



Women's entrepreneurship and the processing of mango and cashew



Background

In Burkina Faso, the dried mango and cashew nut value chains have strong export potential. Dried mango generates more than FCFA 15 billion in sales each season, while cashew nut sales stood at FCFA 67 billion in 2017.

These two products are sold both on the local and export markets. Burkina Faso is the world leader for dried mango, while cashew nuts constitute the third largest export product for the country. Processing of the two products in 2014 created 4,236 and 1,905 direct jobs, more than 90% of these held by women.

Notwithstanding these significant achievements, the potential of these value chains is still weakly exploited. Annual mango production can exceed 450,000 tonnes, but only 2% of mangoes produced are exported and only a tiny portion is dried to be sold on international markets. In the case of cashew nuts, the country only processes 27% of its production which stands at 100,000 tonnes per year.

These problems arise in part due to the low productivity and limited technological capacities of processing plants. There are also constraints linked to weak organization and professionalism of stakeholders in the value chains, to the difficulties in accessing finance, and to the poor management of market information.

The Project to Support the Marketing of Dried Mango and Processed Cashew Nuts, commonly referred to as the "CIR/

SNV Project" was launched to address the double challenge of increasing export revenues and incomes for both female and male stakeholders in these value chains.

Placed under the aegis of the Ministry of Trade, the project was implemented by the National Union for the Implementation of the Reinforced Integrated Framework (UNMO/CIR) in partnership with SNV Burkina, and ran from 2014 to 2017. It covered the regions of Hauts-Bassins and Cascades which are the two biggest mango and cashew nut producing regions.

The challenges

Value chains mainly controlled by adult men

In the mango and cashew value chains, the division of roles is influenced by traditional norms and the economic power of individuals. Access to land being governed by patriarchal norms, orchards are owned by male adults. The empowerment of women and youth is compromised from the outset in the production part of the value chain, even if women and youth are both heavily present in the workforce harvesting mangoes and cashews.

This observation also holds true for the processing and marketing parts of the chains. In effect, wholesaling as well as export sales are undertaken by men. Men are privileged by the credit system given the material assets that patriarchal systems bestow on them (inheritance rights, inheritance of resources). Women are confined to the positions of employee in industrial processing plants and rarely accede

to positions of responsibility. Where they are heads of business, these tend to be cottage-industry outfits in difficulty.

Furthermore, in the marketing part of the value chain, women are generally retailers selling via stalls or through itinerant trade.

Low access to credit constrains female entrepreneurship. But despite these socio-economical obstacles, some women do become entrepreneurs.

This is the case of Cecile Konkobo, 55 years, and a widow since the age of 28. As a mother of four children she had to meet the needs of her family, especially as the family plot had been taken away from them. Cecile was recruited in 2005 as a processor in mango drying plant in Bobo Dioulasso.

She very quickly learned the assembly-line work. Later on, she decided to set up her own processing plant, but she encountered the difficulties inherent to female entrepreneurship: *"I rented a house for the business. The season had just started when the owner of the house sold the plot. The new landlord immediately came to ask me to leave."* Cecile Konkobo, 55 years, Business owner of SYA YEFAALA.

Cecile was obliged to change premises despite the investments she had already made. Given her limited means, she hoped to buy a plot on the outskirts of town, in neighbourhoods that had not been developed, to set up her plant. She wanted to thus avoid problems with rent leases, but financial institutions did not give her loans, given the uncertain status of the plot.



In the cashew value chain, despite the significant quantity of cashew produced, the only existing processing plant in Banfora in the 1980s was shut down a few years later, leaving several women jobless: *"Very few women were active in marketing cashew. They were mostly active in cashew harvesting in the orchards. They were not present in processing. There was a project*

that was processing cashew in 1980s, but it has since ended. The women were no longer working, they found themselves without work, despite the know-how they had acquired." Aminata Kone, Director of SOTRIA-B, an industrial cashew processing plant.

Aminata Kone founded SOTRIA-B, a cashew processing company, in 2003 while she was a public servant at the Ministry of Agriculture, but the company ran into operating difficulties, linked to availability of the raw material caused by the poor organization of the value chain.

