

## Central project evaluation – executive summary

# Promotion of the African Cashew Value Chain III (ComCashew)

Country/region/global	Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mozambique, Sierra Leone		
Sector and creditor reporting system code	31162 - Industrial crops/export crops		
Project number	2015.2165.7		
Commissioning party	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)		
Lead executing agency/ implementing partner	Benin: Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, Burkina Faso: Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Water Resources, Côte d'Ivoire: Cotton and Cashew Council, Ghana: Ministry of Food and Agriculture; Mozambique: National Cashew Institute; Sierra Leone: Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security; Regional partner: African Cashew Alliance		
Project value	EUR 36,190,000 ((including cofinancing by Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) and the European Union (EU): EUR 12,040,000)		
Project term	May 2016 –December 2021		
Reporting year CPE	2021	Sample year CPE	2017

### Context of the project

Africa accounts for 58 percent of the global production of raw cashew nuts (RCN), the bulk of which is produced by 1.4 million smallholder farmers. The cashew value chain offers producer countries in Africa interesting opportunities for creating employment, increasing income at enterprise and national economic level, and enhancing food security. However, due to comparably low yields, low processing capacities and limited work productivity, this potential has not yet been realised.

Due to the lack of high-yielding planting material and differences in agricultural practices, the yields of smallholders in Africa are considerably lower than those of cashew farmers in Asian countries. Moreover, as there is no competitive cashew processing industry in Africa, more than 90 percent of cashews harvested in Africa are shipped to India and Vietnam for processing, before they are sold on the European or American consumer markets. This means that African countries are missing out on the opportunity to add value to their raw products. Moreover, the long-distance shipment of RCN to Asia for processing increases the carbon footprint of cashew nuts.

### Brief description of the project

The project objective was to increase the competitiveness of the cashew value chain in selected African countries. Project activities were structured into four components that reflect the project's four central impact hypotheses.

Within the first component, cashew production, the project facilitated the training of farmers in good agricultural practices and supported research institutes and government departments in their research into and distribution of improved cashew planting material. The aim was that both good agricultural practices and improved planting material would enable farmers to increase the efficiency and productivity of cashew production.

For the second component, cashew processing, ComCashew provided technical support, advice and staff training to cashew processing companies on a number of subjects including business plan development, access to finance and food safety. The aim was that the advice and training provided would increase the competitiveness of processors, enabling them to increase their annual processing capacity and volume.

The third component, which related to cashew supply chains, provided advisory services for cashew stakeholders (e.g., processors, farmer-

based organisations, traders, consumer goods manufacturers), linking them up with new business partners. The intention was that new collaborations would increase the efficiency of the supply chain for cashew products.

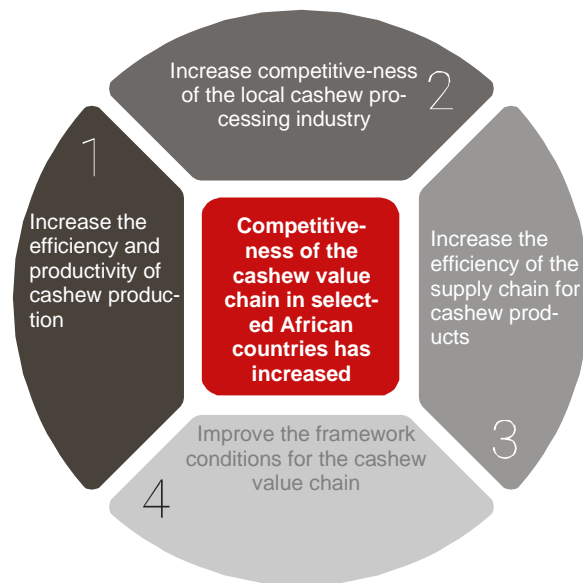
In the fourth component, which focused on general conditions, the project provided advisory services to government institutions and local sector organisations and helped organise international fairs and conferences on cashew. The aim of these activities was to increase organisation within the sector and help governments create an enabling environment for cashew production and processing.

