



Planting Gender Equality in the Benin Cashew Value Chain



A Case Study of the BeninCajù Project



(Cover) Justine Nadohou, woman worker in a cashew apple juice processing unit (April 2019)
(Above) Adélaïde Laourou, woman producer of cashew apple juice and other juices (June 2019)

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Overview

This is an account of how one project, with a focus on strengthening the competitiveness of the cashew value chain in Benin, embarked on a journey to change the norms and practices of a sector that has historically provided limited economic opportunities for women. BeninCajù, implemented by TechnoServe (TNS) in partnership with Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), is an eight-year project aimed at strengthening and expanding the cashew sector into a more competitive, sustainable, and inclusive economic engine of growth. Over the life of the project, BeninCajù has directed actions at multiple levels of the cashew value chain, advocating for the removal of barriers that limit women's access to productive resources and building a network of community advisors to create awareness on gender issues at a grassroots level. Farmers, cooperatives, processors, financial institutions, and community advisors are learning the value of women's economic contributions and are creating a sector that opens meaningful opportunities for women.

TABLE 1: PRIMARY GENDER-RELATED ACHIEVEMENTS

Intervention	Achievement
Change in by-laws of cashew cooperatives to increase share of women as members and leaders in cooperatives	Between 2016 and 2021, total membership in FENAPAB was reported to have increased from about 5,000 total members to approximately 75,000, and women's membership grew from fewer than 1,000 to nearly 21,000. In 2019, the first woman was elected as the president of the supervisory board, as well as the first woman treasurer, for a three-year mandate.
Build capacity and leadership of cashew actors to advance gender equality in their work with farmers	Through the identification of gender focal points, capacity building, and engagement with leadership, the ATDA4, the public agency for supporting the development of the cashew, soy, and cassava value chains, increased its reach to women farmers. By 2020, almost 40% of the farmers with whom it works are women. The agency is developing a gender action plan not only for cashew but for other value chains as well.
Create leadership opportunities for women in processing companies	Processing companies were encouraged to increase the share of women in leadership positions. By 2019, four of the companies working with BeninCajù had promoted or recruited women into positions including director of human resources, chief operating Officer, and plant manager.

This case study presents the approach BeninCajù took to create a more inclusive and competitive cashew sector. It begins with a brief explanation of the context in which the project operates, followed by a description of the project's journey to foster gender equality across the value chain. Finally, it outlines the changes that are occurring among women and men farmers and other cashew actors and draws out lessons learned. Throughout, the case study relies on quantitative and qualitative data from the project and interviews conducted with key stakeholders (Box 1).

BOX 1: DATA COLLECTION

This study was conducted from December 2020 to March 2021. Given the restrictions and limitations on travel due to COVID-19, data was collected remotely in coordination with the Gender and Rural Finance Specialist for BeninCajù. Data collection included desktop review of published literature on the sector, as well as project documents and communication materials. Semi-structured interviews with key informants were conducted virtually and focus group discussions with women and men farmers and processing employees were led by TNS and CRS staff.



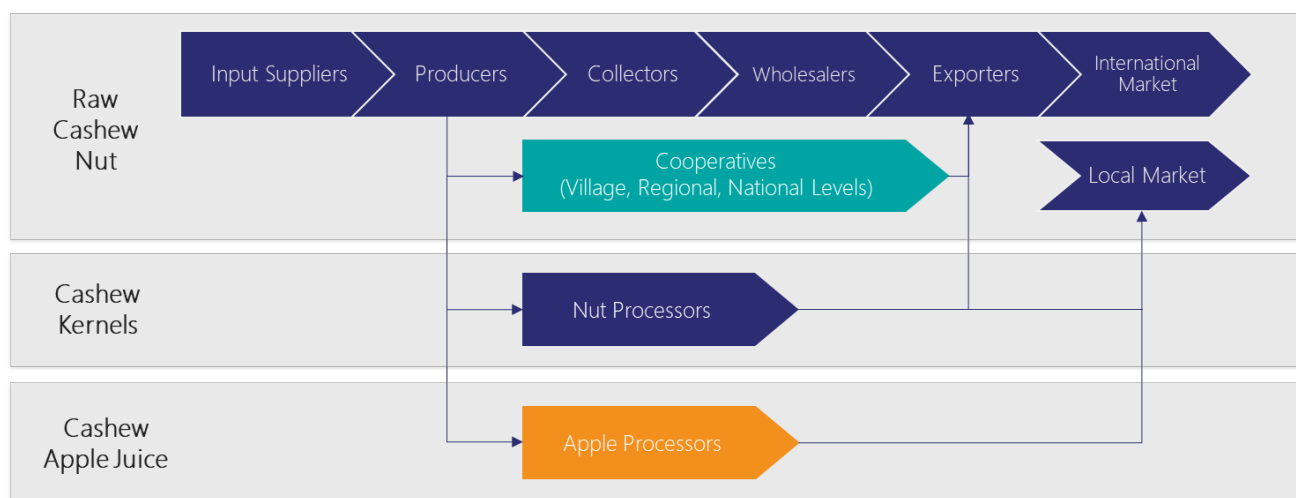
Hélène Segboda, worker in the nursery of Noël CHABI YABI in Parakou (April 2018)

