

2026 AFRICAN CASHEW ALLIANCE (ACA) ANNUAL CASHEW CONFERENCE SYNTHESIS REPORT

Theme: Sustainable Cashew Supply through Policy, Investment and Partnership

Venue: La Palm Royal Beach Hotel, Accra, Ghana

Date: 15 – 18 September 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2026 Annual Cashew Conference of the African Cashew Alliance (ACA), held in Accra, Ghana, brought together stakeholders from across the African and global cashew value chain to deliberate on strategies to achieve a more sustainable, competitive, and resilient cashew industry. The conference was held under the theme “Sustainable Cashew Supply through Policy, Investment and Partnership.” Discussions focused on the major opportunities and constraints affecting the development of the African cashew industry, including sector policy, production and productivity, processing, investment, digitization, climate change, access to finance, women and youth participation, good agricultural practices, post-harvest management, pests and diseases, food safety and global market development.

The conference emphasized that Africa's position as a major cashew-producing region presents significant opportunities for economic transformation, employment creation, value addition and rural development. However, achieving these opportunities requires coordinated interventions across the entire value chain. A recurring message throughout the conference was the need to move beyond increasing production alone and focus on productivity, processing efficiency, local consumption, investment, data systems, quality standards and climate resilience. The conference identified policy reform, research and development, extension, technology, digitization, finance, public-private partnerships and regional cooperation as critical drivers of sustainable growth.

The conference also focused on climate change and its implications for cashew production. Participants highlighted the need for climate-smart agriculture, farm-specific resilience plans, improved pollination, water-retention systems, integrated soil fertility management, insurance and carbon-credit opportunities. The conference further recognized the importance of strengthening African processing capacity and increasing domestic and continental consumption of cashew products. The development of direct relationships between farmers and processors, appropriate processing technologies, food safety standards and certification systems were identified as important elements of a competitive value chain.

Overall, the conference demonstrated that the future competitiveness of the African cashew sector will depend on the ability of stakeholders to work collaboratively, invest for the long term, embrace technology and innovation, and build resilient and efficient value chains.

1. INTRODUCTION

The cashew industry has become an increasingly important component of agricultural development and international trade in Africa. The sector provides income and employment for millions of farmers and value-chain actors and has significant potential for industrialization through local processing and value addition. Against this background, the 2026 ACA Annual

Cashew Conference provided a platform for stakeholders to assess developments in the sector and identify strategies for addressing emerging challenges.

The conference theme, “Sustainable Cashew Supply through Policy, Investment and Partnership,” reflected the need for a comprehensive approach to the development of the sector. The conference discussions demonstrated that sustainable cashew development requires coordinated interventions from governments, producers, processors, financial institutions, investors, development partners, researchers and other private-sector actors.

The conference covered six plenary sessions and nine forum sessions addressing policy, production, investment, digitization, finance, climate change, women-led enterprises, good agricultural practices, processing, food safety, pests and diseases, and global markets.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE

The conference provided an opportunity to:

1. Review developments and emerging trends in the African cashew sector.
2. Examine policy measures required to promote sustainable cashew supply.
3. Identify opportunities for increasing productivity and processing.
4. Explore investment and financing opportunities across the value chain.
5. Examine the role of digitization and reliable data in sector development.
6. Discuss climate change risks and opportunities in cashew production.
7. Promote public-private partnerships.
8. Strengthen women's participation and enterprise development.
9. Promote good agricultural practices and improved post-harvest management.
10. Address pest and disease challenges.
11. Explore opportunities for increasing domestic and continental cashew consumption.
12. Strengthen collaboration among African producing countries and international partners.

