who previously was the sole provider. This has also boosted her family standing in the community. Mr. Dairo is proud of all her achievements while Mrs Temilade she has been able to increase her knowledge and technical exposure. As of September 2015, she went back to school to acquire a Master’s in Agricultural Economics.

### ***In conclusion***

Mrs Temilade’s story makes it clear that by putting extra emphasis on behavioral change management, the men can be enlightened on the benefits of women engagement in other economic opportunities. This also helps to inform them about the measures that are taken to ensure that participants only deal with pre-screened and approved people, regardless of the individual being a program manager or a farmer.

Another important lesson demonstrated was the importance of female role models when trying to introduce change and new learnings. This was utilized as a tool throughout the program, which contributed to the 45% female participation in the Promoting Cashew Farmer Livelihood program. Thus, the support of family is essential for encouraging women to take advantage of new economic opportunities. In order to work, they must feel free and not penalized. This is taking place gradually in many societies and we hope to see more women in higher positions in the future!





# Like a Guiding Lamp:

## *Ouedraogo Relwende Safiatou*

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*As humans, all of us need a starting point. Without a stepping stone, we can't climb the ladder to success, without the roots, no tree can stand tall and sans any guidelines, we'd find ourselves clueless and confused. While doing things on our own provides a sense of accomplishment, having someone to guide us makes matters so much more simple. Having a constant whom we can look back to, who will not dictate but rather guide us through our goals is what we all need.*

### ***A remarkable consultant!***

In the light of such perspective, it's overwhelming to learn the story of Mrs Ouedraogo Relwende Safiatou, who is owner of the consulting firm 'Hourya Conseils' which is linked to the cashew production sector. With a Master's degree in project management and a decade worth of experience, it is not hard to understand why she makes such an inspirational consultant.

### ***A peek into the past***

As we take a look into her life, we see that a native of Bam province in Burkina Faso, she arrived in Bobo Dioulasso in 1998 where she currently lives with her husband and four children while running her agency. Before becoming a consultant, she gathered all the experience she could in this field. From 2006 to 2008 she used to provide advices to women involved in local cashew processing. From 2009, she started training local producers in good agricultural practices application.

### ***She has close ties with the cashew sector***

Since her husband owns a cashew farm, and he is a producer of cashew, she has always been closely related to the field directly and indirectly, for previously, she spent a better part of her time lending a helping hand here. Besides, her work in the field has added on to her years of experience. Also, she is a graduate from the ComCashew (formerly African Cashew initiative, ACi) Master Training programme, professionalizing her expertise during 7 months in all aspects of the cashew sector.

### ***Making the right choice***

When asked on what motivated her to narrow down to the job of a consultant as a profession, Mrs Ouedraogo replies she felt the need to help the producers of her area by training them on techniques to increase their productivity. While this was the main goal, it also provided her with an opportunity to earn a living. Thus, she aimed at using her skills to socially serve the people in the cashew sector while benefitting herself and those around in the process.

### ***She follows an organized schedule***

Giving us a brief outline of her daily activities, she explains she starts work at 8 am, where she handles her urgent files following a calendar. She then goes on to take a break of one hour sometimes when her schedule permits. She also informs us that most of the time, she does not stay in her office, for a majority of her hours are spent in the field, in cashew farms specifically, in order to train the producers. Her office also serves as a networking platform to secure and ensure the supply in raw cashew nuts.

### ***A few unsolved issues remain challenges***

When asked about some of the challenges she faces in this field, she comments that she is met with the problem of



security because she has to meet her profession's demands where she is required to go to places far from the city, in bush to work with the producers. As a consultant, she knows how to make the information relay easily among the producers, but the main issue is the equipment and tools supply, which remains unsolved. Although, as a solution, she is working hard to find some local equipment suppliers, in order to make it easier for the producers who are willing to buy automatic or semi-automatic equipment.

### ***Emerging in light in spite of the darkness***

Despite the challenges that threaten to overpower like the dark clouds, she continues to be the guiding lamp and imparts her knowledge and inputs so people in the cashew sector can polish their skills and learn new techniques to maximize the rewards.

Also, initially, she did find loopholes in terms of establishing a balance between the management of her activities and her role as a mother, but she does her best to be available for her family at all times. Besides, since her husband works in cashew sector, he supports and understand her work, and her children are equally supportive. She tries to manage her time between her activities and her family, and in the morning till 8 am, she takes care of her 4 children and then goes to work.

### ***Exceling in all roles***

Balancing and doing justice to the roles of a spouse, mother and consultant is not an easy play, she knows it, but is willing to go the extra mile to excel in all roles that she is bestowed with. It is amazing to find a woman who knows that the ride is going to be bumpy but does not let the fear prevent her from embarking on the journey. A woman of class and determination, her approach to life is fantastic. Her job of a consultant is her principal profession, her livelihood, and it is what she loves to do.

### ***Creating an informative platform***

Speaking of her future plans, she says that a few years down the lane, she hopes to become a leader in cashew consulting sector. She would also like to integrate cashew processing and marketing sections. Apart from this, she envisions herself playing the role of a consultant in the entire cashew sector in order to help more people by creating a huge information platform. As the only woman consultant in this field as far as her region is concerned, she would like to see more women in the next years launching into consulting sector.

### ***A much needed step***

She also believes that access to funding and information will help improve the position of women in this industry. This is a step that needs to be taken to bring to light more women like her who are exceptionally talented and can share their valuable knowledge but are shadowed due to avoidable circumstances.

### ***Accomplishing the difficult tasks***

Lastly, when asked to reveal her success mantra and advice the other women who are interested in the cashew industry, she says with perseverance and rigorous work, most difficult tasks can also be accomplished. If you wish to become a leader, nothing can stop you from reaching your goal, all one has to do is strive towards it!

### ***Oriented towards success***

Mrs Ouedraogo's story is inspirational in the sense that as a simple woman living with her husband and four children, she is determined and success oriented. She wants to extend her knowledge to everyone around her and make sure that all can benefit from it. She is focused on the development of all and like the lamp that shines bright in the dark, she serves as the light to everyone around her – with a decade's worth knowledge and experience radiating off of her!