Strategies implemented

Support to female entrepreneurship

Given the potential for women in processing, the project's gender strategy was to contribute to the emergence and the strengthening of female entrepreneurship.

With this perspective, capacity building activities were carried out to improve access to financial services and help business development. In all, 60 people, of which 37 men and 23 women, were trained in loan and risk management techniques. Training was also given on the topics of entrepreneurship and development of microprojects to 48 men and 18 women.

Funding for processing plants

The training activities were accompanied by support for setting up about 40 micro, small and medium enterprises, with investments totalling FCFA 200 million: *"In 2016, the CIR/SNV project gave me FCFA 2 million, to which I added FCFA 500,000 in order to buy this plot. I was thus able to have my own work premises. It was a big step. Thanks to the trust that SNV placed in me, everything changed. Before, I was in despair. When the landlord told me to leave his compound, I did not know where to go. I lost almost FCFA 2 million of what I had invested in that compound. I could not take the risk again to rent a premises. Now, I am on my own property. Whatever investments I make here, no one is going to come and chase me away."* Cecile Konkobo, 55 years, Business owner of SYA YEFAALA.

In addition, to improving the technical capacity of processing plants, 14 plants facing difficulties received support for upgrading acquiring small equipment and making physical investments: *"SNV chose 10 plants facing difficulties and who were members of the PTRAMAB¹. My plant was chosen and I received dryers and small equipment such as stainless-steel worktables, barrels, crates, bag sealers and weighing scales."* Cecile Konkobo, 55 years, Business owner of SYA YEFAALA.

¹ Professionnels de la Transformation de la Mangue au Burkina Faso – Mango Processing Professional Association of Burkina Faso

"SNV, as the implementing agency of the project, fulfilled its role well. It supported the whole value chain, and as we are a member of the cashew inter-branch organisation, the results of the project benefitted our factory. 'The project strengthened my leadership skills and in addition, I learnt how to undertake advocacy.'"
Aminata Kone, Director of SOTRIA-B.

Promoting exports

Activities were undertaken at the national, regional and international level to increase the volume of exports of dried mango and processed cashew nuts. Two marketing campaigns were launched. The first focused on cashew and the launch event brought together 147 participants (121 men and 26 women). The mango campaign launch was attended by 154 people (134 men and 20 women).

Results

Pioneer women entrepreneurs

Support provided to value chain actors in the mango and cashew nut sector yielded significant results. Cecile Konkobo now owns a processing plant on the outskirts of the city of Bobo Dioulasso. Her staff is mainly made up of women from the surrounding village and young men: *"I employ 80 women and 10 men. When the women take their salaries, they use it to pay their children's school fees, or to buy supplies or clothes for their children. It is a small amount that has big value. Each new recruit is paid FCFA 1,500 per day of work, and after a year this increases by 250 francs."* Cecile Konkobo, 55 years, Business owner of SYA YEFAALA.

A gender-based division of roles

In the assembly-line production system, women are involved in the first stages of sorting, washing, peeling, cutting and packaging. Older women are given the task of sorting, while younger women are in charge of washing.

Young women also take care of packaging, given their energy and their capacity to quickly understand instructions. According to Cecile, the business owner: *"As they are school goers, they are available from about end of May or beginning June. As soon as they arrive, the work goes faster. In our business, you have to be quick. Normally we should fill the dryers before 2pm to be able to have dried pieces ready the next day. From 2pm, there should no longer be any cutting going on."*

Young men and physical activities

The men are in charge of the actual drying of the mangoes, an operation that requires physical force: *"Drying the mangoes takes 24 hours and the drying racks must be turned once an hour in the gas dryers. This is a physical task that requires a strong person to lift and turn around the racks before returning them to the dryer. The racks which are higher up change positions with those*

lower down. Each rack weighs around 15 to 20kg and each dryer has 15 racks. It is difficult for a woman to do this work, and especially also as it has to continue through the night. We tried one year with women, but the results were not good." Cecile Konkobo, 55 years, Business owner SYA YEFAALA.

