



Build Your PATHWAY TO SUCCESS

Ferdjani Dalada

As humans, we're created to adapt to change. To mold ourselves in situations that life puts us in, or better still, fulfill our inner cravings of trying out something new. Change is the only constant in life, and at some point or the other, we will find ourselves witnessing it. The only difference is that for some people, it is a series of small changes while for others, they have few, but big revolutions. The winners, in either case, are those who during this process, come out better than they were before.



A successful step

Mrs Ferdjani Dalada, a 42 year old Franco-Italian and Nigerian is one such woman who can be quoted in this reference. Chief Executive of FMA Industry (Cashew processing unit in Ivory Coast), although it has been only two years since she started the journey in this field, she is incredibly happy for taking this plunge.

Hailing from a family of many entrepreneurs, Mrs Ferdjani is a well-read woman, with a bachelor's degree in letter and sciences, she also has done her post-graduation along with an addition training as a bank manager.

She was encouraged by the idea of valorization of local products

While she did not have any direct relations with the vast cashew sector, she learnt about it from a cashew importer in Algeria and the opportunity to contribute to the valorization of African local products triggered her to join the field. Besides, she was also aware of Madam Kone at Banfora in Burkina Faso. The fact that she had a significant

career and her appreciable initiative to include other competences to progress in this sector also served as a boosting factor.

Seeking help and launching a magnificent industry

To aid her through the course, she used the services of a consulting office in strategy and project development (CATEK). They accompanied her in the process of putting the project in place and its exploitation.

Thus, after educating herself in this field and receiving valuable advice from many other processors and the consulting agency, the industry she launched a few years back is now growing splendidly. With a work force of more than 170 women among others, as the Chief Executive, her contribution involves the coordination and arbitration between the various options, by making decisions based on targets and in accordance with the strategy.



Not surprisingly, this is a task that requires major investment of self and time, due to which she spends approximately ten hours per day at work, weekends included!

Aiming to leave a significant impact

Speaking of availability of labor in the region, she is happy to say that labor is available in abundance, so much that they couldn't absorb all the job applications. Every morning, the industry receives at least 20 women asking for a job at the factory. Given their contribution, when asked about the facilities provided to women workers, Mrs Fredjani comments the scope of work is huge, due to which they are considering setting up a true social responsibility policy for the enterprise. She believes their impact should be significant in the community in a lasting manner.

Working with a vision

Elaborating on her enterprise and its uniqueness, she says they want their company to be particularly committed in valorizing cashew value chains for the benefit of all shareholders. This vision leads them to develop the processing method for a better output, a greater local processing capacity and to provide a range of cashew products with a high added value. At the moment, although they receive the market price, they are committed in a quality system and the research for a higher added value in the processing method continues.

Staying professional

When asked about the situation when it comes to carrying out or discussing work with men, she says, for her part, there is no particular problem. There are some functions and responsibilities to assume.

However, she also recognize that she does not directly deal with men workers; maybe that could be different. She directly manages the senior officials who are men (the manager of the factory, the administrative and financial director). At the board meetings, she doesn't see any difference between the senior officials, men or women. "You should always be professional," she advices.



Supply remains a primary concern

As for some of the challenges she faces in this field, she says that supply in sufficient quantity, quality and reasonable prices, a key factor of success in processing in Africa, remain the primary concern. The most competitive supply of raw materials permit them to compensate their non-competitiveness in the others production factors including access to industrial land, electricity, returns on labor and access to the financing cost.

Secondly, adequate and competitive funding remain mighty challenges in their field of work.

Looking for solutions

As for overcoming them, they are looking at an involvement in the supply up to the farmer level, through a specialized division, and cooperation with more organized

cooperatives. Regarding access to funding, the purpose is to ensure a full transparency on their financial operations through exhaustive and complete financial information production.

The need for rigorous organization

Moving on, when asked about her family and striking a work-life balance, she comments that her children are all grown-up and live in Switzerland. A part of her family is also a shareholder in her company FMA. She admits that during the start-up phase of an industrial unit of this size, the balance goes in favor of the work and at the expense of other personal activities. However, she still hopes that, after the setting-up, the starting and the consolidation phase, the focus of activities will be on the coordination and the control, and that control should allow her to focus on more aspects of the daily lives. It remains true that to achieve this, she needs a rigorous organization.

She adds that the family's support is essentially moral, which is important, along with being financial.

Women were the first investors

Commenting on the position of women in the cashew industry, she believes women have been the first to invest in this sector, through some small artisan products workshops. Today, they are the first employees in cashew industry. They know the product, the circuits and the capacity for work, they are just lacking the financing and the technical assistance to manage more important capacities through industrialization.

Definitely not a male dominated sector!

She refuses to believe that cashew is a male dominated sector. Men may rule the land property, so the orchards belong to men, but raw cashew nuts export, mostly trading is ruled by men only because of the difficult access to funding for women. Otherwise, the cashew collection and processing activities are ruled by women, cashew hand-made processing is also ruled by women; even the majority of the industrial employment is occupied by women in cashew sector.

Success is not based on gender

Thus, she doesn't feel like an intruder in the sector. After all, her first practical advice in the processing business has been given to her by a woman who owns a cashew processing unit at Banfora in Burkina Faso. Her success will come from the organization she is putting in place, which is beyond the gender-sensitive.



Access to financing is a path blocker

As for the hurdles that prevent women from emerging as leaders in this industry, she thinks access to financing is what blocks them the most, and access to non-financial services specifically the strategic and technical advices.

Apart from this, when asked, she is quick to admit there is scope for improvement in the job. Elaborating on this, she hopes to improve the industry's organization, production and management efficiency, on a continuous basis. In her view, cashew industry is in its early stages in Africa, so there is a lot that can be done.

A tremendous ambition

Putting her future plans forward, she hopes to gain the trust of the financials in order to implement the target to reach a processing capacity of 100,000 tons by 2020 and also offer high quality roasted kernels to African consumers. She firmly believes that this would be great for the industry and the employment in Africa and although this is a tremendous ambition, they would definitely strive to work towards it. She also hopes that by this, she will be able to set up a model for all those who still hesitate to process locally in such countries for after all, with hard work and persistence nothing is impossible!