# BENEFITTING THE WORLD

*Ouattara Adjata*

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*When asked to choose between working hard or working smart, a lot may choose the former. However, if a task is done smartly, it may require the same levels of hard work but the yield it brings with it would be much higher.*

## ***The flag bearer of change***

In the year 2005, when Madame Ouattara Adjata realized that most of the farmers were selling their production individually and therefore were not able to negotiate a better price, she became the flag bearer of change. She took the first step by gathering several small middle men and farmers operating in Dabakala area and created COOPAD (Cooperative des producteurs d'Anacarde de Dabakala).

As the founder and President of this organization, she started the journey with the registration process of individual farmers. One hundred and sixty farmers joined the cooperative and they got their official registration document on 18th March, 2015. The organization and their plans were executed to such great standards that today, 314 farmers from 13 villages are part of the cooperative, supplying close to 1500Mt of dried raw cashew nuts to Olam Bouake factory.

## ***A mighty achievement***

Moreover, as the statistics state, COOPAD ranks as the second largest cooperative in the zone of Dabakala-Boniéré, which is an achievement that deserves applause! Their work involves the collection of cashew with the farmers, followed by its transfer to one of their 5 warehouses. Once the stock is offloaded, the cashew is then dried before being loaded and sent to the processing unit in Bouake.

## ***A smart partnership***

In 2010, the organization decided to go a step ahead and in order to maximize the return; they tied the bond of partnership with Olam. It was also during this period that Madame Diallo Adjata used to deliver to Olam depending on the opportunities that she was able to seek. She used to negotiate prices on a day to day basis and based on the comfort of cooperative members, the decision of delivery was taken. Due to this structure of deal, they were not receiving any training or funding from Olam.

After 3 years of working with Olam under the opportunity buying model, in 2013, the two organizations mutually decided to move to another level.

## ***The initiation of the sustainable cashew growers' program***

In 2012, Olam opened a new semi mechanical processing unit in the Bouake region. The cashew sector, as is the case, is characterized by small growers, low yields, poor agricultural practices and a multitude of intermediaries. Thus, there was a need for a large processor like Olam to directly engage with growers and secure the supply through an innovative and sustainable supply chain, aiming at improving the livelihoods of the growers as well as their communities. Keeping this logic in mind, the sustainable cashew growers' program was initiated with the objective of connecting 40.000 farmers to the cashew factory in Bouake.

## ***Receiving trainings to top the scale of brilliance***

Madame Adjata's cooperative has shown interest in this program and it has been accepted in their sustainable procurement network since 2013. Along with their partners, GIZ and IDH, Olam has provided numerous trainings to COOPAD farmers. They have imparted valuable information on good agricultural practices, including the pre and post harvesting techniques; covered topics like child labor, democratic management of the cooperatives and conducted sessions on traceability system and tools.





### ***Surviving the tests***

Throughout the years of their partnership, COOPAD has continued to prove itself time and again. In 2013, they were provided with a mere USD 50,000, and while that was a small amount compared to the potential of the cooperative, Madame Adjata was still able to collect 730 Mt of fully traceable cashew from her network of farmers, establishing the fact that they were an organization to look out for!

### ***Overcoming the storms***

2014 was a particularly strenuous year as the entire cashew sector went through a reform. As the government introduced a minimum price system and started registration of people operating the cashew value chain, new strategies were in demand. In order to withstand the multitude of changes, Madame Adjata organized a couple of meetings with her cooperative members in order to explain the different changes and potential benefit of the reform.

They also managed to convince Olam and obtained a funding of about USD 60,000. In return, they received 907 Mt of cashew from COOPAD, yet another marvelous accomplishment.

### ***Rising in an expected downfall***

The next year, 2015, proved to be a game changing year in the Cote d'Ivoire cashew sector. High price fluctuations were observed in the market. By the end of the season, even the farmers quoted a price much higher than they used to initially receive. In this difficult environment, while one may have expected a downfall and a decrease in the growth rate, COOPAD surprised everyone.

The cooperative produced 1477 Mt, increasing its volume by more than 60% as compared to 2014. This was an outstanding performance and COOPAD was rewarded as one of the best cooperatives in the company's sustainable procurement network. It was in the same year that Madame Adjata made some donations of school kits and cashew plantation maintenance equipment worth 3 million. These were distributed in two villages and were given to each and every farmer who was a member of the cooperative.

### ***Maintaining a balance***

While 2016 was another difficult year because of the high price volatility and high increase in the number of players, COOPAD managed 1317 Mt of raw cashew nuts. Although this is 10% lower than the volume obtained in 2015, given the context, it's still a good number.

### ***Taking up other projects***

With the success of the business and strong partnership with Olam, Madame Ouattara Adjata has been able to invest in other businesses. She has opened 2 oil stations in the area- one in Boniééré and a second one in Dabakala, which is in partnership with TOTAL. The cooperative also bought three vehicles to collect more cashew from the plantation and villages to transport them to the warehouses. They have also expanded their network and along with cashew, cover more commodities like peanuts.

As a goal for the next season, Madame Adjata hopes to supply 2000 Mt of fully traceable and dried raw cashew nuts to the Olam Bouake factory. She would also like to get her cooperative certified as organic and fair trade. Besides this, COOPAD is registered in the 3S- Sustainable Supply System, which is a procurement model providing full traceability to the customers. It brings together the traders, processors, roasters and retailers to provide completely transparent, traceable supply chain of cashews.

### ***Reaching excellence***

Thus, as we see, Madame Ouattara Adjata is a magnificent blessing to the cashew sector whose contributions have helped innumerable people. What started as a small idea to build a collaborative network has succeeded towards becoming a brilliant cashew chain.





# THOSE WHO HOLD THE MEANS, HOLD THE POWER

*Aminata Mane*

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*In order to survive the tough competition of the present world and emerge winners, while we need good tactics and a solid plan, of equal importance is a strong mind and a positive attitude. Everything may be in place, but if we lack the confidence and determination to strive forward and put the plans into action, the results wouldn't reach excellence.*

## ***It's never too late***

The story of 63 years old Ms Aminata MANE is one that speaks along the same lines. Although it has only been about three years since she became a part of the cashew industry, she is currently the President of the board of directors of 'Santa Yalla', an economic interest group, conveying to us that it's never too late to pursue your interests.

