Sub-Saharan Africa • Guinea

Sustainable Cashew Production in Guinea

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Sector • Agriculture
Enterprise Class • Small Producers
Summary

Guinea Conakry is referred to as the “water tower” of West Africa because twenty-two West African rivers have their origin in the country’s pastoral highlands, and the country has an average annual rainfall of 430 centimetres (169 inches). Guinea currently grows approximately 5,000 tons of raw cashew nuts per year, while its much smaller neighbouring country, Guinea-Bissau, produces approximately 80,000 tons per year. With climatic and soil conditions similar to Guinea-Bissau, and consumer demand increasing for cashews, Guinea has begun to focus on expanding cashew production.

Eighty percent of Guineans depend on subsistence agriculture for their livelihoods, although most of the agricultural production is rather rudimentary, and Guineans face many problems in exporting their products. International agencies have been lending technical and financial support to Guinean producers in order to enhance their competitiveness in world markets. Over the last three years, a Global Development Alliance Partnership between several Guinean cashew producing cooperatives, the government, USAID and Kraft Foods has been working to help Guinean farmers produce and sell cashews as a means to reduce poverty and secure a better economic future for the country. Guinea’s climatic conditions, fertile soil and long rainy season are all favourable characteristics for growing large, high-quality cashews.

The partners have worked together to provide technical support to community-based organizations. In the process, some 1,600 hectares of old cashew plantations are being rehabilitated, 12,000 hectares of new plantations will be made ready for cashew growing (including 2,800 hectares of small holder cashew plantations), improved seeds will be supplied, farmers’ associations strengthened and 1,600 farmers’ associations trained. The initiative has led to the creation of employment opportunities and improved incomes in the cashew sector.

Positive Outcomes for the Poor

- Improving Guinea’s production and marketing of cashews to increase incomes and improve livelihoods of smallholder farmers who typically own one to five hectares of land
- Increasing export earnings to improve Guinea’s economy and generate much needed foreign exchange earnings
- Producing cashews for local consumption to contribute to national food security
- Environmentally, cashew trees are suitable for reforestation projects, because they are wind and fire resistant and help stabilize the soil
- Cashew trees also make good “live fences” to protect fields
Challenges

- Dominance of raw nuts over other higher value-added export products
- Lack of capacity building and training among sector stakeholders (including farmers, extension workers, research institutes, inspection agencies, export promotion agencies and associations) on modern practices, export procedures and documentation
- Dominance of informal markets
- Poor condition of cashew trees due to insect-related damages and weeds
- Rivalry between a number of regional and national umbrella organizations that seek to represent farmers
- Lengthy, bureaucratic export procedures and corruption at the level of government officials, which tended to delay orders and cancel contracts
- Poor image of cashew nuts produced in Africa compared to India and Brazil
- Poor marketing infrastructure, coupled with poor post-harvesting and handling techniques, resulted in crop losses
- Excess duties and taxes levied in producing countries tend to make cashew nuts from Africa uncompetitive and act as disincentives to producers
- Lack of coordination among producers and exporters and weak linkages in the marketing chain- consequently, there is no common platform for advocacy and representation in front of government on issues affecting the sector
- Lack of easy access and excessive costs of financing for exporters and processors
- Lack of access to market and price information
- Lack of promotion of global cashew consumption though advertisements and health related studies creating awareness on the virtues of consuming cashew nuts
- Lack of political stability

Key Innovations

- The implementation of small-scale processing units using efficient and inexpensive technology
- Training for cashew producers: it is difficult to manage support services efficiently to numerous farmers with very small holdings. However, with the assistance of NGOs, farmers are coming together in groupements to share information, provide mutual support and coordinate activities. There are now over 1,000 groupements.
- New marketing strategies
- Modernization of cashew processing (improved production tables and new welding and steaming techniques)

Opportunities for Replication & Scaling Up

- Based on its contribution to the partnership in Guinea, USAID has invited Kraft Foods to expand its partnership reach to include all of the major African cashew-producing countries. Kraft is the only US company that has been asked to be part of the new African Cashew Alliance.