These four project components are interdependent and the intention was that each would reinforce the other. The creation of a supportive regulatory environment (outcome of component 4) may strengthen the competitiveness and productivity of production and processing. Furthermore, processors may benefit from an improvement in the quality and quantity of RCN supply resulting from successful farmer training (outcome of component 1).

The project featured two instruments that contributed to all four components. Firstly, the Master Training Programme (MTP) is a practical training course covering all relevant aspects of the cashew value chain. Public, private and civil society stakeholders sent their staff to the MTP. Participants completed all parts of the training regardless of their background. Secondly, the Matching Fund was a public private partnership instrument the project used to co-fund the projects of local partner organisations that contributed to the achievement of the project objective. For example, Matching Fund projects featured research into and distribution of improved planting material or the introduction of traceability systems to the supply chain.

The project built on two predecessor projects implemented between April 2009 and April 2016. All three projects are based on a similar intervention logic, and the projects' objectives and indicators underwent only minor changes and rearrangement over time. A follow-on project is currently being prepared and is scheduled to start in 2022.

Figure 2: Project objective/areas of intervention



### Assessment according to DAC criteria

#### Relevance

According to the document analysis conducted by the evaluation team, the project's objectives – such as the increase in productivity and the creation of jobs in the agricultural sector – are very much in line with the national development plans of the six partner countries, the BMZ regional strategy for Africa “Marshall Plan with Africa” and the 2030 Agenda (dimension 1). Findings from the interviews and the online surveys of processors and farmer-based organisations (FBOs) also indicated that the project's activities and objectives were highly relevant for the different target groups (dimension 2). Representatives of FBOs and processing companies alike indicated in an online survey that the content of the training matched their needs and requirements quite well.

The project design was found to be comprehensive, consistent and ambitious for the creation of macro-level developmental change, and the underlying results hypothesis is plausible (dimension 3). However, objective and indicators were set at results level, which describes impacts rather than outcomes. This limits the attribution of observed changes to the direct interventions of the project. For instance, two of the project's objective indicators are almost identical with the programme indicators at impact level. Indicators on the performance of farmers and processors did not measure

changes among those who received direct training from the project, but for all farmers/processors in the country.

Responding to the Covid-19 crisis (dimension 4, ability to respond to change), the project provided processors with masks and other sanitary materials, food for workers, hand washing stations, medical personnel, tables, health and hygiene posters and bikes for the transportation of staff. Processors who received support described it as very useful. The response of the project to the Covid-19 crisis was found to be a fast and appropriate reaction to an external shock to the whole value chain, even though this response was limited to processors only.

### Effectiveness

The project's achievements at output level are reflected in the training of 721,113 cashew farmers and 255 employees of cashew processing organisations. Moreover, the project facilitated and co-funded 22 Matching Fund projects by partner organisations, which were implemented to increase the competitiveness of cashew farmers and processors and to increase the efficiency of the cashew value chain. However, the project's indicators at outcome level and the underlying monitoring data show a range of methodological constraints and shortcomings. Overall, the set of indicators and reported figures were insufficient for capturing the achievement of the project's objective (dimension 1). The evaluation team therefore used the qualitative findings from stakeholder interviews and from the processor and FBO surveys to complement the indicators. While the evaluation team found it plausible that the module objective was to some extent achieved, it was not possible to get a clear picture of the quantitative degree of the achievements as predefined by the indicators (dimension 1).

According to the assessment of dimension 2, three impact hypotheses were confirmed (project component 1, 3 and 4) and one was only partly confirmed (component 2). The representatives of FBOs and partner organisations observed that the application of GAP and the use of improved planting material has contributed to an increase in farmers' yields and income (hypothesis 1). The project's interventions to support processors (hypothesis 2)

were found to be less effective as many processors are still struggling with access to finance and technology. Even though some of the partner countries have witnessed a tremendous increase in in-country processing during the implementation period of the project, it remains unclear to what extent this can be attributed to the project. There is an attribution gap between the project's intervention reaching only some of the processors and the respective outcome indicator capturing national processing volume, which is also influenced by external factors such as market dynamics.