## ***With the aim of economic empowerment of women***

Ms MANE had known a number of other women in this sector before starting the cashew business. She had seen them efficiently run cashew processing units and these brave women were highly respected and recognized, thanks to their activities in this sector. The fact that they benefitted from it and were able to make a proper living out of it was commendable. When she herself decided to initiate the Leadership Development Programme in Casamance, one of her aims was the economic empowerment of women through their integration in strong value-added sector such as cashew.

## ***Equipped to excel***

Since great things do not come easy, in order to be best equipped in the work sector, she took up a number of tasks that dealt with capacity reinforcement in basic organization management, marketing and fund raising, advocacy and lobbying, cashew nut and cashew apple processing practices. All of this helped in the reinforcement of her capacities, collaboration with partners intervening in the sector, gaining the confidence of the members and sharing the gained experiences which in turn helped her manage the business which currently employs 500 women workers.

## ***Committed and determined***

Although she did not take up any training in particular nor did she have prior work experience in this field, commitment and determination guided her first steps. And in this short time, as part of the program she has been successfully running, she has had the opportunity to organize two reinforcement workshops benefiting women, concerning cashew apple and cashew nut processing techniques. Their financial and technical partners have also supported the implementation of 'Leadership Development Programme' in Casamance (Senegal).

### ***Providing a supportive platform to women***

Speaking about the response of other women towards her business and their involvement in it, Ms MANE is happy to inform us that labor is available because her company works with many groups and the members are divided in high production areas. Women are provided with a number of facilities, which includes the access to financing in order to strengthen their income generating activities along with the reinforcement of their capacities in cashew nut and apple processing.

The company also aids the women to organize themselves inside the operational groups. Despite all this, she believes that the position of women in the industry can still be improved by taking steps to further strengthen their technical capacities, modernize the processing equipment and by making the access to credit easier.

In her opinion, it is the absence of financial resources and the lack of empowerment that stand as obstacles in the journey of women to become leaders.

### ***Her opinions as the representative of the women's organization***

Keeping in mind that she and her team are representatives of women's organization, when questioned about the situation in regard to dealing with her male counterparts in this field, she says that she does not face any particular problem because they are the ones who recruit the men depending upon the job requirements and they are required to work under them based on clearly defined tasks. Hence, each employee's role and responsibility is well distributed. She also does not have any complains when it comes to receiving recognition for she thinks they are well recognized in the cashew sector and this is due to their commitment, determination and will.

### ***Hurdles in the way***

As for the challenges she faces, she says helping women to get an economic autonomy through the setting up of production unit in the major production areas, access to funding, to intensify the production of quality products with the brand UR Santa Yalla, and fulfilling the need to be present and well-recognized in the market, on the local, regional, national and international levels are some big hurdles that stand in the path.

### ***Finding practical solutions***

However, no matter how mighty the obstacles are, every problem comes with a solution and some of the strategies she and her team adopts are the arrangement of financing with a quick and proper access for raw cashew nuts purchasing, and reinforcement of women's capacity from nuts picking and collection to the final product processing.

### ***Her daily routine***

Since she is in charge of such a huge team, when asked about the tasks that she performs every day, Ms MANE gives a brief of her daily schedule which includes coordination of work done by others, providing technical support, attending meetings to discuss the current position and ways to improve the brand as a whole, building contacts, monitoring and supervision of tasks, among others.

### ***Not one to compromise on quality***

She is also very keen on the quality of the products that are sent into the market in the name of their brand and accepts no compromise in this regard. She confesses that they get slightly higher price in the market because their members have been trained in nuts choice techniques when they are purchased. This is also the reason for the supreme quality of their products.



### ***Investment of time to ensure best results***

Besides, in order to maintain the uniqueness of their brand, they ensure the best quality of the raw nuts. Nuts picking is done by women of their groups, and they invest a lot of time throughout the awareness sessions, to teach them the importance of having good quality nuts. The work is done with love, commitment and desire because the women work for themselves, putting in all their dedication into the job.

### ***A peek into her early life***

Moving on, when asked about her childhood, Ms MANE says that she grew up in Kafountine in Senegal along with her parents. Her family's economic status was more or less stable. She also comments that although she started working in another sector in the beginning of her career, she later realized the potential that the cashew sector holds and understood the large margin by which it can improve the community and the living conditions without blocking her business.

Everyone could benefit from such a sector and that is exactly what she was looking for.

### ***Organizing her tasks***

Given the amount of work and time she puts into her work, it may be understood that it would be a mighty task to strike a work life balance. When questioned about the same, she says that while it may seem difficult, through elaborate planning and an internal management with the family, she is able to set her priorities right. She receives moral support from her family and they are proud of her, for which she is glad. And seeing her commitment, even her family members are getting inclined towards the cashew sector.

### ***Fulfilling a responsibility***

When asked to comment on her profession and what it means to her, she says her work is like priesthood and she feels it is helping her fulfill her responsibility towards the women of the community. While she has been able to achieve a number of her goals, she still has big plans for the future. In the years to come she hopes to turn the women into true producers and make the UR Santa Yalla cashew products an internationally recognized label.

She does not deny that there is still scope for improvement in the job given the fact that they are getting an opening to the cashew world, and are continually engaged in a number of meetings to discuss the different positive changes that can be incorporated.

### ***Setting an example for others to follow***

Through her excellent approach and the will to empower women, Ms MANE has been an asset to the working sector. It is commendable that she has been able to achieve her goals to allow women to access the production means through cashew industry and thus has enabled them to overcome their economic obstacles. Her enterprise has made it possible for women to be able to benefit from the opportunities provided by cashew sector, from the collection and production up to the trading.

Being the chairwoman of the organization, she sees herself as the moral responsible. Obtaining a proper financing remains one of her biggest aims as she feels this will allow them to position women, for those who hold the means, hold the power. She has been the force by which women are willing to integrate the cashew sector in the same way as men and we applaud her for that!



# Looking Beyond the Hurdles

*Kone Kanate Namaro*

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Owner and managing director of a cashew processing unit named CAJU Industry in Kolia, Ivory Coast, Mrs KONE KANATE Namaro has an encouraging story to share!

### ***A nut that could be valued***

When she was married, her husband was the mayor of Kolia, the village where they lived for 27 years. He later went on to work with the FirCA which was engaged in researching funds for agriculture. It was in the midst of this work that he realized cashew could be greatly valued and the couple thus joined the sector together.