The cashew company SOTRIA-B employs 450 people, of which 90% are women and young girls who have dropped out of school.

Women processors operating equipment

The work in the processing plants has a beneficial effect on transforming the roles of women. According to the Director: *"Men work on the machines and on the tasks that are physically demanding. The women also work on the machines, in particular in shelling"*. Aminata Kone, Director of SOTRIA-B.

Entrepreneurship and empowerment

The business which is located in Banfora, an industrial town, benefits from a workforce that is used to industrial work. The entrepreneur enjoys more her current role as business manager compared to her former public servant position: *"I feel more myself as an entrepreneur than I was as a public officer. I prefer my life today. Here I am free; I organize my business and my personal life how I want. As a woman, I am taking care of my children's schooling, as well as that of my grand-children, and I am supporting other women who are able to take care of their families. When I was in the public service, I could only take care of my own family."*



Lessons learned

By supporting the entire value chain in the mango and cashew sectors, SNV Burkina contributed to sustainably improving entrepreneurial and employment opportunities for households both in rural and urban areas. As perennial cash crops, cashew and mango trees constitute long-term investments, and even more so as they aid restoration of vegetation.

One of the project's successes is having developed an integrated strategy that put together direct stakeholders (both male and female) with ministerial and private bodies. This approach improved collaboration and the division of the responsibilities between stakeholders, which helped guarantee a favourable environment for the participation of women in advocacy and lobbying activities addressed at Burkinabe public authorities, as well as the sustainability of the project actions. Advocacy for the cashew value chain was undertaken by Mrs Kone on behalf of the cashew interbranch organization. As a woman, she faced a lot of intimidation, but she remained steadfast so as to set an example for other women in the sector. Moreover, the setting up of a membership fee system to fund umbrella organizations for each part of the value chain contributed to empowerment of the value chains.

The existence of umbrella organizations for the different parts of the value chain was one of the success factors of the project.

While the project also had interventions in the processing link of the value chain which actively involves a significant number of women and youth, more remains to be done in terms of systematizing the gender approach.

When the dried mango marketing campaign was being launched, out of 154 participants, only 20 women were present. Yet, wholesaling and exporting are fields where few women are active due to a lack of means.

A gender map and organizational analysis of umbrella organizations would have ensured greater visibility of women and youth. These analyses could highlight specific difficulties for under-represented groups, as well as the criteria used when choosing participants for various activities.

Improving mango-drying technology

For the acquisition of processing equipment, the project emphasized the approach of making funds available to umbrella organizations. While this approach aligns well with participatory strategies, it may have contributed to certain mitigated results.

The processing units chose artisanally produced gas dryers which are cheaper than approved dryers. Furthermore, all gas dryers have significant environmental impacts and artisanally produced dryers² can also negatively affect the quality of the finished products and pose fire hazards. One of the plants that received support from the project was almost entirely destroyed by a fire: "The high- quality

dryer costs FCFA 1,750,000, and I had received FCFA 2 million. Could I just limit myself to buying one single high-quality dryer? I bought 5 artisanal dryers with 10 compartments each instead. These dryers do not produce dried mango with an attractive colour, they come out dark. There is no ventilation. They told me to install fans, but I am scared to, because I know two or three people who lost their dryers [like this]. The drying attendants start their shift in the morning and are on shift until the next day. Often, they are tired and fall asleep, so when there is a power cut it can easily create a mass that catches fire." Cecile Konkobo, 55 years, Business owner of SYA YEFAALA.

Due to its demanding nature and the work load it entails, this kind of drying technology is not well adapted to women, and not kind to the environment. The project could have involved engineering organizations to propose and/or develop alternative technologies that combined ease of use, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability.

In conclusion, supplying better adapted technologies to women processors and facilitating access to finance for women entrepreneurs are areas for intervention for the upscaling of the project with the aim of increasing the economic empowerment of women in the mango and cashew value chains.



²These dryers do not have a ventilation system and also do not respect norms for fire prevention, especially as their racks are made from wood.