I. Landscape

With about 52.7% of the Beninese population residing in rural areas, agriculture is an important economic activity for the country, employing roughly 38.3% of the active population and generating 26.9% of the gross domestic product (FAOSTAT, 2021; WB, 2021). Women are critical to the sector: 43% of economically active women are in agriculture, where they often perform the majority of agricultural work in key value chains (FAO 2010). Yet only one out of three women working in this sector in Benin is paid in cash and in-kind (AFD, 2016), meaning the vast majority of women make unremunerated contributions. To generate income, women instead have alternative businesses, selling staple food crops and processed products like shea butter, largely in the informal sector (AFD, 2016; FGD, 2021).

In Benin, women have historically lacked access to—and control over—land, as a result of a complex set of arrangements and gender differentiated social rules and roles, in which the most common way for a woman to secure land tenure is through a male spouse or relative (Goldstein, 2016). These and other gender-related inequalities constrain women’s opportunities and life choices, especially in rural areas. They remain primarily responsible for domestic chores, like fetching water, collecting wood, and preparing food. Women’s literacy rates remain low, at 31%, compared to 54% of men, and women’s empowerment is further complicated by early marriage, pregnancy, and school dropout (WFB, 2021; GGGI, 2019; IFAD, 2015).

FIGURE 1: SIMPLIFIED CASHEW VALUE CHAIN IN BENIN



Benin is the seventh-leading global producer of cashew nuts, and cashew is the country’s second most important export crop (WB 2020, FAOSTAT, 2021).¹ It contributes 25% of the country’s agricultural export earnings (ComCashew, 2019) and 3% of the gross domestic product (PSDSA, 2017). Benin has favorable conditions for growing cashew trees, particularly in the northern and central regions,² and more than 200,000 families are involved in cashew farming on farms with an average size of one hectare (PSDSA, 2017). Even though domestic processing of the cashew remains low, a number of export-oriented cashew kernel companies exist. While raw cashew nut has been the most valued product, new by-products, like cashew-apple juice, have opened additional market opportunities.

Broadly, the cashew sector is comprised of input suppliers, producers (working independently or organized in cooperatives at the village, regional, and national levels), aggregators and intermediaries, processors (artisanal or semi-industrial), exporters, and retailers (Figure 1). It has historically been dominated by men, even while women are significantly involved in different levels of the chain. In production, women are active in harvest and post-harvest activities, like separating nuts from apples and transporting them from farm to village. These activities are seasonal, lasting the roughly four-month length of the harvest. Both men and women are involved in the marketing of raw cashew nuts (ACI,

¹ To give an idea of the export value of cashew, just European imports more than doubled from €534m in 2013 to €1.34bn in 2018, and between 2007 and 2017, the imports of cashew in the United States of America grew about 29,000 tons (Unah 2019).

² Comprising the Zou, Collines, Atacora, Donga, Borgou, and Alibori administrative departments.

2010). In processing, women make up a large part of the labor force in shelling, but hold few managerial positions (PSDSA, 2017). Some women are owners of small cashew kernels processing units. As pioneers of an emerging market, women entrepreneurs and women's organizations buy cashew apples to press and sell as juice.

"Women are reluctant to accept positions of responsibility in associations because they lack self-confidence."

-Man leader of cooperative

"...women didn't even dare to participate in group activities because men laughed at them saying these things don't concern women."