In the light of this perspective, Mrs KONE undertook a training from TECHNOSERVE and visited many processing units. When she had gathered enough knowledge, she chose to build a stronger tryst with the cashew industry by starting her own industry. Being into processing from the past three years, now, she is involved full time in her industry of 130 members, her working hours being from 7.00 am to 1.00 pm and 3.00 pm to 6.00 pm.



### ***Her professionalism keeps her going***

She is in charge of all major activities related to the buying of raw cashew, the processing methods, marketing and the trading. While this is a huge responsibility on her shoulders considering the strength of the company is also in large numbers, given her professionalism and love for her work, she manages it with ease.

### ***A labor intensive job***

Commenting on the labor activity in her region, she says, labor is available but when the prospective employees visit the industry and see how difficult it is to work in a cashew processing unit, they leave. So, labor is available in the region but not for cashew activity.

### ***An empathetic partner***

Speaking of striking a work life balance, she beams that her husband is chairman of the board of directors of the industry and thus, understands the nature of the cashew system and the commitment it requires. He is considerate and supportive and as for the children, they are all grown-ups and don't live with her due to which she manages her time well.

### ***Delivering products of quality***

When asked about the uniqueness of the industry and its products, she is of the opinion that the quality of her products stand out amongst others. It is very important for her to deliver a high-quality product.



### ***Trying to make it big***

Also, as a promising venture, they provide trainings and financial help to their women employees. When it comes to dealing with her male colleagues, she does not think they stand as path blocks nor does she feel like she is denied rewards in their comparison. She doesn't look at herself in the place to advice on strategies to improve the position of women in the cashew sector because projecting the larger picture, she envisions herself as a person trying to make it big in the industry.



### ***Hurdles in the path***

When she speaks of the challenges she faces, for anyone in the cashew industry, there are innumerable lessons to learn. Initially, when they had just started, funding was a problem along personnel training, equipment issues, and power supply issues. Besides, Kolia is a village situated at 700 km of the city Abidjan, making it all the more difficult to convey equipment and machines from Abidjan to their destination.

### ***Not one to stop***

However, given the success of the industry, we can guess that she had the vision to look beyond the challenges. In order to make reach her goal, she contacted a number of banks for the funding, but finally only one accepted to finance the project and that's how she was able to buy the machines and start the business.

The rejections from the banks she had contacted and their discouragement did not stop her from trying and putting her plans into action. This leads us to the conclusion that Mrs KONE is a wonderful leader, one that doesn't stop with the tides but who, instead, is willing to work against it.

### ***A milestone to cross***

Her work means everything to her and in the years to come, she foresees her company turning into a big processing unit, producing more than the current annual capacity of 3,000 tons.

She does not see this as an impossible dream, but thinks it to be a milestone that they are capable of crossing. We couldn't agree any less with her when she signs off quoting her favorite ideology to live one's life by, which is - 'If you can dream it, you can do it!'



# THE FRUIT OF LABOR

*Aïssatou Seydi*

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*When you look for something with a desperate heart, you will eventually find it. Never settle for less, know your worth and do not be ashamed to reach the high standards you think you deserve. It may be a long chase, but if one craves to succeed in life, they must be ready to look around with an open mind and maybe they'd find what they've been looking for all this while.*

## **The best decision**

When Ms Aïssatou SEYDI was looking for a company where she could work to earn a livelihood as well as make the best use of her time, she was advised by a local NGO to explore the cashew sector, given its obvious scope. And as she looks back, accepting this advice was probably one of the best decisions of her life.

President of the economic interest group FASS DIOM, processor and Trader in Ziguinchor, SENEGAL, 56 year old Ms Aïssatou SEYDI is a woman of many talents. With over a decade worth of experience in the cashew industry, she has abundant knowledge and vast understanding of the sector.

## **The first step**

As we trace back to her journey, we see that although she knew a few women in cashew business, they were used to doing traditional processing, and she wasn't familiar with women who were managers themselves. Thus, Ms SEYDI took the first step by educating herself and opted for a vocational training in local products processing (fruits and vegetables), local cereals and wood and non-wood forest products.

## **Education came handy when she didn't have much experience**

Trainings in cashew nut processing, in cashew processing unit management, and a few years later a training in cashew apple processing, and non-fermented juice also helped her strengthen the foundation and gain an understanding of the different zones of the market.

This education served as a tool for her to begin her very own enterprise even though she did not have any prior experience in it. While many other ladies were still into the traditional methods, she didn't shy away from the idea of setting up her own work place and putting in her sweat and blood to establish it. She believed learning to be a continuous process and constantly took up a number of trainings in cashew processing techniques, and business management to equip her in the organization.





### ***Content with her achievements***

With a current strength of eight workers, with seven of them being women, Ms SEYDI is glad to have come this far and to have been able to provide a platform for other women to work and proceed with her.

### ***Ensuring smooth flow***

Cooking, pre-drying, oven drying, de-hulling, grading and packaging are some of the daily chores that are carried out at the enterprise every day. However, being the Managing Director, Ms SEYDI's main job is to supervise the work being done by the other members of the company as well as to ensure the smooth flow of labor without any hassles.

### ***A fair trade***

Given the amount of effort she has put into the industry, when asked, she beams that a lot of people, especially women, are attracted towards her company and labor is available without any complains. In regard to her male counterparts, she admits that neither does she face any problems from their side nor is she denied rewards in their comparison. She is positive that she is recognized in the cashew sector and everyone receives the fruits of their efforts.

Having said that, she is of the opinion that providing an access to appropriate equipment and raw materials will help improve the overall position of women in the industry. She also believes that the lack of adequate funding prevents women from becoming leaders in the cashew industry.

### ***An ethical approach***

While they do not offer any fancy benefits, her company has an ethical approach of work which involves offering a fair and unbiased policy to all. Taking into consideration the intense amount of work put in by the laborers, they are offered lunch during the break and a short time to relax and refresh.

### ***Reaching high standards***

When asked about the uniqueness of her products and what makes them stand out, we were informed that their company promises international standards for their products, and this is also the reason for their high prices in the market. It is no easy job to reach the high standards set and she faces a number of challenges in the process, which includes access to funding and inventories of raw materials. Extremely high and unsteady prices and equipment modernization also remain some big issues that still need to be overcome.

