



# BUILDING CAPACITIES FOR A SUSTAINABLE AFRICAN CASHEW INDUSTRY



**Cotonou, Benin**

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**“Exploring inclusiveness for holistic and sustainable development within the cashew sector.”**

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# Available, rich, yet underutilised resources...

- **Women make up >60%** of the cashew sector workforce
- They are mostly engaged in:
  - **Value addition/ innovation** – factory hands in processing factories; by-product processors
  - **Production** – grafters, harvesters, farm hands, etc.
  - **By-product research** & new product development
  - **Trade** – mostly retail
  - **Digital Solutions & extension** (youth)



# ... the problem

Despite being worthy resources and important sources of credible information and useful experiences that the sector can benefit immensely from:

- women and youth are **hardly visible in decision making circles**
- their **opinions are rarely solicited** in strategy development discussions
- **decisions are made for them** and very rarely with them.
- Seeming **lack of awareness or perhaps intentionality** of the need for their inclusion.





# Questions this panel discussion will address ...



- What are the **current roles and contributions** of women and youth to the sector? Are there any achievements or solutions we are missing out on?
- Are they being **consulted** adequately in **strategy development** for the sector?
- How can we **practically and intentionally involve women and youth** in the sector's development going forward?
- What **potential** does involving women in integral decision making and implementation wield for the sector?
- What would an **active inclusion** of women and youth in the sector's sustainable development **look like**?
- How do they enhance the conversation on **sustainability**?



# Bénédicte AKAKPO-BADOU



- A **Researcher** at the Central Laboratory for Plant and Improvement Biotechnology, Faculty of Science and Technology at the University of Abomey-Calavi (Benin).
- An **agronomist** with a passion for scientific research, entrepreneurship and agricultural innovation.
- She holds various degrees in Chemistry-Biology-Geology, Cellular Physiology and Pharmacology, Plant Genetic Resources and Crop Protection from the University of Abomey-Calavi.
- Conducted extensive research into the use of plant biotechnologies for the mass production of cashew seeds in the context of climatic variability in Benin.
- Holds **PhD in Plant Production Sciences and Techniques** with a specialization in Biotechnology and Seed Science.
- Bénédicte has **published several scientific articles** on the use of plant biotechnologies to improve cashew cultivation through *in vitro* cultivation applications and adapting cashew cultivation to climate change.
- **An international conference speaker, wife and a proud mother.**

# Sahadatou ATTA

- A **cashew producer** and the **first female president** of the Cashew Producers Association of Benin (FENAPAB).
- Began her career as an **animator in a forest resource restoration project**.
- Inspired by her father, a retired soldier who devoted his later years to farming, she ventured into **cashew farming with her family**.
- With support from GIZ/MOVE, she participated in the Master Training Program (MTP), where she gained key insights into agricultural best practices and **honed advocacy skills to promote women's inclusion in decision-making roles**.





# Olamide ALAO-AKALA

- An **agribusiness entrepreneur, speaker, and passionate investor.**
- **Founder** of UMèRA Farms Nigeria Limited and UMèRA Business School.
- An **Executive Board Member** and audit committee chairman at Doje Microfinance Bank.
- holds a diploma in Law, BSc. in Sociology, an MSc. in Human Resource Management and is a PhD candidate in International Agribusiness from institutions in Nigeria and the UK.
- Dedicated to **philanthropy**, she has spearheaded initiatives like CEO WOMEN (since 2018) – transforming 30 rural women into entrepreneurs, the UMèRA Business School (founded in 2022), the *Africa Made for More Conference*, and the annual UMèRA Boost Conference (graduating 900+ youths).
- a **John Maxwell Certified leadership consultant**, Olamide actively promotes leadership development through conferences.
- **an accomplished author** '*The Rich Christian*' (2023) and '*Nine Strategies Business Startups Fail to Recognize*' (2022)

# Serge KPONOU



- **Co-Founder and CEO of Tolaro Global** – a cashew processing and export company which **employs 600+** workers in Benin.
- Serge has **extensive experience in logistics and supply chain management** across different industries.
- Together with his wife and co-founder:
  - ❑ launched a non-profit organization called ***Projects for Progress***, which works with women to address community issues.
  - ❑ founded a trading business called ***Beyond the Nut***, which promotes and sells some of the products from the Tolaro Global factory.
- Serge is **bilingual** and fluently speaks English and French.



# Adelaide LAOROU



- **President** of the National Union of Cashew Processing Cooperatives in Benin (UNCTPC).
- **Independent consultant** with extensive expertise and proven knowledge of agri-food processing techniques, decentralization and local development, organizational development of associations, design and facilitation of training modules, social mobilization, and gender and development issues.
- She holds a Master's degree in Local Development and Decentralization from the University of Abomey-Calavi.
- **Married and mother of two children (boy and girl).**



# Donald TCHAOU



- Founder of **TIC AGROBUSINESS**, an expert in **ICT** for sustainable development, with 10 years' experience in integrating digital technologies into the agricultural sector.
- **Has developed digital tools** to improve farmers' yields and management. Initiatives include:
  - *DigiKiosks* to facilitate the adoption of innovative solutions
  - production of extension videos to facilitate GAP adoption
  - a platform for sending voice messages in local languages,
  - set-up of call centres for producers using IVR (interactive voice response) functionality
  - ICT-based agricultural advice (maize, cashew, pineapple, market gardening, rice, etc.)
  - distribution of meteorological information to producers in Benin and Togo
  - ICT support for market access
  - Farm management and monitoring, pest control, etc.
- Donald runs **OUR VOICE**, a startup offering an advanced platform for customer relationship management, and **AGROLAB**, an incubator dedicated to supporting agricultural and craft projects.
- To date, more than 30,000 producers have been impacted by TIC's tools.



***Now let's talk!!!***