-Woman leader of cooperative

Despite women's participation in key activities, they still face major obstacles that restrict their rights and opportunities to meaningfully benefit from their participation in the cashew value chain. In 2010, the African Cashew Initiative (now ComCashew) estimated that 95% of the existing cashew farms in the country belonged to men. Furthermore, while women cashew farmers represent 66% of the potential clientele for credit, only 5% have access to it, as land is often required as collateral. Women have historically been less present in decision-making structures, like cooperatives, in which men make up the majority of membership and leadership. The situation, however, is rapidly changing, in part due to efforts like those of BeninCajù.

II. The Approach

BeninCajù's initial approach to supporting women's economic empowerment began with activities focused on cashew processing, the creation of community saving and internal lending groups (SILCs), and a set of training modules on gender equality. While this was initially informed by a gender analysis, by 2018, women remained underrepresented in terms of voice, ownership of resources, and influence on decision-making. A project assessment concluded that while efforts had been made to address gender issues in the project's design, these were not translating into gains for women. In response, the program hired a Gender Specialist and established a new gender action plan—developed with input from project partners and focused on addressing specific gender-based constraints—with its own set of objectives and a logical framework to be implemented across BeninCajù. Central to this new plan was ensuring that the concerns and experiences of both women and men became an integral aspect of the project's work at multiple levels of the value chain (Box 2).

The effectiveness of this approach lies in how it targeted individuals—both women and men—and the multiple actors in the cashew value chain with whom they interact, including farmer groups, cooperatives, and government agencies (Table 2). The project played a role in introducing gender-related topics within these institutions, as well as supporting the visibility of gender issues within the project's management team. The diverse strategies and actions undertaken are described below, focusing first on those targeting cashew farmers, followed by a description of activities and actions employed with other value chain actors, and finally, at the project level.

BOX 2: GENDER PLAN ACTION STRATEGIES

Strengthening the institutionalization of the gender dimension in partner organizations for better consideration of gender issues in production activities;

Building the capacities of project partners and providers for more effective gender mainstreaming;

Facilitating women's access to factors of production.

TABLE 2: SUMMARY OF ACTORS INVOLVED IN BENINCAJÙ'S GENDER APPROACH

Function in Cashew Value Chain	Organization
Farmer Training Service Providers	CRADIB, DEDRAS
Savings	Savings and Internal Lending Community (SILC) groups
Farmer Producer Organization	Village Cooperatives of Cashew Producers (VCCP) groups FENAPAB: National umbrella organization of cashew producers. Represents cooperatives from the village, communal, regional, and national levels.
Extension and Advisory Support	ATDA4: Public agency for supporting the development of the cashew, soy, and cassava value chains.
Processing	Sweet Benin: First formal brand of cashew apple juice in Benin Fludor.

Women and men farmers

BeninCajù conducted a series of actions that targeted women and men farmers to improve their participation and performance in the cashew value chain. These activities aimed to strengthen women's knowledge of cashew farming and other business skills; address gender issues within farming businesses; and facilitate women's access to resources, such as land and savings.

Strengthening women's knowledge of cashew farming and other business skills. To ensure that women could acquire knowledge about cashew farming, the project invited women working on family cashew farms and spouses of enrolled participants to the training sessions, arranged the training sessions according to women's needs³, and harnessed technology—such as making video recordings of the training session—to reach women that could not attend.

Addressing gender issues within farming businesses. Women and men farmers learned key concepts of gender equality and the value of recognizing women's and men's contributions through a set of modules on the subject. These were integrated into the training program for farmers, as well as SILC groups, village cooperatives of cashew producers (VCCP) and the ProLeader community-based approach. Topics included the recognition of women's participation in the cashew production, the equal productive and managerial capacities of women and men, leadership, and land rights. In each village, women leaders were invited to serve as local focal points and be the liaison between community advisors and other women from the community.

In addition, two focused methodologies on household gender issues were integrated into the program. The Gender Transformation Approach targets selected SILC groups whose members faced problems related to financial resource management at the household level, covering topics such as joint decision-making and communication. The *Maison*

³ The training sessions were to be scheduled ensuring they did not overlap with other tasks still associated with women's responsibilities like cooking or going to the market. For doing this, the field teams were asking beforehand the best schedule to the women and men participants.