However, at the moment, direct collaboration with the producers and microfinance support are some of the strategies that the company has adopted in order to ensure the easy flow of work.

### ***Sharing the ups and lows with family***

Speaking about her family and personal life, she says a few of her family members work with her in the factory and share her struggles and success. And those members who are not directly involved in the factory, ease her tasks by doing the household chores due to which she can concentrate and spend more time at work – which rounds up to about 10 hours per day. It is due to this reason that she is able to strike a positive work life balance and their support helps her aim higher. She is extremely passionate of her work, and simply put, it means the world to her.

### ***Focusing on big numbers***

In the years to come, she hopes to expand her factory and see it grow with a processing capacity of 1000 tons per annum. While that is a big number, with her focused vision and the urge to improve with every passing day, it definitely is not impossible to accomplish the dream!





# Rocky PATHS LEAD TO BEAUTIFUL DESTINATIONS

*Bamba Noumina*

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Clouds of darkness disappear to give way to sunlight, efforts contributed brick by brick someday result in marvelous monuments, and finally, sometime, somewhere, rocky paths lead to beautiful destinations.

A native of Ivory Coast, Mrs Bamba Noumina's journey has not been smooth, to say the least, but is one that teaches us innumerable lessons.

## ***Ivory Coast - An advanced land housing highly educated teachers***

To understand her native briefly, we see that Ivory Coast, officially named the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, is a country located in West Africa. Ivorian economy is largely market-based and relies heavily on agriculture, with smallholder cash-crop production being dominant. Unlike traditional accounts of African countries, the Ivory Coast economy is the most advanced in sub-Saharan Africa, and one of the most developed economies in Africa as a whole.

The country is also the largest exporters of cocoa and one of the largest producers of coffee beans. Despite a relatively low literacy rate, Ivory Coast is perhaps the only country in Africa with a large presence of highly educated teachers in schools inducted directly from very high-level government ministries and other prime labor pool.

## ***She chose to stand out***

Now, coming back to the focus of this write up, Mrs Bamba, we are truly inspired by her journey. Since we broadly have an idea of the land she hails from, we may have imagined her to go with the flow and do the expected. However, what we do not know about her is that she is the CEO and Owner of ANAD-Sarl, a cashew enterprise with about 100 employees.

While the destination she has reached may delude a third person, what he may fail to see is the rocky path that she has survived to witness this day. For instance, as we learn about her childhood, we see that due to her circumstances, she had to stop school after obtaining her elementary certificate, and become a trader where she was involved in the purchase of cashew apple in Abidjan and its sale in Dabakala. In 2008, however, she got a bigger opportunity and was selected for a project launched by RONGEAD, from where she learnt about cashew processing and received the training given by INADES.

## ***Initiation of her empire – ANAD-Sarl***

It was this training that laid the foundation for her to initiate ANAD-Sarl which, back then, was a small processing unit in Dabakala with a capacity of 20 MT. With 4 semi-automatic machines and 25 employees, she started



producing kernels in small quantities. Although she did not have prior work experience, her earlier days as a trader helped give her a rough idea to handle different areas in her unit.

It was her dedication and hard work that led her unit to be selected by the United Nations project “PACIR” (Trade and Regional Integration Support Programme) in order to be trained on raw cashew nuts quality assessment as well as the different stages in raw cashew processing. The programme helped her tread further in her successful journey for it equipped her unit with two automatic huskers and others machines, thereby allowing her to increase the production capacity.

### ***Her desire to value the product served as an inspiration***

For the purpose of improving her products quality, Mrs BAMBBA received several trainings, provided by Technoserve and Olam. All these trainings provided her the skills and techniques to run her enterprise for prior to this, she did not know anyone from this business whom she could look up to. In fact, she was inspired to work in the cashew sector as she was willing to value the local product, as cashew nut is highly produced in Dabakala.

### ***There's no looking back***

Today, Mrs Bamba's unit has a capacity production of 500 MT with 100 employees, more than 70 of which are women. Different varieties of kernels are produced in ANAD-Sarl: white kernels, toasted kernels, caramelized kernels and also by-products such as cashew paste and cashew kernel juice.

From starting a small scale business where she was required in every field, today she has employees under her who carry out the work, and she is mostly required for supervision. For instance, in her processing unit, there is a production manager, a marketing manager, a store manager. Roles are shared throughout the whole chain, she only intervenes when needed.

### ***It hasn't been a cakewalk***

Witnessing a steady growth curve in her professional life from when she started 15 years back to balancing her personal life, it definitely isn't a cakewalk. We see that after her husband passed away over a decade back, she has been a single mother to her four children ever since and has fulfilled that role with excellence whilst juggling her career.

When asked about this, she says, she has reached a stage where she comes to manage the time between her processing unit and her family quite easily, as her children are more or less grown-up and they understand that she needs to work to take care of them. Besides, her daughter, Diaby Assana, who has her bachelor degree in English, plays the role of marketing director in the enterprise. The fact that she has her family member help out at the enterprise is definitely an added advantage.

### ***A driving force for the womenfolk***

Currently, she is also a member of Group SONMON, a consortium of four cashew processing companies owners in which she is the only woman. Along with this, she is the president of an NGO that helps women and makes them aware of their rights. This serves to be beneficial for it helps her offer advice and aid her women employees working at her enterprise, thereby serving as special benefits that her female workers receive. Such favors help in keeping the women in her enterprise because although labor is available in her region, she believes men are attracted towards working at gold mines.

In her view, to improve the position of women who are attracted to this industry, government and cashew institutions need to do major progress in terms of access to funding. A lot of women wish to be involved in the cashew business but are limited because they don't have the capital needed. Setting up a working capital to these women will be helpful.

### ***She believes in finding solutions***

Speaking of the USP of her products, she says their quality makes them stand out in the market. Besides, being a woman entrepreneur helps her enterprise stay unique in the generally male dominated zone.

However, when it comes to some of the challenges she faces, raw cashew nuts supply and financing top the list. But, being the logical person, she adopts a strategy to resolve both of these challenges. In order to get enough raw cashew nuts to run her factory, she negotiates with producers in the bush, for instance if the raw material is offered at fca 600/kg at the farm gate, she guarantees them she will offer fca 700/kg once the raw cashew nuts have been processed in her unit. But not all the farmers accept her deal, as a lot of them need that money for living, and cannot wait that long to get paid. She tries striking a balance and finding a way through the challenges.