3. CONFERENCE SESSIONS

The conference was made up of plenary and forum sessions;

The Plenary Sessions covered;

1. Cashew Policy in Africa
2. Addressing the Gap between Global Consumption and Production
3. Realigning Policies for Competitive and Sustainable Cashew Supply
4. Digitization for Cashew Supply
5. Investment Partnership Opportunities for Sustainable Cashew Supply
6. Leveraging Mutually Beneficial Public-Private Partnerships: Insights and Experience from MGF Projects

While the Forum Sessions covered;

1. Beyond Participation: Scaling Women-Led Cashew Enterprises through Market Access and AfCFTA Opportunities
2. Validation of Best Practices from MOVE Matching Grant Projects
3. Enhancing Cashew Agronomy for Climate-Resilient and Sustainable Growth

4. From Bankable on Paper to Building in Practice: Access to Finance
5. Strengthening Good Agricultural Practices, Harvest and Post-Harvest Systems for a Competitive African Cashew Industry
6. Advancing Cashew Processing through Technology and Food Safety Standards
7. Mitigating Pests and Diseases in Cashew Cultivation for Sustainable Production
8. Cashew and Climate Change: Risks and Opportunities in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana
9. Global Market Live with Jim Fitzpatrick.

4. KEY SYNTHESIS OF CONFERENCE DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Cashew Policy in Africa

The policy discussions emphasized that increasing production alone will not guarantee sustainable growth of the African cashew industry. Participants identified the need to:

- increase productivity across African producing countries;
- strengthen value addition and processing capacity;
- increase collaboration among countries and development partners;
- strengthen policies regulating the cashew sector;
- increase investment in research and development; and
- strengthen agricultural extension services.

The discussions demonstrated that effective policy frameworks are necessary to create an enabling environment for investment and long-term sector development. There is therefore a need for African producing countries to develop policies that support both production and industrial development, rather than treating raw commodity production as the primary objective.

5. ADDRESSING THE GAP BETWEEN GLOBAL CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

The conference recognized the growing production of cashew alongside continuing opportunities to expand consumption. Panelists emphasized that African producing countries should invest not only in production but also in:

- value addition;
- domestic consumption;
- market development;
- processing efficiency; and
- product promotion.

The conference noted that production and processing are growing within an increasingly competitive market. Consequently, improvements in processing efficiency are essential to maintain competitiveness and sustainability. A major implication is that the African cashew industry needs to transition from a predominantly raw-material-oriented model toward a value-added and consumption-driven industry.

6. REALIGNING POLICIES FOR COMPETITIVE AND SUSTAINABLE CASHEW SUPPLY

The conference observed that policy and institutional reforms have contributed to growth in several cashew-producing countries. Participants noted that reforms are continuing in some countries in an effort to consolidate these gains. Technology is increasingly being applied to reduce production costs, while producing countries are also exploring innovative approaches to mobilizing finance, including carbon financing. The conference emphasized that knowledge sharing and partnerships between countries are essential for sustainable development. Key implications are that African countries can benefit from sharing experiences on:

- sector regulation;
- farmer support;
- processing;
- market development;
- financing;
- research;
- climate adaptation; and
- technology adoption.

Regional collaboration can therefore accelerate learning and reduce duplication of efforts.

7. DIGITIZATION AND DATA FOR THE CASHEW SECTOR

Digitization emerged as a critical component of modern cashew-sector development. Panelists emphasized the need to invest in digital infrastructure and recognized that digitization can create value and contribute to sustainability. However, the conference also stressed the importance of data quality and verification. A particularly important message was: “A beautiful dashboard does not make bad information true”. The conference therefore emphasized that credible data must be collected, verified, and maintained before being used for decision-making. The principle identified was to build reliable information once, verify it properly, and use it repeatedly. The conference also highlighted the Cashew Barometer as a tool intended to make accurate cashew-sector information more available and accessible. It was made clear that, reliable digital data can support:

- production planning;
- yield forecasting;
- market intelligence;
- farmer registration;
- traceability;
- investment decisions;
- policy formulation;
- climate-risk assessment; and
- monitoring of agricultural interventions.