Modèle methodology, operating exclusively with project beneficiaries and their spouses, targets those communities where women lack decision-making power and face a context of gender-based violence.

Facilitating access to resources like savings and land. BeninCajù promoted the creation of SILC groups, especially for women, who represent around 70% of the group's members. SILC groups enable members to access financial services, learn financial management skills, and network. Over time, many are evolving into agricultural-oriented groups. This is a notable shift, because it provides an important vehicle for actors to deliver training, e.g. on cashew production, to the high share of women among their members. Awareness around land tenure has also become an increasingly important conversation with farmers and other actors, in order to facilitate women's access to land and entry into the cashew chain as farmers.

Actors in the value chain

BeninCajù's strategies and actions rely in great measure on raising awareness of gender issues among other value chain actors involved in the project, such as the FENAPAB and ATDA4. The activities conducted in this vein are geared towards supporting the creation of an operational environment that recognizes women as important actors in the value chain, as well as gender-based constraints and how to address them.

Building capacity of value chain actors. The project made a concerted effort to ensure that all project partners understood the importance of gender equality and were engaged in delivering training on the subject. This meant that other project partners, such as ATDA4, were targeted to receive training and coaching on gender equality throughout the project. Over time, the responsibility for farmer training shifted increasingly to local partners, meaning that they too needed to understand the importance of reaching women. Newer community-based methods, like ProLeader, required the same attention to gender issues in order to maintain the focus on equity in the program.

Placement of gender focal points within partners and key stakeholders. A total of 26 gender focal points—women and men—were targeted for capacity building and coaching among key stakeholders and partners of BeninCajù: CRS, DEDRAS, CRADIB, FENAPAB, and ATDA4. Initially, coaching was held on a monthly basis, but with COVID-19, the meetings have been moved online and the interaction between the project's gender specialist and the focal points has increased. These individuals help to amplify the gender mainstreaming efforts at the community and project levels. The government agency ATDA4 communicated its support for gender equality through an official statement that committed to facilitating gender awareness training modules to farmers as part of its technical training on cashew production.

Awareness-raising sessions on gender issues. Efforts were made to raise awareness of gender issues among FENAPAB staff and representatives of two processing companies (for a total of 28 persons trained). Modules focused on the gender situation in cashew production, gender integration issues, strategies to accelerate gender integration, and women's situation in relation to the cashew production value chain.

Advocacy for gender equality. BeninCajù devoted significant effort to fostering cooperation and building capacity of local actors, such as the FENAPAB, processors, the government agency ATDA4, and other actors, including financial institutions to support gender-specific interventions. For example, the project advocated for the modification of membership requirements for women to join the FENAPAB, the reduction of interest rates on credits offered by the National Agricultural Development Fund to farmers, the enhanced recruitment and nomination of women for management of partners' structures, and greater awareness for improved labor conditions for women working in the cashew processing companies.

Recognition of women's work in the cashew sector. The program organized recognition events aimed at building a greater understanding of how addressing gender inequalities can benefit cashew production. The events convened

more than 100 people, raised awareness on the opportunities for the reform made to the National Land Code 2017-152, and awarded the women who applied best practices for cashew production. Co-organizers of the events included the ATDA4, local authorities, and the Cooperatives of Women Producers, Collectors and Processors of Cashew and Soya (CFPCTAS in French).

BOX 3: ADVANCING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN CASHEW PROCESSING

Cashew processing companies employ a significant share of women as workers who shell and grade cashew nuts. This labor-intensive work provides an important income to women, but the terms and conditions of this work can be precarious. To improve the competitiveness of the cashew sector, BeninCajù worked with 24 processors (six cashew nut processing factories and 18 cashew apple facilities) to strengthen domestic processing capacity and create new jobs, especially for women. Processing companies like Fludor and Tolaro received technical expertise and training to improve business practices in food safety, management, and occupational and workplace safety. A strong focus was placed on identifying policies and practices that would enhance the terms and conditions of women's work, and meet social audit standards and compliance indices like the Business Social Compliance Index (BSCI) and Sedex Members Ethical Trade Audit (SMETA).



Shelling section of the FLUDOR processing plant (February 2020)

Gender-friendly infrastructure upgrades: Companies upgraded their factories to include a restaurant providing two free meals a day to workers, on-site child care, a nurse with access to a doctor, and proper bathrooms for women and men.