### ***Big dreams, bigger efforts***

Speaking of her profession, she says she holds it very close to her heart as it is what helps her survive and she is deeply involved in her work.

In her journey further, Mrs Bamba Noumina aims to create a bigger factory and become the leader of Ivory Coast cashew processing industry. Five years down the line, instead of 500 MT of kernels, she sees herself producing 2000 MT; she also hopes for her processing unit to become a big plant with good equipment and she is working hard to reach those goals.

Her magical ingredient which has brought her so far in the journey of life is reflected in her words when she states that if you are willing to succeed, you will and nothing can come in your way. You need to set yourself a goal and take the necessary measures to achieve it!





# ACQUIRING A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

*Sarr Yande*

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As the processing unit manager in SOKONE, Ms SARR YANDE has about eight years of experience in the humongous cashew field. A dedicated and hard working woman, the Senegalese lady's story is one that tells us no matter what the world says, it's our vision and belief that truly counts.

### ***Cashew opened the door to endless possibilities***

Fluent in French, Wolof and Serere, when asked about her involvement in the sector, she informs us that cashew is a business they discovered in their region, but back then, it was only about the consumption and the variety of dimensions related to the nut weren't paid attention to.

However, she is grateful to a program based in Fatick district that trained them in management and processing practices, which sowed the seed of thought, helping her seriously ponder over the idea of working in the cashew sector. Thus, contrary to her earlier outlook on cashew, the nut that was merely seen as an eatable now opened doors to endless possibilities.

### ***A plunge with no regrets***

With no prior experience but a strong backing received through the program, along with the aim of earning a livelihood and creating employment for women like her, she plunged into the promising cashew sector. Apprenticeship, patience, a vision that cashew sector is a lead chain were some of her acquired skills and thoughts that helped her build the love for her work.

### ***She is a satisfied manager who hopes for the best***

With satisfaction that she is able to contribute to her locality's development and with the hope that one day she'd be better equipped to cater to the demanding market, Ms YANDE works endlessly, investing her precious time and commendable efforts.

While she has a number of partners, Ms YANDE is mainly in charge of monitoring the business, including the purchase, processing and promotion of sale. Working with her six other women counterparts, they all put in every bit of effort to make the company work and hope for it to rise the ladder of success.

### ***Quality over quantity***

At SOKONE, they promise high quality cashew nuts. She confesses that the products' prices are high due to the lack of resources to process in large quantities but vouches that they never compromise on the quality.

### ***Encouraging workers to think beyond***

She regards the availability of labor and raw materials as big boons and hopes that with proper funding, they'd be able to make better use of such blessings in the years to come.

While she does not face particular problems when it comes to men and a number of youngsters and women are attracted to the work, due to strained means, there are not many complimentary benefits that they offer. However, the company encourages and aids the workers to think beyond and engage in other activities of their choice that would lead to them earn a little extra.

### ***A strong strategy key for success of women***

In her opinion, in order to improve the condition of women in the cashew sector, a framework that allows them to work to their full potential must be setup.

They must be given access to land, equipment, investments and financing and production must be secured to enable fair competition. She also points out that a platform for them to receive authentic information on cashew market and trainings must be created. Women possess a lot of potential and they are even willing to explore their abilities, she is confident that with a strategized program, they will be better skilled to reach higher.

Specifically, lack of equipment, trainings, infrastructures and market information are the hurdles that prevent women from treading forward.

### ***Channelizing plans into actions***

Thankful for a supportive family and managing her work and personal life to the best of her ability, Ms YANDE believes she, and all women in general, can receive better posts and start their own enterprises if their plans are funded along with being channeled in the right direction.

### ***She has mighty goals to achieve***

Commenting that there is room for improvement and she still has a long way to go, in the years to come she dreams of running a big company with equipment, investments, trainings and adequate financing to be able to export the products. Not forgetting people around her, one of her big goals remains to be able to create jobs and provide employment so people are given a chance to engage in productive work and benefit out of it.

### ***She believes in an all-round development***

While she still works in a small scale business, we see Ms YANDE is a visionary, who thrives towards the growth of self and the environment. She wishes for the society to succeed and we hope that her positive attitude to focus on solutions for problems as well as her efforts to work as a team takes her far in life!





# EXCELLING IN HER FIELD

*Toure Diabate Massogbe*

CEO of SITA, a cashew nuts processing company, Mrs TOURE DIABATE MASSOGBE of Ivory Coast is a smart and successful woman who has accomplished great heights in the cashew sector. Fluent in French and having done her Technical Diploma, she has been working in this sector for more than ten years now.

### ***Skilled in the sector***

Before initiating her company, she has worked extensively in the cashew sector, even heading a cashew based food industry for more than a decade. The work experience from the job helped her significantly when she started her venture, with the passion and keenness to develop a cash crop in the North-West of IVC.

### ***Working towards development***

The idea of creating the company struck her in 1980 when she decided to join her husband in ODIENNE. She linked with him to get involved into developing a land classified as one of the poorest regions in the country and observed that the people had tremendous potential. The rational exploitation of this potential could permit them to overcome poverty.



It's from that standpoint that she created the Cashew Planters' Cooperative of Ivory Coast (COPLACI). This cooperative was initiated in 1981 as a test plantation of 10 ha, which has now evolved to 150 ha in LOWANA, a place located at 10km of ODIENNE.

### ***One step leads to the other***

Thanks to that plantation, she was also able to start a promotional campaign for cashew culture in the entire region



of ODIENNE, with a free distribution of seeds to the producers in addition to a training on planting practices. In turn, with the help of this operation, the culture of cashew experienced an exponential development in ODIENNE. The area planted has improved from 120 hectares in 1981, to 20000+ ha in 2008.

To ensure a sustainable market for the raw cashew produced in ODIENNE, in 2000, Mrs DIABATE created her company SITA, with a processing capacity of 3000 tons per annum, which is so far the biggest private investor of the region.

#### ***SITA came as a blessing for people***

She believes that with hard work and perseverance, she has gained more experience in her line of business. Employing about 1,005 people when the work is in full swing, 850 of which are women in the factory, SITA has proved to a boon for the people of this region. She informs that all of them eagerly await the payday, to reap the fruits of their hard work!

