

# ENLIGHTENING THE CASHEW SECTOR

*Betre Ati-Atcha*

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!

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