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ComCashew

Growing Beyond Subsistence: How Farmer Business School is Transforming West African Agriculture

Agriculture remains the backbone of African economies, employing two-thirds of the labor force and contributing up to one-third of West Africa's Gross Domestic Product. Yet, many small-scale farmers remain trapped in subsistence, missing the chance to thrive in growing local and global markets. Rice yields are low, covering just 50% of domestic demand in West Africa, forcing expensive imports.

Cashew, though rich in export value, is often sold raw, losing out on local processing and profits. With food imports costing Africa $35 billion annually and the projection to triple without local production growth, the urgency is clear. The agricultural sector must transform to feed a growing population, create rural jobs, and reduce the carbon footprint of value chains.

Supporting entrepreneurship among smallholder farmers is no longer optional; it's essential. Yet business skills training remains marginal in traditional agricultural systems.

In five half-day sessions, farmers gain the mindset and tools to treat agriculture as a business

Transforming Mindsets - Fostering Growth

In this landscape, MOVE is using the Farmer Business School (FBS) approach as a practical, lasting solution tailored to rice and cashew, that is embedded in national agricultural extension systems. Across seven countries, this effort is turning farmers into business-minded producers, improving incomes, resilience, and rural employment.

Initially developed by GIZ in 2010 with global partners, the Farmer Business School (FBS) equips smallholders with practical business skills: understanding cost-benefit analysis, managing farm finances, planning production, and recognizing the value of group membership and quality production.

Each training is adapted towards the specific products and their production localization. It is hands-on. In five half-day sessions, farmers gain the mindset and tools to treat agriculture as a business.

The practical modules cover essential skills:

- Planning agricultural activities (production, post-harvest)
- Measuring financial gains and managing money
- Investment strategies and working together as a group
- Accessing inputs, financial services, and markets

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Different gender needs and climate-smart practices are integrated into all trainings. This ensures the approach is relevant and sustainable.

Under the MOVE project, FBS has been adapted and scaled for rice and cashew across Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Senegal.

At least 10,000 producers in the partner countries, have access to FBS sessions.

Since the start of the project in 2023, 290 trainers have been certified through the International Agribusiness Practitioners Association (IAPA). Cascading the knowledge of these trainers, at least 10,000 producers in the partner countries, have access to FBS sessions.

Beyond numbers, the impact lies in changed mindsets. As one cashew cooperative leader shared:

> **The FBS training helped me change my way of thinking. I learned to manage my farm like a business. Today, I plan better and make more informed decisions. I feel like a different person." Konate Sonde Moussa, cooperative manager, Konate's cooperative.**

Looking Forward: Scaling Success

The FBS approach is proving effectiveness in strengthening farm income, securing livelihoods, and building resilience to economic and climatic shocks. It also actively promotes the economic empowerment of women and youth in rural areas. Through the addition of local value to rice and cashew, FBS contributes to the reduction of trade deficits and of carbon footprint associated with cashew exports.

Due to its success with farmers, the FBS was easily institutionalized. Today, the FBS is being implemented by public extension service providers in the MOVE implementing countries. In Burkina Faso, for example, the Directorate General for the Promotion of Rural Economy (DGPER) promotes FBS. In Côte d'Ivoire, the National Agency for Rural Development Support (ANADER) champions it.

To further scale this impact, continued policy alignment is essential to ensure a long term embedding of FBS into national agricultural training systems. Stronger partnerships with the private sector and financial institutions will help expand into new value chains and unlock capital for growing agribusinesses.

With each trained farmer comes a ripple effect: more productive farms, stronger rural economies, and greater food sovereignty for the region.

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