#### ***She strongly believes in equality***

As the president of the Women's Entrepreneurship Development Commission within the General Confederation of Ivory Coast's Enterprises (CGECI), she constantly claims the equality of competencies between men and women. According to her, women must have the same employment opportunities as men.

She believes there is no gender distinction and she deals with men workers on the same terms as women employee. Also, she is not of the opinion that she is denied rewards when compared to the male counterparts in the sector. While she cannot say that they are all-knowing, she is sure they have made their way through this sector which has long been ruled by men.

#### ***Her take on equipping the womenfolk***

As for improving the position of women, she thinks women are used to underestimating themselves, although they have an excellent management potential in addition to their rigor and flexibility to administer activities and people. According to her, the gender is not the real issue. What women need is to be confident in themselves, believe in what they do and find the appropriate support.



To ensure this, they must be willing to take some risks and engage into income-generating activities. Women must endeavor to get into the processing sector no matter what the activity is, because only processing gives more added value to the agricultural products. She also advises that women need to know the government pays attention to them and has set up some assistance services to the feminine gender, such as the PROPACOM, and some other projects.

“We must know that the CGECI within which is Women Commission, for which I am the president, works hard to put women at the top, by supporting them through their income-generating activities, and keeps making contact with the funders (such as BAD). We need to know that to be heard and listened, we need to form some economic interest groups or any other association and mutual with economic and social nature,” she further comments.

### ***Standing out amongst other women***

Speaking of her processing unit, she says it’s unique due to the fact that it is the first food industry enterprise in cashew sector, run by a woman. Their products stand out amongst others because of the diversity of the different processed kernels that they commercialize. Of course in some surfaces, one will find high priced products in comparison with their products.

Speaking about the nature of her work, she says she has a direct implication in her company’s activities. In other ways, just like the employees, she is at the office from eight in the morning and spends the whole day coordinating the different departments.



**SALLE DE DEPELLICULAGE**





### ***Challenges and strategies***

As for the challenges, finding resources to finance investments and run the business; management of human resources; developing plans to conquest a market share to increase sales revenue; determinate a profit margin to comfort her business' durability are some of the big tasks she encounters. To top it all, though, the lack of financing stands as the main obstacle to business developments regarding the cashew sector. In her opinion, with proper funding, they can become the leader of cashew sector in Ivory Coast and perhaps in Africa.

Besides, to overcome the challenges, she is on the constant lookout for strategies and strives for a win-win partnership contract between the State and the private sector, development partners.

### ***Fulfilling all roles***

As for striking a work life balance, she says she is happy to have the support and encouragement of her lovely family members who understand her work. She believes in complete organization of tasks to ensure she does not compromise on anything. She manages to conciliate her status as a mother and wife along with her status of CEO.

### ***Humbled to have reached great heights***

In the years to come, Mrs DIABATE sees herself as a leader in her line of business, while also putting a price on the social and humanitarian segments. In her humble opinion, she credits her profession for giving her everything she has today. A brilliant officer, she abandoned everything to get into cashew sector and today, she takes pride in being part of this sector.

Most definitely, the efforts she has been putting for years have paid off!





# "SWAPNA NAGARI" INDEED A DREAM COME TRUE FOR DIFFERENTLY-ABLED

*Naseema Hurzuk*



## ***Lajawab Cashew Processing Training Unit'***

Sindhudurg is a major Cashew growing region. To provide employment opportunities to the differently-abled, Helpers of the Handicapped Kohlapur (HOHK) created a special cashew processing unit 'Lajawab Cashew Processing Training Unit'

## ***Life of Dignity for differently-abled***

HOHK was founded in 1984 by Naseema Hurzuk, who was struck with paraplegia at the age of 16 and, thereafter, confined to a wheelchair. Though she completed her graduation and even worked at the Central Excise Department—she experienced the trials of working in an environment that is not friendly for the handicapped. Along with friends and like-minded persons such as Rajani Karkare-Deshpande and Manohar Deshbhratar, they founded HOHK to support the physically challenged to live a life of dignity. Their work expands areas of health, education

and livelihoods, including a rehabilitation centre and hostel.

## ***Employment for underemployed and unemployed women***

The region grows some of the best cashews in the world—and Hurzuk along with her team realized its potential ability for processing in a handicapped-friendly manner while at the same time bringing in a lucrative price. At present it employs 130 people, of which 75 percent of the workforce is physically challenged. The rest are mostly women supporting the processing functions who are unemployed or underemployed women from the neighboring villages. It processes close to 1,200 kg of cashews in a day. This unit not only





provides them employment but also equips them with vocational training so that they can seek employment in their villages or nearer home.

***Free Food and lodging facilities to the employees***

The employees are paid on the basis of their function and contribution — averaging INR 3,500 a month and also given free food and lodging facilities. They have been trained on grading of raw cashews there are 22–26 varieties that fetch different prices from INR 550 a kg at the lowest grade to over INR 1,000 a kg at the highest grade level.

***Vocational training and machinery to reduce strain***

The CPU has now been operational since 2005 and is providing vocational training and employment to nearly 80 persons with disability and 25 underemployed women from the neighboring village. To reduce physical strain of vocational trainees and staff, they have installed a number of machines like cashew peeling machine, cashew grading machine and conveyor belts. These machines have enhanced the productivity of the unit.

‘It’s not been easy — we didn’t have a set model to replicate. After in depth research on how to create a working environment that is handicapped-friendly, we introduced tweaks such as special tables as against sitting on the floor in traditional set-ups and activities to maintain the stamina of our employees through the day. All this has led to the success of Lajawab,’ says Hurzuk.

The financial discipline that you often don’t see in many urban units — is however reflected in this rural unit. Lajawab has kept costs low capital costs incurred in the last 10 years are Rs 1.16 crore, while working capital requirements are typically in the range of Rs 35–40 lakhs per year. They focused on financial growth — and last year for the first time redistributed profits of 50% amongst long time loyal employees who has been striving since the inception and made Lajawab the brand that is.





# The URGE TO Help

*Jai Rajkumar*



While a full-fledged education and experience in the field one wishes to work in forms an excellent platform, all of us need a starting point. And it isn't necessarily too late to begin one's career while learning on the job and acquiring the skills needed from people around, who have already mastered the task!