Women in leadership: Companies were encouraged to increase the share of women in leadership positions. By 2019, four of the companies working with BeninCajù had promoted or recruited women into positions including director of human resources, chief operating Officer, and plant manager. BeninCajù also helped to establish the first brand of cashew apple juice, Sweet Benin, in which women make up 83% of the permanent positions in its production plants. As pioneers of this emerging market, Sweet Benin produced 163,968 bottles by September 2020 with a value of 286,753 USD.

BeninCajù staff

Arguably, the work of BeninCajù to create a gender-responsive environment began internally. BeninCajù evolved from a situation where gender was not consistently mainstreamed in the project to one where gender issues are addressed throughout the projects operations. Leadership was critical to this change, including the gender specialist and the gender focal points, who made it possible to keep cohesion among the project's components and the stakeholders working towards gender equality objectives.

Building capacity of value chain actors. The project made a concerted effort to ensure that all project partners understood the importance of gender equality and were engaged in delivering training on the subject. This meant that other project partners, such as ATDA4, were targeted to receive training and coaching on gender equality throughout the project. Over time, the responsibility for farmer training shifted increasingly to local partners, meaning that they too

needed to understand the importance of reaching women. Newer community-based methods, like ProLeader, required the same attention to gender issues in order to maintain the focus on equity in the program.

Permanent presence of gender expertise to ensure gender mainstreaming within the project. Hiring a gender specialist as the key expert was a core action to ensure the coherence during the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the gender-responsive approach. Gender focal points within the project structure (TNS, CRS, DEDRAS, and CRADIB) also functioned to amplify the importance of gender equality directly with the beneficiaries and throughout all activities.

Considering gender issues in the design and planning of the project strategies, actions, and activities.

BeninCajù invested first in conducting a gender analysis to identify constraints and entry points. After hiring a gender specialist, the development of the gender action plan was a critical action to redirect the project's strategy to effectively reach and benefit women within the cashew production sector. The creation of internal action plans and job descriptions with specific gender-related responsibilities was also a significant step to give formal weight to the gender component. Adopting inclusive recruitment practices and creating awareness on gender issues across the project staff were additional actions that appear to have set gender mainstreaming into effective practice.

Awareness-raising sessions on gender issues within project staff. Efforts were included to raise awareness of gender issues among project staff of TNS, CRS, DEDRAS, and CRADIB, and specifically on the gender dynamics of the cashew value chain and strategies for reaching and benefitting women.

Sex-disaggregated data collection, monitoring, and evaluation. Sex-disaggregated data enhanced accountability, with indicators that tracked the share of women participating in training sessions, accessing financial services and land, or holding managerial positions in VCCPs. Monitoring staff and gender focal points learned how to use this information to understand progress towards gender equality.

Communication and dissemination. A communications plan was developed to routinely share the project's progress and success stories online and in newspapers, including those related to women's contributions to the cashew value chains. Communications materials encompassed bulletins, success stories, videos and photographic material, events to recognize women's work in the cashew sector, blog entries, branding and marketing support to "Sweet Benin" cashew apple juice, and a monthly newsletter.



Hostess at a sales booth selling cashew apple juice launching under the Sweet Benin brand (April 2017)

III. Evidence of Change

Advancing women's economic empowerment requires change in multiple domains. It is achieved, in part, by increasing women's access to resources, knowledge, and skills. It is also achieved with shifts in perceptions and attitudes among women and men, about themselves or each other, at the farm level, and among leaders in extension agencies, processing companies, and in the community. This shift in perceptions and attitudes is often accompanied by changes to the business practices of these organization to bring services closer to women. This section draws upon quantitative project data and results from semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to illustrate the evidence of change across different actors in support of women's economic empowerment.

Increased access to knowledge and resources

Women's participation in training sessions steadily increased over the life of the program: from 18% in 2018, to 31% in 2019, and to 35% by the end of 2020. This was the result of the diversity of BeninCajù partners who were responsible for delivering training to farmers, including TechnoServe, Catholic Relief Services, DEDRAS, CRADIB, and ATDA4. To achieve this increase, these partners all had to adopt practices that would target and attract women farmers, and this meant a significant investment in training facilitators, extension agents, and leader farmers on gender equality and practices to reach women farmers. As a result, in a sector where women have largely been viewed as unpaid labor, as of March 2021, more than 29,000 women have gained knowledge about cashew farming, positioning them better as farmers.