8. INVESTMENT AND PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

Investment and partnership were central to the conference theme. Panelists emphasized that public-private partnerships should be structured around mutual benefits and sustainability. An important issue raised was the need for governments to communicate policy changes early so

that private-sector actors have sufficient time to plan and adjust their operations. The conference also noted that exposure to accurate information is contributing to changes in the lending behaviour of financial institutions. This suggests that improved sector information can reduce information asymmetry and help financial institutions better understand agricultural businesses.

9. MATCHING GRANT FACILITY AND SME DEVELOPMENT

The Matching Grant Facility (MGF) experience demonstrated the potential of targeted financial and technical support to improve business performance. The conference reported that participating businesses had improved their financial performance and were able to create livelihoods and employment, particularly for women, youth, and persons with disabilities. The programme also encouraged collaboration among businesses, small groups, cooperatives and government institutions. The experience demonstrates the importance of combining finance with technical support, partnerships and business development.

10. WOMEN-LED ENTERPRISES AND AfCFTA

The conference emphasized that women should not merely participate in the cashew value chain but should be supported to build commercially viable and scalable enterprises. To access global opportunities, SMEs were encouraged to develop a global outlook. The conference identified several strategies, including:

- collaboration among SMEs;
- formation of consortiums;
- stronger branding;
- targeted marketing;
- storytelling;
- diversification; and
- scaling operations.

The conference further emphasized that moving from small-scale enterprises to larger businesses requires a change in mindset and access to increased finance. Partnerships and collaboration were identified as important for enhancing the competitiveness of African producers. AfCFTA therefore provides an important framework for expanding intra-African trade in cashew products, provided enterprises can meet quality, food safety, packaging and market requirements.

11. AGRONOMY AND CLIMATE-RESILIENT CASHEW PRODUCTION

Agronomic practices were identified as fundamental to increasing productivity and resilience. The conference highlighted:

- improved extension approaches;
- tree rehabilitation;
- integration of beehives into cashew plantations;
- stronger farmer relationships;
- diversification of extension methods; and
- full utilization of cashew products and by-products.

The integration of beehives into cashew plantations was reported as having the potential to increase yield, while tree rehabilitation was identified as an important pathway for restoring productivity. The discussions also emphasized the need to maintain farmer loyalty through trust and adherence to agreements between value-chain actors.

12. CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND TOTAL PRODUCT UTILIZATION

An important emerging theme was the need to maximize the utilization of the entire cashew fruit. Participants highlighted opportunities to develop products from cashew shells; cashew apples; and husks. This approach can contribute to a circular economy, where materials that would otherwise be treated as waste become inputs for new products. Such approaches have the potential to:

- reduce waste;
- create new businesses;
- generate additional employment;
- increase farmer and processor revenues; and
- improve the overall efficiency of the cashew value chain.

13. GLOBAL MARKET DEVELOPMENTS

The conference identified several challenges and opportunities in the global cashew market. One observation was that cashew production is growing faster than demand, creating a need for stronger consumption-promotion strategies. Although consumption is increasing, participants noted that additional efforts are required to accelerate demand. The conference also emphasized the need to:

- establish direct partnerships between farmers and processors;
- promote domestic and African consumption;
- strengthen market development; and
- encourage longer-term investment in the sector.

Thus, production expansion should be accompanied by corresponding investments in market development, processing, and consumption promotion.

14. CLIMATE CHANGE AND CASHEW PRODUCTION

Climate change was one of the most important cross-cutting issues discussed at the conference. The conference examined both risks and opportunities associated with climate change in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. Participants recognized that changing climatic conditions can influence cashew productivity and production geography. The conference noted that climate change is making additional areas potentially suitable for cashew production. However, the expansion of suitable areas should not be interpreted as eliminating climate risks. Changes in temperature, rainfall patterns, water availability and pest and disease pressures can affect productivity and farm profitability. The conference therefore called for deliberate investment in:

- climate-smart agriculture;
- farm-specific resilience plans;
- insurance;
- carbon-credit opportunities;

- water-retention systems;
- improved pollination;
- improved soil fertility management; and
- other adaptation measures.

