



SUCCESS STORY

Five challenging years build a business

Burkinabe business-woman Minata Kone started with 'lots of problems,' the Trade Hub helped her find solutions



A cashew processor in Burkina Faso is exporting tons of cashew kernels every month, employing hundreds and generating revenue. It wasn't easy, but with assistance from the Trade Hub and the African Cashew Alliance, her company is succeeding.

Five years ago, Minata Kone's cashew processing company in Burkina Faso had a handful of employees and scarcely a business plan. The company, Sotria-B, had no buyers for its product and no loans to buy raw cashew nuts.

"She had the wrong machinery and then ordered the wrong packaging machine," recalled Trade Hub Director Vanessa Adams. "It all looked rather hopeless."

"I had a lot of problems," Kone said. "Quality was one. I didn't have any technical assistance – there was no one to tell me, 'This is good but this is not so good.' And there were no buyers at all."

What a difference five years can make. Today, Sotria-B is exporting one container of raw cashew kernels monthly – almost 16 tons – the work of 330 employees, mostly women, cracking the raw nuts. With Trade Hub assistance, Kone obtained a loan to buy the raw cashew nuts that abound in Burkina Faso. Kone has linked up with two other women entrepreneurs in Burkina Faso to expand production to two containers a month.

And Kone is now the president of the Burkina Faso chapter of the African Cashew Alliance, an industry group co-founded by the Trade Hub in 2005 with 22 members and now thriving with more than 100. The alliance held its fourth annual conference in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire in September 2009, where more than 230 industry stakeholders discussed the main issues affecting cashew, from tree yields to financing, processing to marketing. Participants also heard about the African Cashew Initiative, a US\$50 million project the alliance helped plan that will increase farmers' incomes, tree yields and the marketing of cashew internationally. The Trade Hub is home to the alliance secretariat.

"The Trade Hub connected me to all the buyers and the entire industry," Kone explained. "And they put me in touch with banks and helped me improve quality and find packaging.

"It's been quite remarkable."