Regarding the hypothesis for component 3, processors have largely confirmed that the project's interventions to facilitate efficient supply chains have contributed to an improvement in the quality and quantity of their RCN supply. Finally, regarding the hypothesis of component 4, there is strong evidence that the project's technical advice to government institutions contributed to the creation of cashew-specific departments within the ministries of agriculture in Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire. Government officials in several partner countries also stated that the project was of great help in the development of specific sector strategies. This helped to create an enabling regulatory framework for cashew production, processing and trade.

Regarding dimension 3 (unintended results), the evaluation team examined child labour and the adverse effect of agrochemicals as potential negative unintended results. The team concluded that these negative impacts did basically not occur. Moreover, it concluded that the project's response to occurred risks such as falling prices for cashew nuts and occupational safety issues was appropriate. However, the project does not monitor unintended results in a systematic way.

### Impact

The project was embedded in the BMZ programme Broad-scale Promotion of Agricultural Value Chains in Africa. At impact level, the project contributed to the programme indicators, which are the increase of the income of peasant households, the increase of the number of job-equivalents alongside the agrarian value chains and the degree to which local partner organisations are increasingly

using their own funds to implement the promoted activities.

With regard to dimension 1, the evaluation team came to the conclusion that the project achieved significant developmental results such as increased farmer income and the creation of new jobs in the processing sector. This implies that the project also contributed to the achievement of SDG 1 (end poverty), SDG 2 (zero hunger) and SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth). Nevertheless, the available data does not allow for a description of the quantitative extent of these impacts. There is still room for scaling up positive results on income and employment in the future. For the same is true of the project's contribution to SDG 5 (gender equality). While the project has made some efforts to address women within the various capacity-building measures, there is limited evidence that it improved the position of women within cashew production and the cashew sector's institutions and organisations in partner countries. However, women do benefit from the creation of new jobs, as the majority of workers in cashew processing are women.

Regarding the project's contribution to higher-level development results (dimension 2), all results hypotheses were confirmed. Based on stakeholder interviews and online surveys, the evaluation team considers it plausible that a higher yield due to the adaptation of Good Agricultural Practices and improved planting material enables cashew farmers to improve their income and contributed to a reduction of poverty. As regards the processing component of the project, it is also evident that the increase in processing volume creates new jobs and economic growth. Moreover, it is likely that the project has contributed to the reduction of carbon emissions because in-country processing reduces the carbon footprint of cashews, as shipment to Asia is avoided.

The negative impacts of potential unintended results from indirect land-use change driven by the expansion of the cashew cultivation area are considered rather low to date, but should be monitored in the future (dimension 3).

## Efficiency

Overall, the evaluation team considers the project's use of resources to be efficient. Spending in relation to outputs (dimension 1) and expected outcomes (dimension 2) was thoroughly planned and implemented as outlined in the project proposal. The project was able to leverage significant partner contributions through the Matching Fund instrument and the eligible contributions of board members. Cofinancing helped maximise outputs and outcomes. Moreover, the project was able to use synergy effects by collaborating with other development projects both inside and outside GIZ. The evaluation team considers it unlikely that the project could have achieved higher outputs or outcomes through a different use of resources or a different distribution of resources among the project components.

## Sustainability

The project has done a lot to anchor results in partner structures (dimension 1). The joint implementation of activities in the production component has helped build technical capacities and organisational structures among partner organisations, such as farmer-based organisations, NGOs and government departments. This enables them to continue independently of the project with the support of farmers. Financial sustainability, however, remains a challenge for the continuation of research into planting material.

Besides those activities linked to cashew production, the project has made a significant contribution to building capacities among government institutions regarding the development and implementation of sector strategies and the creation of a supportive environment for the growth of the processing sector. The project contributed to the creation of cashew-specific government departments in several countries and provided advice on and reviewed the development of sector strategies. Those departments have assumed a key role in the further development of the sector. This is also likely to last beyond the end of the project.

In terms of the long-term durability of the results (dimension 2), the evaluation team considers the achievements relating to farmers' yield and income

quite stable. However, many processors are still struggling with a lot of challenges related to access to finance and technology and may not be able to continue without further support.