15. CLIMATE-SMART AGRICULTURE AND FARM RESILIENCE

The conference recommendations point toward a transition from generalized agricultural recommendations to farm-specific resilience planning. Such an approach would consider:

- soil characteristics;
- rainfall;
- temperature;
- farm age;
- tree density;
- tree health;
- production potential;
- water availability;
- pest and disease risks; and
- farmer resources.

Climate-smart cashew production should therefore integrate agronomic, environmental, economic and technological considerations.

16. INTEGRATED SOIL FERTILITY MANAGEMENT

The conference recommended promotion of Integrated Soil Fertility Management (ISFM). This is important because maintaining soil productivity is fundamental to sustainable cashew production. An integrated approach can involve combining appropriate:

- organic inputs;
- inorganic fertilizers;
- soil testing;
- nutrient management;
- moisture conservation; and
- other soil-improvement practices.

The conference recommendation for ISFM should therefore be integrated into extension programmes and farmer training systems.

17. PEST AND DISEASE MANAGEMENT

Pests and diseases remain important constraints to sustainable cashew production. The conference highlighted the need for pest and disease forecasting systems to enable early identification and response. Forecasting can potentially move pest and disease management from a reactive approach toward a more preventive system. The conference also emphasized the importance of research, extension, and technology in strengthening pest and disease management.

18. GOOD AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES, HARVEST AND POST-HARVEST MANAGEMENT

Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) were identified as essential for building a competitive cashew industry. The conference emphasized the need to strengthen practices across the production and post-harvest chain. This includes:

- appropriate farm management;
- harvesting at the right maturity;
- proper handling;
- drying;
- storage;
- quality management; and
- traceability.

Improved GAP and post-harvest management are particularly important for meeting increasingly demanding international market requirements.

19. PROCESSING TECHNOLOGY AND FOOD SAFETY STANDARDS

Processing was identified as a major area for investment. The conference noted that processing machinery has evolved and processors therefore need to select the right technology for the right application. Technology selection should consider:

- processing capacity;
- energy requirements;
- product quality;
- efficiency;
- maintenance;
- labour requirements;
- raw-material availability;
- food safety; and
- market requirements.

The conference also identified **certification and food safety standards** as increasingly important market requirements.

However, certification costs were identified as a major challenge, with a significant proportion of certification requirements linked to infrastructure.

This suggests a need for coordinated support to enable processors and SMEs to meet international standards.

20. QUALITY, CERTIFICATION AND MARKET ACCESS

Certification is increasingly becoming an important element of market access. However, small and medium-sized businesses can face significant challenges due to:

- certification costs;
- infrastructure requirements;

- technical capacity;
- documentation requirements; and
- compliance costs.

The industry therefore needs approaches that help SMEs gradually improve compliance while maintaining food safety and product quality. The conference also recommended broader acceptance of the ACA seal and collaborative efforts to achieve wider global recognition.

21. FINANCING THE CASHEW VALUE CHAIN

Access to finance remains a major constraint to investment in agriculture. The conference discussed the need to move businesses from being “bankable on paper” to actually building and operating viable enterprises. Financial institutions require reliable information to assess agricultural businesses and associated risks. The conference noted that improved information is already contributing to changes in lending behaviour among financial institutions. Potential financing approaches discussed across the conference included:

- commercial finance;
- matching grants;
- partnerships;
- carbon financing; and
- other innovative financial mechanisms.

22. CARBON FINANCING AND THE CASHEW VALUE CHAIN

Carbon financing was identified as an emerging opportunity for the cashew sector. Cashew production systems can potentially contribute to climate mitigation through increased biomass and improved land management. However, access to carbon markets require credible systems for:

- farmer identification;
- farm mapping;
- baseline establishment;
- biomass measurement;
- monitoring;
- reporting;
- verification; and
- benefit sharing.

The conference's emphasis on digitization and reliable data is therefore directly relevant to the development of credible carbon-financing systems.

23. MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conference discussions, the following recommendations are proposed:

23.1 Strengthen productivity

African producing countries should prioritize productivity-enhancing technologies and practices, including improved planting materials, rehabilitation of old plantations, appropriate agronomic practices and integrated soil fertility management.

23.2 Promote climate-smart agriculture

Climate-smart practices should be mainstreamed into cashew development programmes, including farm-specific resilience plans, water-retention systems, improved pollination and appropriate adaptation measures.

23.3 Strengthen agricultural research and extension

Research institutions, governments and private-sector organizations should strengthen collaborative research and ensure that research results are translated into practical farmer technologies.

23.4 Develop credible agricultural data systems

Farmer and farm-level information should be collected, verified and regularly updated. Machine learning and other analytical tools should be explored for developing credible, country-specific yield forecasting systems.

23.5 Expand processing and value addition

Producing countries should promote investment in processing facilities and appropriate processing technologies.

23.6 Promote local and African consumption

Governments, private-sector actors and industry associations should invest in promotional campaigns highlighting the nutritional and economic benefits of cashew consumption.

23.7 Strengthen farmer–processor partnerships

Direct relationships between farmers and processors should be encouraged to improve market linkages, quality management and supply reliability.

23.8 Improve access to finance

Financial institutions should develop financing products appropriate to the agricultural and processing cycles of the cashew industry.

23.9 Promote carbon-financing opportunities

The sector should explore credible carbon-financing mechanisms linked to climate-smart agriculture and agroforestry while ensuring transparent monitoring and benefit-sharing arrangements.

23.10 Strengthen pest and disease forecasting

National cashew programmes should develop early-warning and forecasting systems for major pests and diseases.

23.11 Strengthen food safety and certification

Support should be provided to SMEs and processors to meet certification and food-safety requirements.

23.12 Strengthen regional collaboration

African cashew-producing countries should increase knowledge sharing, research collaboration, policy learning and joint market-development initiatives.

23.13 Promote the ACA seal

African industry stakeholders should work toward broader recognition and acceptance of the ACA seal, beginning with continental recognition and progressively expanding to international markets.

24. CONCLUSION

The 2026 ACA Annual Cashew Conference demonstrated that the sustainable development of Africa's cashew sector requires a shift from a predominantly production-oriented approach toward an integrated value-chain model. The conference discussions highlighted the interconnected importance of policy, productivity, processing, investment, digitization, finance, climate resilience, research, extension, food safety, market development and partnerships. A central lesson from the conference is that increasing production must be accompanied by investments in processing, consumption, data systems, technology and climate resilience. The sector must also create stronger linkages among farmers, processors, financial institutions, governments, researchers and markets.

Climate change adds urgency to these interventions. The future sustainability of cashew production will depend increasingly on the ability of producers and other value-chain actors to adopt climate-smart practices, manage soil and water resources efficiently, improve pest and disease forecasting, utilize digital technologies and explore appropriate carbon-financing opportunities. The conference further demonstrated that partnership is not an option but an important mechanism for addressing the complex challenges facing the African cashew industry.

25. SUMMARY OF PRIORITY ACTIONS

Priority Area	Proposed Action
Productivity	Intensification, rehabilitation and improved agronomy
Climate change	Climate-smart agriculture and farm resilience plans
Soil health	Integrated Soil Fertility Management
Water	Water-retention and efficient water-management systems
Pests & diseases	Forecasting and early-warning systems
Digitalization	Reliable farmer, farm and production databases
Forecasting	Machine-learning-based yield forecasting
Processing	Appropriate and efficient processing technologies

Food safety	Strengthen infrastructure and certification capacity
Finance	Innovative agricultural and SME financing
Carbon	Explore credible carbon-financing opportunities
Women & youth	Scale enterprises and improve market access
Markets	Increase domestic and African consumption
Partnerships	Strengthen public-private and regional collaboration
Research	Increase R&D and extension collaboration
Standards	Strengthen quality and food-safety compliance
Trade	Leverage AfCFTA opportunities
Industry branding	Promote wider recognition of the ACA seal