### ***A beneficial transition***

For a long time, 41 year old Mrs Jai Rajkumar saw herself as a humble housewife, taking care of the family and household chores. However, when her husband, who owns and operates cashew processing factories under the name 'Intersnack Rajkumar Implex' from, more than 20 years decided to expand, she saw a role for herself to assist him. Thus, with the support of her husband and their children, she developed the interest.

### ***Understanding the nature of work***

Since this was an on the spur decision, she did not receive any formal training before joining the factory. Once she decided to get involved, she started by visiting the factories to observe the nature in which they functioned. After a few visits, she started learning about the process from senior employees. She strongly believes this has helped her understand the intricate details more clearly and has led her to utilize the learning's to work effectively.

Thus, she learnt the needed skills on the job from family and from the old experienced employees in the organization. Her initial involvement kindled the interest and desire to contribute to the growth and success of the family enterprise.

### ***Taking the enterprise forward***

Fluent in Hindi, Tamil and English, Mrs Jai now has ten years of experience in the cashew sector and has played a mighty role in bringing the company forward and helping it reach new levels of excellence.

In the enterprise of more than hundred employees, her work involves processing and operation monitoring. Her main focus lies on monitoring output, analyzing daily operations results from each factory, identifying deviations and coordinating to ensure corrective action to arrest inefficiencies. She also undertakes additional responsibilities of worker skill enhancement.

### ***Their unique attributes***

The enterprise boasts of a single roof processing technology and has all mechanized operations under one roof which enables better process control, thereby creating confidence in the buyers' mind about the product. Over the years, it has resulted in building a reputation and credibility which commands a premium.

### ***Getting labor isn't a hassle***

Speaking of labor availability in the region, she said factories are located in places where labor is not a big problem. While other manual factories have difficulties in getting labor especially for the shelling and cutting sections, this is not a major issue in their factories which have mechanical shelling. Labor can be attracted by cleaner factories and better working conditions apart from reasonable wages, she suggests.

As for the facilities provided, she elaborates that they cover all basics including good bathrooms, canteens, transportation and free medical camps.

### ***The male mindset***

Speaking of the males, she thinks there is certain resistance from the employees to accept women from the owner's family. In her opinion, this must be overcome by showing performance and by demonstrating desire and ability to improve the operations which will keep everyone connected with the organization.

In general, men hold the post of supervisors, so it is easy to handle them with weekly and monthly targets.

### ***Women can be leaders***

She hopes to improve the position of the women by skill enhancement, improving efficiency to earn more and giving them the chance to rotate in different sections to reduce fatigue or boredom. Both lack of opportunity and lack of interest prevent them from becoming leaders in the industry.

### ***A difficult task***

Elaborating on the challenges, she says ensuring skilled labor in respective sections and implementing knowledge in latest technology as per food safety standards stand as difficult tasks. To overcome this, she suggests regular training for skill enhancement; better process control to ensure quality and food safety, reducing wastages and increasing productivity will be helpful.

### ***Hoping to be an achiever***

Speaking of her family, she says they are very supportive and she balances her personal and professional life with their help coupled with efficient time management.

To stay afloat and rise above, she tries to have a focused approach to tasks, inculcate systems over aphorism and by being a continuous learner. She also seeks analysis of problems to find solutions and bottlenecks to improve efficiency and enhance productivity.

Her work is a source of fulfillment and gratification to her and in the years to come, she sees herself as a high achiever, enabling women empower themselves in the cashew industry.





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# Abbreviation

ACA: African cashew Alliance

ACi: African Cashew initiative

ADPP: Ajuda de Desenvolvimento de Povo para Povo/Development Aid from People to People (DAPP)

AFETRAPA: Association on of Women Processors of Agricultural Products

BMZ: The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development

Bsc: Bachelor of science

CATEK: Centre for Advanced Technologies Electronics Research

CCA: Cotton and Cashew Development, Cote d Ivory

CDS's: Community Development Societies

CEO: Chief Executive Officer

CGECI: The General Confederation of Ivory Coast's Enterprises

CII: The Confederation of Indian Industry

ComCashew: Competitive Cashew initiative

COOPAD: Cooperative desproducteursd'Anacarde de Dabakala.

COPLACI: The Cashew Planters' Cooperative of Ivory Coast

CRIG: the Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana

GFSI: The Global Food Safety Initiative

GIZ: The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ, now GIZ)/ German International Co-operation

HACCP: Hazard analysis and critical control points

HIV: the human immunodeficiency virus

HOHK: Helpers of the Handicapped Kolhapur

HRM: Human resource management

IAM: Cotton Institute of Mozambique

ICAF: Ingenierie Conseil Audit Formation et divers

IDH: the Sustainable Trade Initiative

INCAJU: Instituto de Fomento do Caju (INCAJU)/ Cashew Promotion Institute, Mozambique

INR: Indian National rupee



IRD: International Relief and Development

ISO: International Organization for Standardization

KNUST: Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology

LTD: Limited

MD: Managing Director

MT: Metric ton

NABARD: National Bank for Agriculture & Rural Development

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

NVQ: National Vocational Qualification

OSD: Organizational Development Center

PACIR: Trade and Regional Integration Support Programme

PADA: Support Program for Agricultural Diversification

PDIF: Development Program of Fatick

Pp Presentation: Power Point Presentation

PPP: Public Private Partnership Programme

ProCAD: Framework support Programme for Agricultural Diversification

RCN: Raw Cashew Nut

SIETTA: International Exhibition of Cashew-Processing Equipment and Technologies

SITA: State Information Technology Agency, South Africa

SMEs: Small and Medium-sized Enterprise

SOTRIA-B: Industrial Cashew Processing Society in Burkina Faso

UNIDO: The United Nations Industrial Development Organization

US: United States of America

USD: United States Dollar

USDA: United States Department of Agriculture,

USAID: The United States Agency for International Development



## Promoting the Competitiveness of the African Cashew Sector

The Competitive Cashew initiative aims at:

- 1) Raise cashew nuts production and quality
- 2) Increase quantity of cashew nut and by-product processing
- 3) Introduce appropriate cashew processing technologies
- 4) Create business relationships along the value chain
- 5) Organize key stakeholders around shared goals. Advocate policies in favor of cashew production and processing.
- 6) Promote consumption of cashew kernels in Africa



In Partnership with



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the Source and Destination*

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