Additionally, by the end of 2020, 620 SILC groups, established to increase women's access to savings, reached a total of 10,614 women members—71% of the total membership. The SILC groups play a key role in increasing women's well-being by enabling access to savings that they can invest in their farming business or to respond to a health shock. By 2020, the SILC groups had given loans with a total value of \$526,256 to 8,469 women who previously did not have access to savings.

"With SILC group, we have the ability to take loans for other activities that generate income, and to contribute to household expenses."

—Woman cashew farmer

INCREASED MEMBERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP IN THE VALUE CHAIN

One of the desired outcomes of the project's gender action plan was to address the specific constraints women face in becoming members of cooperatives, in part by examining the bylaws of farmer groups and cooperatives. The objective was to advocate for change in the membership criteria of these groups, thus opening opportunities for women to participate in and potentially improve their representation among their leadership. A behavior change process with these institutions was put in place to raise awareness around gender inequalities in the sector, women's lack of access to land, and the importance of women's contributions to the sector. It also aimed to change the perceptions and social beliefs that depicted women as not being capable of holding key decision-making positions, in part because they lacked confidence and self-esteem.



Elisabeth Atchade, woman cashew nut producer in Tchaourou (February 2020)

"Five years ago, I would have never imagined that the FENAPAB would be directed by a woman. Nowadays, there are three women within the board of directors of the FENAPAB. Before, the role of women was really minimum."

-Man project staff

"Five years ago, men outnumbered women [in cooperatives] because women did not have the freedom and permission of their husbands to participate in group activities."

-Woman leader of cooperative

These efforts bore results in 2019 when three women were elected by the General Assembly of FENAPAB to serve on the association's board of directors. These women, who were also ProLeaders,⁴ became the first woman president of the executive board, the first woman president of the supervisory board, and the first woman treasurer, for a three-year mandate. Under the new president, FENAPAB revised its statutes and internal regulations, resulting in the land ownership criterion being reduced from 0.5 hectares to 0.25 hectares for women, thus removing barriers for women to become members of the association. Between 2016 and 2021, total membership in FENAPAB was reported to have increased from about 5,000 total members to approximately 75,000, and women's membership grew from fewer than 1,000 to nearly 21,000.

"Before arriving in FENAPAB, I was trained by TNS on Good Agricultural Practices and management of the cashew farm. So, I was interested and as I was already a member of a cooperative, it was possible to represent a regional union, and then to be elected in the FENAPAB."

-Woman cooperative member

⁴ ProLeader is a 4-month trainer of trainers' program where farmers train peer farmers on the learned modules to complete the training. The ProLeader training sessions focus on cashew production, leadership, market, management, quality, and includes a gender module. The overall objective of the ProLeader Initiative is to build a pool of local producer-experts, at least 40 % of whom are women.

Changes in agency and attitudes of women and men

To drive attitudinal change, BeninCajù's technical training curriculum included modules on gender and household dynamics to shift beliefs at the household level that limited women's agency and decision-making. The case study used the Ladder of Power and Freedom, a tool developed by Petesch & Bullock (2018), to explore their relative power and freedom (P&F) at two different points in time, capturing change in their perceptions about their own agency and decision-making.

During the group session, women reflected that five years ago, they had the minimum level of P&F (1) around cashew production and household dynamics. Speaking about the current dynamics, the women indicated that their level of P&F had increased, placing them around the middle level (3). Women farmers initially felt voiceless and that they had almost no power over decision-making. Many of the participants indicated that nowadays they have decision-making power and share it with their husbands: *"Before, it was difficult to sit down with my husband to discuss. Today, communication has improved, and this affects children who started by copying these good manners."* (Woman cashew farmer, 2021). *"Nowadays, our husbands encourage us to participate in meetings and training sessions."* (Woman cashew farmer, 2021).

"Meal preparation were activities unique to women, but now performed by men as well. This change is a result of model house training and on gender."

-Man cashew farmer

"Before, my husband didn't take care of the children even though I was busy. But after the training, he washes the kids, has fun with them when I am busy. He brings me firewood on his motorbike from the field."

