



# BELIEVE IN THE POTENTIAL

*Dr. Gniré Mariam Ouattara*

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*Some ideas result in moderate fruits. Others lead to revolutions that promise tremendous outcomes.*

In order to meet food, ecological, socioeconomic and political challenges related to the development of agro-food sectors favorable to the poorest people, several intervention approaches can be used. Grassroots development strategy is part of those approaches.

### ***A strong woman in the cashew field***

In complement with some macroeconomic measures and big projects, the strategy is advocated in developing countries, promising better results. This method is used by many players, such as Dr. Gniré Mariam OUATTARA, a combative woman in Ivorian cashew sector. With a doctorate in Economy, specializing in Local Development, Dr. Mariam OUATTARA holds the position of the Cashew Technical Director at the Board of Regulatory, Monitoring and Development for Cotton and Cashew Development (CCA) in Ivory Coast.

### ***It all began as a theme for her thesis***

Her involvement in the cashew sector has been very interesting. In 2004, when she was looking for a theme to write her Ph.D thesis, she stumbled upon this field. She decided it to be an ideal topic for she was willing to work on a new, special and practical product on which there were few writings. Considering it to be a huge potential for rural population, especially for young people and women, she zeroed down on cashew, contrary to cocoa, coffee, cotton which has enough literature available.

Since this complied with all the above mentioned criteria, she decided to work on it. After all, it was the beginning of an exalting career!

### ***Benefitting the rural women***

During her thesis, she worked as a rural facilitator for RONGEAD, a French NGO that has contributed to her research works





as part of the implementation of a project supported by the European Union, to promote craft processing of cashew for the benefit of rural women. During the span of five years, from 2004 to 2009, Dr. Mariam worked directly and closely with more than 500 rural women, reinforcing their abilities in craft shelling and local consumption. At the end of those operations, four handcraft units with a capacity of 100 TM per annum were installed in four villages, managed by four groups of women.

### ***A cashew lover***

With this strong background, she joined GIZ by the end of 2009, as National Coordinator for the project 'African Cashew initiative (ACi)' also known as ComCashew. In this regional project team financed by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Government of Germany (BMZ) and the private sector, this woman who became a cashew lover, was given charge to coordinate all the operations of ACi in Ivory Coast. A function she assured with self-abnegation and courage until the end of 2012, yielding satisfactory results.

### ***Implementation of policies important for development***

After a year of independent consulting activity and field works with rural community, Dr. Mariam repositioned herself in the Ivorian cashew sector as Cashew Technical Director at the CCA. For this mother of two pretty girls, the development of cashew sector will not be effective without the implementation of policies favorable to the enhancement of the basic initiatives undertaken on the field since 2004.

This is why, at CCA, she and her colleagues are working hard, along with technical and financial partners of the value chain, to implement the strategies of the reform undertaken by the Government of Ivory Coast in 2013, permitting to raise Ivorian cashew at the international level.

### ***Her list of tasks***

Research programs on cashew sector, coaching farmers, organizing the sector's direct and indirect players and managing CCA's projects on cashew are dealt by Dr. Mariam every day. She is assisted in her tasks by 5 direct collaborators including two women. She relies heavily on the capacity-building of her colleagues, men or women.

### ***A woman with a vision***

What makes her unique is her long-term vision, her spirit of creativity, conception of innovative projects, her quest for perfection but most of all, her perseverance. She places a high value on the activation and the valorization of latent resources to operate qualitative and quantitative changes.

### ***Words of wisdom***

According to Dr. Mariam, appropriate planning, prioritization and delegation are the watchwords of success in her work. Her current challenge is to always defend her ideals in the context of reforms for a prosperous sector. "Properly formulate your ideas, share them with your colleagues to get advices, contributions and adhesion from them following a participatory approach are strategies that can help meet this challenge," she comments.





***Focusing on the communities***

When asked what her work means to her, she replies, "To me, it is a way to contribute to the well-being of rural population." This is also proved in the field of incomes and social exclusion. Several studies has, for instance, shown that inequalities are even more important when we "go down" in geographical scales; economic and sustainable development will not become a "reality" unless one focuses on the local level, that means on the communities, initially.

***Grateful for the support***

The unfailing support of her husband and the family warmth are factors that reinforce her and give her a strong spirit to always do better. She can further improve her efficiency in the company with solidarity and team work.

In her view, the improvement of women's position in cashew industry requires the strengthening of their capacities, the valorization of their work and particularly their accompaniment to take the sector to a new high. These measures reassure women and encourage them to give the best of themselves for an added value.

***Hoping to share her rich experience***

Five years down the line, Mariam sees herself running her own business in the education area in order to share her experience with young people, so she can contribute to facilitate skills transfer in agricultural sectors in Ivory Coast and worldwide.

