



# MATERIALIZING HER GOALS

*Sounlinalia Sèlomé Zoé*

*Sometimes, we don't understand why things happen the way they do. They don't make sense and there's no use digging for the message that may lie underneath, because, simply put, from a human perspective, it really is futile. However, it may take us days or even years, but someday, we'll find the reason for the affairs of the past and that moment, we'll be nothing but satisfied.*

*All we need is a little courage to survive the present as we wait for a beautiful tomorrow.*



## ***An unexpected beginning***

When Mrs SOUNLIN Alia Sèlomé Zoé was in high school, she had to leave midway because of a strike. With nothing to do, she started a small business which included buying and selling tropical products including the cashew nuts. Back then, little did she know this laid the foundation for her to reach the current status of the Managing Director at KAKE 5 Industry SA in Savalou, Benin.



### ***Steady growth over the years***

With about 16 years of experience in RCN collection and trade, she is now involved full time in her company. Over the years, she has improved in her trade. While she started at the small level, in 2004, she undertook processing of raw cashew into roasted kernels for local consumption. She also roasted them into white kernels for sub regional consumption, in order to add value to the raw material and to reduce unemployment in her region.



Currently, her work is to supervise the operations, give advices and if there is any problem, she is in charge of helping the employees while trying to figure out possible solutions.

### ***Obtaining abundant education***

Throughout her journey, she has been blessed to obtain trainings, attend workshops and go on exchange trips. She has received support from an NGO, and was able to travel to Brazil in order to acquire knowledge in cashew processing sector. Besides, they were also supported by the ProCAD (Framework support Programme for Agricultural Diversification) through their project called PADA (Support Program for Agricultural Diversification) with several exchange trips and they helped them research partners for their products, and for the acquisition of modern processing machines.

Besides, she also obtained technical support from Technoserve through trainings on HACCP standards and on factory management in Ghana and Benin. She has been privileged enough to attend some workshops organized by GiZ through their platform comprising all the cashew players.

### ***Believe, and you're halfway there!***

Having seen the vast array of activities that she has been involved with, it's given she is doing a marvelous job at her company comprising of more than 200 employees, most of whom are women willing to contribute to the sector.

Considering their active participation, when asked about the facilities provided to women, she says they have nurseries, transport services and extend financial help. In her opinion, if women can receive proper financing and technical support, their position can be improved.

Having said that, she also advices that women need to be confident and believe in themselves, be persevering and have the love towards work.

### ***Quality – a priority***

When asked about the uniqueness of the brand, BENINLUXECAJOU, she says it stands out among others because of its high quality. They care about their employees, and treat them well so they can be productive in their personal life and at work.





***Overcoming all challenges in her path***

Speaking of the challenges she has faced in her journey, regarding the trading, she says partners were unwilling to work with her as her company was not formal. Financing was also an issue for she did not have any land to use as guarantee in order to attain a loan from the banks.

As strategies, she decided to create a formal

company, and she was determined to make it happen. They had to show to the partners that they were serious and wanted strong relations with them. At the processing level, they needed to have good quality nuts in order to ensure the final products would be competitive and of high quality.

The finished goods were controlled by a laboratory before any selling; this process allowed them to get the certification and they've been able to sell their products in complete quietude. Although they've come a long way, she does not deny the fact that with proper funding and skill, they can extend the company even further and be more competitive.

***Sailing through life***

While all the work she puts in for sure demands her attention and time, we're glad to know her family remains her priority. Despite her business, she always manages to be present for her children and husband at home. She is happy to be part of a family that appreciates her success and most of all, her endurance to materialize the goals. However, she does not deny that while she tries to manage and spend some time with her two kids, being repeatedly absent at home for financial reasons creates some handicaps which she tries to overcome.

With her husband as the CEO and promoter of the company, it makes things a bit easier but that does not mean it's a cakewalk. She still puts in her heart and soul into her work.

***Her work has been nothing short of a blessing***

She has been grateful to her profession, through which her economic situation has improved, and she is financially self-sustaining. When asked, she confesses that her work means everything to her.

Stating her long term goals, she hopes to run a big company and be known on the international market because of their high quality final products. Given her plans and efforts, we hope this turns a reality in the near future.