-Woman cashew farmer

"Thanks to the learnings of Maison Modèle, a lot is changing. Our husbands let us teach our boys to clean, which was not done. This relieves the girls and allows them to learn their lessons better."

-Woman cashew farmer

The Ladder of Power and Freedom (P&F) is a qualitative data collection tool used to capture perceptions of the capacities of men and women to exercise agency and make major decisions in their lives. It is designed as a focus group tool with interactive ranking exercises that provide a numerical value of power and freedom, along a 5-point scale where the lowest rung of the ladder (1) is no power and freedom to make decisions and the highest rung (5) is the power and freedom to make most decisions. This is accompanied by narrative data explaining the participant's ranking.

For more information consult [this](#).

The men's group stated that five years ago, they were near the maximum level of P&F (4-5) concerning decisions related to cashew production, but that nowadays, this had dropped to a middle level (3). These results suggest that the decrease in men's P&F level may be due to an increase in women's participation in decisions. This was mostly seen as a positive change, citing better management of food and income through joint decisions, improved communication, and teamwork.



Women workers with producers to harvest and dry cashew nuts in Tchaourou (June 2019)

Men have also been changing norms by taking on some responsibilities that were generally considered women's activities, like cooking. These behaviors are also having an impact on children: boys are learning how to do

household chores. Among both men and women, many expressed that once they understood the notion and benefits of gender equality, a change could begin. One of the main changes identified by the participants was the recognition, by men and women themselves, of women's contribution and capacities.

"Before, I did not have any farm, but thanks to the training of BeninCajù, my husband has given me one hectare of land where I started my cashew farm." (Woman cashew farmer, 2021)

IV. Lessons Learned

Women's economic empowerment is achieved through behavior change at multiple levels and among multiple institutions. BeninCajù created awareness on gender issues at the community level, but also among organizations, government, and service providers. The project's training, communication, and advocacy efforts among and across actors in the cashew sector was critical to behavior change. Gender focal points helped to communicate directly with communities, while community and industry events helped to raise major awareness of women's contributions to the cashew value chain. Furthermore, the targeted work engaging men enabled attitudinal change among this group who yield significant influence over women's lives.

Land is a significant, but not insurmountable, challenge. While a lack of land access is often cited as the root cause for women's limited role in the sector, the project still found ways to open opportunities for women. The advocacy efforts to change FENAPAB's bylaws are important evidence of how to foster structural change and open opportunities for women. Having learned from this experience, BeninCajù continues to talk about the right women have to land under Benin's law and equip extension officers among partner agencies, like ATDA4, with the knowledge and skills to speak with communities about women's access to land.

Women's leadership and confidence can be developed in multiple ways. Women's increased participation in agronomic training provided them with new knowledge and resulted in a stronger sense of self-confidence. In BeninCajù, this was supplemented by encouraging women's participation in SILCs and the delivery of gender-specific workshops targeting the households. Beyond the household, women also increased their voice in other decision-making bodies: their participation in the ProLeader program, for example, provided women with space to demonstrate their leadership skills and agronomy knowledge. There is some evidence that these women have become role models for others in the sector.

Understanding the impacts on the household division of labor as a result of women shifting towards productive work remains critical. Even though it was reported that women were receiving more help from their husbands at home, this situation was mainly among cashew farmers. Women working in processing facilities shared that it was not easy to comply with their household chores in addition to their responsibilities at the processing unit and there is some suggestion that women are delegating household tasks to children in the family.

Gender mainstreaming requires persistent attention and whole project ownership of the objectives. The mid-term report highlighted that "not all project's staff were equally aware of the gender issues and their potential impact

"Women themselves have become aware of their importance in the sector, and they express themselves better and better in the group."

-Woman Community Advisor



"When a woman succeeds in becoming a cooperative manager, she even has greater legitimacy in front of other women who find in themselves the person who does extraordinary things, because they do what men do and what other women are not capable of."

-Man leader of cooperative

on the project.” The assumption made by many was that gender-related objectives were known by everyone, when in fact, this was not the case. A review of the project’s data and reach to women was critical in shifting attitudes and practices in the project—a practice which continues to be critical as it expands, new staff is hired, and the program continues to evolve.

