

# Mozambican women work to revitalize the cashew nut industry

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Cashew farming communities in northern Mozambique have been experiencing firsthand the important contributions that women can make when they are empowered to make a difference.

Traditionally in Mozambique, men have been responsible for managing and generating income for the household, while women have been responsible primarily for domestic affairs. However, MozaCajú, a USDA-funded project that supports production, processing, and marketing of cashew along the entire value chain, is working to change that by supporting female cashew farmers to become more actively involved in agricultural activities and livelihoods.

MozaCajú recognizes that investments in women have big impacts on the economic and social well-being of the household and community. Therefore, MozaCajú has made deliberate efforts to reach out to women to include them in various roles, most especially as farmer promotion agents. To date, these women have contributed to the increase in cashew nut yields and incomes by helping to teach farmers new production techniques thereby helping to increase the sustainability of the cashew industry for years to come.

## Meet MozaCajú's female promoters who are teaching best practices in their community

Salima Amule and Fatima Mussa are neighbors from Mueda district in Cabo Delgado province, a predominantly cashew-producing region. Sofia Momade and Gilda Jose are from the neighboring coastal district of Mocimboa da Praia.

In 2014, these women were chosen to become four of MozaCajú's 179 farmer promotion agents ("promoters"). A promoter is a cashew farmer who is trusted and known in his or her community and who works on behalf of MozaCajú to deliver technical assistance on cashew production to other farmers. Being a promoter is an important and challenging job – it is essentially the role that agricultural extension workers have in many other parts of the world.

MozaCajú has specific criteria for promoters, including attainment of a certain level of schooling and literacy as well as approval from the community. The majority of MozaCajú's promoters are male, with around 20% female promoters. Sofia, Gilda, Fatima and Salima were chosen by their communities because they were better educated than other women and were active in the community.





*Gilda practices teaching at a training on crop protection*

Over the past two years, these women have joined other MozaCajú promoters in trainings on techniques for improved cashew production including cleaning, pruning, and spraying of cashew trees as well as harvesting and post-harvesting. They have traveled to centralized locations for these trainings, which aggregate promoters from many districts in order to foster peer learning within the group.

In addition to learning these improved practices from the MozaCajú technicians, these trainings have been good opportunities for promoters to get out of their own villages and communities in order to meet other farmers. This has been particularly important for the female promoters as they do not typically get as many opportunities to travel to new districts and meet other women. As Sofia, Gilda, Fatima and Salima have all been attending the same training sessions since 2014, they have come to know and learn from each other, despite living around 55 miles away from each other (a large distance is a rural and undeveloped area).

The real work of the promoter, however, begins after the training sessions upon return to their communities. As promoters, these women are responsible for disseminating this new knowledge and information to other cashew farmers, through the help of materials such as field manuals and posters that are provided during the training sessions.

At the outset of the project, MozaCajú technicians worked with each promoter to organize the cashew farmers in their community into 7 to 8 groups of around 20 to 30 farmers each (for a total of around 200 farmers per promoter). To encourage a quick dissemination of the knowledge and information, these promoters have 10 days from the initial training in which they must reach each group in their community. The promoters travel to a selected location where all the farmers in a group are organized – typically a cashew farm or field – and deliver the training. When a practical demonstration is required, the promoters use their own fields or pre-identified demonstration plots to illustrate techniques or tools.

The impact that promoters like Sofia, Gilda, Fatima and Salima are having is significant. Through the support of MozaCajú, they are reaching over 23,000 cashew farmers with these new and improved production techniques. Moreover, the farmers they have trained have seen a 31% increase in cashew tree productivity and a 71% increase in farmer income.

In addition to the positive impact that these promoters are having in their communities, the experience of being a promoter has had a positive impact on the women as well. They have learned how to organize their community and disseminate important information to large groups of people – skills that are not common for rural Mozambican women but necessary in order to carry out the work of a promoter.



*Fatima (left) and Salima (right) selling their cashew*

Through their dedicated work over the past few years, these four strong women – Sofia, Gilda, Fatima and Salima – have been contributing to a larger movement that is revitalizing the Mozambican cashew nut industry. Their many successes in promoting adoption of good agricultural practices highlight how women in Mozambique can be empowered to play a leading role in agricultural activities, thus contributing to the economic well-being of the household and larger community.

**MozaCajú** is a project funded by USDA that connects smallholder cashew farmers to markets and factories in three northern provinces of Cabo Delgado, Zambézia and Nampula. For more information about the project, please see: [www.mozacaju.com](http://www.mozacaju.com)

*Story and photos by C. Denny Newhouse*