

From Waste to Wealth: How Women in Northern Benin Are Turning Cashew Apples into Gold

New Discovery: use of Cashew Apples: A New Opportunity for Northern Benin

For generations, cashew farming in northern Benin focused solely on the nut. Once the nuts were harvested, the juicy nutritious cashew apples were left to rot in the fields.

“

We used to leave the apples behind after collecting the nuts. No one thought they had any value. We didn't know we were throwing away something so precious

- recalls a woman processor from Soubroukou.

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That mindset began to shift with the launch of an innovative Matching Grant Fund project, implemented by Tolaro Global in March 2024, under the Business Support Facility for Resilient Agricultural Value Chains.

The project's main objective is to boost the cashew sector by unlocking the untapped potential of the cashew apple through value addition.

One of the project's key components is the promotion of the cashew apple, a fruit which must be processed on the day of harvest to retain its nutritional and flavour qualities.

Through a hands-on, locally tailored training approach, 1,075 women and young people have learnt to collect, boil and dry the apples, and then sell the pre-processed product, known as “Pomme Émincée” (commonly referred to as Cashew Apple Meat) to Tolaro for final packaging and distribution.

This initiative has created new sources of income and redefined the value of a fruit that was once forgotten.

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A New Market and a New Mindset

At first, the idea of collecting cashew apples raised eyebrows. “The farmers thought we were just cleaning their farms,” one woman laughed. “But when they saw that we were making money, they began selling the apples to us instead.” Now, farmers deliver apples directly to the women who are beneficiaries of the project at 25 FCFA per kilo, while Tolaro pre-finances the activity, allowing the women to purchase the fresh apples from farmers.

Once processed, Tolaro buys a kilo of Pomme Émincée for 610 FCFA from the women's groups. This cashew season, a women's group from Soubroukou sold 111 kg of Pomme Émincée to Tolaro for further processing.

The product has gained strong consumer interest, and during a recent visit to Tolaro's showroom in Parakou, the shelves were empty of Pomme Émincée. "It's a fast-moving product," the sales representative explained. "We sell about three boxes a month."

More than an Income

Beyond the economic value, the project has brought nutritional security and family stability to the community of Soubroukou.

"Cashew apples are so nutritious," declared Seydou Rabi, President of the Cooperative. "We don't sell everything we keep some to cook at home. Just two pieces of Pomme Émincée can satisfy a child". The impact on family life has also been profound. In the past, many women had to migrate to neighbouring countries in search of work, leaving their families behind.

Today, they are able to remain in their communities, earn enough to pay their children's school fees, and invest in building a future at home. This shift has given families both stability and confidence that their livelihoods can be sustained locally, with wealth created by their own hands.

A Model for Inclusive, Sustainable Growth

The project doesn't stop at Pomme Émincée. Apples that are not suitable for Pomme Émincées are processed into animal feed that the women sell at 30 FCFA per kilo.

At Tolaro's showroom, further cashew-based products were on display: cashew flour, roasted nuts, puree, and cream, all pointing to a growing ecosystem of value-added processing in the cashew value chain.



Looking Ahead: A Promising Market

The women are eager for the next cashew season, not just to produce more but to expand awareness and market reach. "Our strongest wish is for people to understand the health benefits of the cashew apple," said Seydou Rabi. "We want support to create awareness to grow Tolaro's market which will also expand ours" she concluded.

Through a simple yet powerful model of transforming waste into wealth, the project has empowered women, created income, improved nutrition, and inspired entire communities.

The Matching Grant Fund is implemented as part of the Joint Action "Business Support Facility for Resilient Agricultural Value Chains" co-funded by the European Union under the Samoa agreement with OACPS and by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and implemented by GIZ.

“**We can't wait to apply everything we've learned. Next season, we expect better yields and better lives.**”

- concluded Bokor Sime Idrissu

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