### Overall rating

Table 1: Rating of OECD/DAC evaluation criteria

Criteria	Score (Max. 100)	Rating 1 (highly successful) to 6 (highly unsuccessful)
Relevance	92	Level 1: highly successful
Effectiveness	77	Level 3: moderately successful
Impact	90	Level 2: successful
Efficiency	100	Level 1: highly successful
Sustainability	85	Level 2: successful
<b>Overall</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>Level 2: successful</b>

### Conclusions and factors of success and failure

The project is considered a success, because all interventions are highly relevant to the target groups and national partners. Furthermore, the joint implementation with national partner institutions and the Master Training Programme have built capacities and contributed to organisational development among partners, creating important prerequisites for long-term sustainability. The theory of change and the indicators of the project need to be improved. Moreover, no clear picture could be obtained on the quantitative dimension of achieved outcomes and impacts even though the evaluation team drew a positive conclusion based on the qualitative data derived from the interviews and the feedback of the target groups collected in two online surveys. The different interventions across the sector showed a high level of coherence and that the results reinforce each other.

Training more than 700,000 farmers in GAP is regarded as a major achievement. The observations of FBO and stakeholders working with farmers suggest that it is likely that this training made a major contribution to increasing the quality and

quantity of farmers' yields and that farmers are able to increase their income accordingly. The research into improved planting material (co-) funded by the project was very successful and has delivered improved cashew varieties that have the potential to help farmers reach up to four times more yield than the old varieties. Significant efforts to distribute this planting material to farmers have been started together with the partners, but in many regions farmers' access to these high yielding varieties is still low and partners require further support for scaling-up.

The project was able to raise awareness among governments on the potential of cashew for rural development and job creation. As a consequence, governments put cashew on their agenda and are developing and implementing sector strategies supported by the project.

The increase of in-country processing may not be explained by the project's direct training measures for processors, which, indeed, show room for improvement. But the evaluation team is convinced that spillover effects from the interventions of other project components, such as improving direct supply chains and the quality and quantity of RCN supply, as well as the improvement of legal and organisational framework conditions have to some extent contributed to the increase in in-country processing.

In conclusion, the project came close to having broad-scale developmental impact on a transition of the cashew sector in the respective partner countries and beyond. Whether the project has a long-term impact that facilitates sector transition depends on whether the project is able to consolidate and scale-up successful concepts and achievements, transfer existing knowledge and concepts to local organisations and further strengthen the capacity of and framework conditions for processors (particularly regarding finance and technology) to help them become a stable and competitive industry.

The following factors of success are highlighted:

- Involvement of processors in the training of farmers proved very beneficial, as it contributed to mutual understanding and



support between both groups. Processors learned that they benefit from the improved quality, quantity and continuity of RCN supply if they assume responsibility for the training and support of farmers.

- ☑ The Master Training Programme has greatly contributed to the increase in technical capacities among all stakeholders along the value chain. The broad perspective it is imparting is regarded as beneficial. Stakeholders from different countries, professional backgrounds and positions within the value chain meeting in the same training room created a space for exchange and contributed to mutual understanding and to building informal cross-country and cross-professional networks.

## Recommendations

The impact of the GAP training could be improved by combining it with durable **supportive structures that provide input, equipment and/or GAP services** to farmers, such as pruning with chain saws or spraying with pesticides. The project has already started working on this task and these efforts should be intensified. Based on requirements formulated by FBO representatives, it is also recommended that **further business training be provided to farmers to support the organisational development of cooperatives** and to **intensify training on intercropping** as it contributes to food security.

With co-funding from ComCashew, researchers have developed high-yielding cashew varieties that have tremendous potential to double – if not triple – farmers' yields. Efforts should be intensified to **support sustainable partner structures** (nurseries, scion banks/gardens, nursery men etc.) to **distribute this planting material to farmers**. This also includes **training farmers** in techniques to rejuvenate old cashew fields and plant new fields, which was also mentioned by FBO representatives as a future need.