V. Conclusion

Over the life of the project, BeninCajù’s commitments to advancing women’s economic empowerment have grown. Starting from its efforts to include women in training, the strategies have matured to target not just producers, but other actors along the chain and to address structural issues, like access to land. The approach recognizes the need to move beyond solely addressing women’s gaps in knowledge and skills, to increasing their access to resources and overcoming institutional barriers in the household and the workplace. Farmers, cooperatives, processing facilities, financial institutions, associations, government, and community advisors have all been drawn into the efforts to transform the cashew chain into a competitive and equitable sector.

While these efforts have already made a measurable difference on women’s participation and leadership in organizations; access to information, finance, and resources; and decision-making power at home and on the farm, it’s likely that their full impact will not be felt until the future. That’s because BeninCajù’s strategy of planting gender equality within the key value-chain actors is likely to yield results long after the project’s completion.

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ANNEX I

Summary of techniques used during the case study and its practical application:

Table 3. Summary of data collection techniques used during the case study.

Techniques used	Practical application
Semi-structured interviews	11 individual semi-structured interviews with key informants (3 women, 8 men) 1 group semi-structured interview (1 woman, 3 men)
Questionnaires	20 questionnaires to women (11) and men (9) involved in processing and production of cashew
Focus groups	5 focus groups with women (26) and men (16) involved in cashew production and processing
Secondary data sources	National and international statistics and reports, project documents, research papers, annual reports, publications, bulletins, websites, news portals, videos, and social media.

Tables 4, 5, and 6 show the detailed lists of semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and questionnaires conducted during the case study:

Table 4. List of semi-structured interviews conducted during the case study.

No.	Date	Interview	Platform	Duration
1	15 th December 2020	Junior Agricultural Advisor – TechnoServe	Zoom	57minutes
2	15 th December 2020	Principal Specialist on Monitoring & Evaluation – TechnoServe	Zoom	52minutes
3	15 th December 2020	Deputy Program Director – TechnoServe	Zoom	45minutes
4	17 th December 2020	BeninCajù Chief of Party – TechnoServe	Google Meet	1hour 15minutes
5	17 th December 2020	Production Director -Catholic Relief Services	Zoom	45minutes
6	17 th December 2020	Responsible of Communication – TechnoServe	Zoom	48minutes
7	18 th December 2020	Gender and Rural Finance Specialist -TechnoServe	Zoom	1hour 18minutes
8	15 th & 26 th January 2021	President – FENAPAB	WhatsApp	2 hours cumulative
9	19 th January 2021	Project Supervisor and Gender focal point CRADIB	WhatsApp	2hours

10	20 th January 2021	Project Director and Gender focal point – DEDRAS	Zoom	1hour 11minutes
11	23 rd January 2021	4 Gender Focal points (3 men and 1 woman) -ATDA4	WhatsApp	2 hours
12	24 th January 2021	General Director – ATDA4	WhatsApp	1 hour 15 minutes

Table 5. List of Focus Group Discussions conducted during the case study.

No.	Date	Focus Group Discussion	Location
1	25 th January 2021	10 Women cashew producers	Tchatchou
2	25 th January 2021	12 Men cashew producers	Tchatchou
3	26 th January 2021	5 Women working on cashew apple processing	Dassa
4	27 th January 2021	7 Women working on cashew apple processing	Djougou
5	03 rd February 2021	4 Women and 4 Men leaders of cashew producers' cooperatives	Ouemou, Tamarou, Baowngueon, Komeguea

Table 6. List of Questionnaires conducted during the case study.

No.	Date	Questionnaires	Number	Location
1	26 th January 2021	Women working on cashew apple processing	3	Dassa
2	27 th January 2021	Women working on cashew apple processing	4	Djougou
3	27 th January 2021	Men working on cashew nut processing	5	Djerègbe
4	03 rd February 2021	4 Women and 4 Men leaders of cashew producers' cooperatives	8	Ouemou, Tamarou, Baowngueon, Komeguea

ABOUT TECHNOSERVE

TechnoServe is a leader in harnessing the power of the private sector to help people lift themselves out of poverty. A non-profit organization operating in 30 countries, we work with hard-working men and women in the developing world to build competitive farms, businesses, and industries. By linking people to information, capital, and markets, we have helped millions to create lasting prosperity for their families and communities.

Founded over 50 years ago, TechnoServe has been named the #1 nonprofit for fighting poverty by an independent charity ratings agency. If you would like information about TechnoServe's work, please contact media@technoserve.org.

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