



The Power of Experience

Djanie Lydia Sagbo

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.

