

GROWING SEEDS OF PASSION

Ouattara Minata

Our dedication and efforts determine the direction of our life. Just because we may be at the bottom of the ladder today, it does not mean we're going to stay there forever. The journey to reach the pinnacle may be long and tiresome, but it's our will power that helps us tread each step with zeal and undying hope. Everything is temporary, and it's the vision to reach the shore that helps one swim in troubled waters.



The passionate spark

A widow and mother to seven children, Mrs Ouattara Minata may have been a witness to many downpours, but she never backed down from striving for shade.

An Ivorian citizen, residing in Banfora, Burkina Faso, she arrived in the country 33 years ago with her husband who was a Burkinabe. Since passion is the spark that eventually becomes a guiding light, it caused her enthusiastic husband to seek a career in agriculture, a field that he was genuinely interested in.

Welcoming a change

To begin with, he took over the management of an orchard of approximately 50 hectares in Toumousseni, 15 km from



Banfora and the couple, together, started growing mangoes. However, in the year 1990, they welcomed a change in their field by growing raw cashew nuts, thanks to the cashew project that was initiated in Burkina Faso.

Experience over education

While the advice from project cashew nuts in their region caused them to take the plunge in the field of cashews, when they started, they hadn't received many trainings. It was their experience over the years that became their biggest teacher, and helped them take slow but steady steps towards fulfilling their goals. Also, within a few years, they eventually received trainings provided by ACi (African Cashew initiative, now ComCashew)) that added to polish their skills on farm keeping, pruning, fruit picking, drying and packaging.

A quick learner

With a modest educational background where the most she achieved was a certificate in secondary education, no prior trainings and work experience in terms of dealing with the cashew market, Mrs Ouattara quickly caught on about the dos and don'ts of the trade as she started helping her husband.



A challenging variation

Life went on in such momentum, a routine, until the year 2004, when her husband passed away, and she was left alone to deal with the enterprise that they initiated decades ago. Having no other person to share the load and burdens of her firm, it was a change that required tremendous effort to get used to.

Up to this day, she has been single handedly monitoring her firm. Although she has two employees that help her in the maintenance of trees, pruning, and growth monitoring, a major chunk still weighs on her shoulders which is also the reason for her to work full time.

Handling responsibilities single handedly

While her two employees lend a helping hand, when it comes to the selling and negotiation with raw cashew nuts buyers, she is the sole in charge of it. Her other works involve monitoring the flowering and fruiting, checking if the cashew trees are healthy; and with her employees, she picks the cashew nuts, dries them and puts them in the warehouse after the packaging is done.

Gold mines pose as a big competition

At this note, as she speaks of the labor activity in her region, she says it is quite a hassle finding employees. Labor is not available as lot of people are interested in working in the gold mines where they can quickly become rich if they are lucky. Thus, workers are not entirely attracted to work in cashew farms, thereby leading to a scarcity of workers in Burkina Faso because of the gold mines.



She feels women can be attracted to this sector and their conditions can be improved by providing them with farm inputs and by training them on ways to maintain their orchards.

The boon of an understanding family

Speaking of striking a work life balance, she says it is not easy as she is a mother of seven children, along with being a widow. While only two of them stay with her for others are all grownups and have moved out, she still finds it difficult to spend a lot of time with them in between her tight schedule. However, her children understand her concerns and appreciate the fact that ultimately, she is doing this for them. They support her in her activities and even help her with her chores whenever possible.

Scarcity of accurate products are a cause of concern

Furthermore, as she is questioned on the challenges that she faces in this sector, she elaborates that in capacity to know if trees are sick is a mighty trial, as there is no way to figure this out. She says that at times, they can see some leaves



drying or turning yellow for no reason, they also notice some brown spots on the leaves without being able to determine the reason. There are times the sap flows from the tree and coagulates and within two years, the tree dies. The difficulty is that they don't have a specific product to find out if the cashew trees are sick and what kind of disease it is.

To add to her woes, so far, they have no solution in sight for this problem.

Aspiring to be a leader

Although it is male dominated sector, at her level of work, she says she does not have a problem while dealing with male workers nor does she think she is denied rewards.

Between her role as a mother and her entrepreneurial business, Mrs Ouattara spares no effort to achieve her goals to be a leader in cashew nuts production and to be respected by men and women in this sector. And the fact that despite running a small firm, with her dedication and hard work, the annual production rounds about up to 3 MT, it is a mighty achievement.

No hurdles are too big to reach your goals

Thanks to her determination, Mrs Ouattara has been elected President of farmers' cooperative in Toumousseni. About her future projects, she has the desire to increase her farm productivity, improve her cashew nuts quality and become a leader in the cashew sector. She believes that if women wish to be leaders in the industry, they can, and absolutely nothing can come in the way.

With the amount of love she puts into the career that was initiated as her husband's passion, her profession holds a high place in her heart. It means more than what she can describe, for it is the livelihood of her family.

Success is not a numerical measurement

Mrs Ouattara is an outstanding example for all women across the globe, a testimony to the fact that one mustn't measure success in numbers. If you're better than what you were the day before and are keeping your head high in every situation, you've already embarked on your journey to success!