The national cashew cultivation area in the partner countries has increased tremendously over the last five years and may continue to do so. Although the evaluation team could not identify any negative

results at this point, **potential impacts of land-use change should be monitored in the future**. This relates to the potential replacement of subsistence food crops as well as expansion into biodiversity areas such as forests.

**Project objective indicators** should be located at outcome level and should be **clearly attributable to the interventions of the project**. To limit external factors, for instance, it may be more appropriate to develop indicators that measure the performance of processors or farmers who have received direct training from the project rather than looking at the performance of all processors/farmers in the country.

The evaluation team recommends a number of measures to **improve the data on the impact of GAP training**. This includes the **introduction of a uniform sampling approach** to increase comparability of data over time and across countries. A **panel survey following the development of yield and income of farmers who have received training** at one point in time (ideally including a comparison group of untrained farmers) may be more suitable than mixing trained and untrained farmers. Moreover, data on production could be improved by a second **qualitative survey** based on a smaller number of case studies to **investigate the impact of GAP** and improved planting material on rural development.

Even though the project has already done a lot to anchor activities and concepts in partner structures, these efforts should be intensified and assembled to create a **comprehensive exit strategy** covering all areas of the project's interventions. It would be good to find a way of ensuring that the MTP is continued by partners after the project ends. Financial sustainability is a key challenge that should be considered, particularly regarding the research and distribution of improved planting material.

## Approach and methods of the evaluation

The evaluation was based on a mixed-method approach to allow triangulation of sources and data collection instruments. Document analysis, the assessment of the existing monitoring data collected by the project, stakeholder interviews and two semi-standardised online surveys were conducted.

The evaluation team conducted two semi-standardised online surveys of processors and FBOs, which represented the two central target groups of the project. The survey of FBOs was not sent directly to farmers. Instead, one leading member of the FBO answered the questionnaire on behalf of all farmers in his/her cooperative. No sample was drawn, but the questionnaire was sent to all processors and FBOs for which contact details were available. The response rate for processors was 15 out of a basic population of 56 and 17 out of 50 for FBOs. The 17 FBO respondents represent approximately 109,000 farmers.

Several interviews were conducted with the head of the project, the M&E manager and the heads of the four project components. Further interview partners were selected to cover all relevant partner organisations among the political partners, the research institutes and the national association of cashew processors in each of the intervention countries.

Interview protocols were assessed using qualitative content analysis and the software MaxQDA®. Survey data was analysed using descriptive statistical methods and the software SPSS®. All data was triangulated to answer the evaluation dimensions and questions as outlined in the standardised GIZ evaluation matrix. The impact hypothesis was tested applying a contribution analysis approach.

Due to the current global pandemic, travelling between the partner countries and within countries was heavily restricted and unpredictable. For this reason, the evaluation was done remotely by a team of two international evaluators. All interviews were conducted remotely via web-based communication services. The surveys of processors and FBOs were conducted online using the SoSciSurvey® software.

## Rating system

Projects are rated based on the OECD/DAC criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, impact, sustainability and efficiency. Each of the six criteria is rated on a scale of 1 to 100 (percentage system).

The project's overall score is derived from the average points awarded for the individual DAC criteria. The average value for the overall score is rounded according to mathematical convention. All DAC criteria are equally weighted for the overall score. Compared with the predecessor systems (6-point scale, 16-point scale), a 100-point scale has a number of advantages in that it allows differentiation, is commonly used internationally, is easy to understand and can readily be converted into other assessment systems.

Table 2: Rating and score scales

100-point scale (score)	6-level scale (rating)
92–100	Level 1: highly successful
81–91	Level 2: successful
67–80	Level 3: moderately successful
50–66	Level 4: moderately unsuccessful
30–49	Level 5: unsuccessful
0–29	Level 6: highly unsuccessful
Overall rating: The criteria of effectiveness, impact and sustainability are knock-out criteria: If one of the criteria is rated at level 4 or lower, the overall rating cannot go beyond level 4 although the mean score may be higher.	

Both the assessment dimensions within the OECD/DAC criteria and the determination of the overall score using a points system serve to increase the transparency of ratings while enabling better comparability between individual projects.

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