



## SUCCESS STORY

### Businesswoman Gambles On Better Future

#### Cashew processor seeks global demand and local profits



Awa Beve (front left) and her employees peel and sort cashew kernels.

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Prices for cashews have hit a 10-year high in West Africa, and Awa Beve, president of the Beye Counda Economic Interest Group, could not be happier. In 2006, she took a gamble, left a textile business and decided to try cashew nut processing in Senegal's cashew-rich Casamance region.

"I saw Indians coming to buy nuts to take back to their country for processing, and thought why can't I do that?" Beve said.

India is the top global producer of cashews, as well as the number one destination for processing which involves cracking, peeling, grading and packaging the nuts before they are shipped for retail worldwide. While West Africa is one of the world's major exporters of raw nuts, with overall sales of about \$300 million in 2007, experts say the region could earn up to 50% more if nuts were processed locally.

With \$4,500 in savings, Beve bought one machine to shell nuts, and launched her business with two daughters and a cousin.

The only problem was that the cashew business was very different from dyeing cotton and textiles, which she had done for 25 years. With the help of a USAID Economic Growth Program trainer, she learned the basics: don't pluck nuts from the tree; the best nuts that get top dollar have to ripen and fall; collect the nuts within 24 hours before insects attack; separate the hot pink and juicy fruit from the nut so it won't dampen and discolor the nut; dry the nuts in the sun for up to three days and don't store the nuts in plastic, which traps moisture and can ruin them.

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Once her business was underway, USAID bought Beve two more machines worth more than \$250 each. In two years, she increased her production rate of shelled raw nuts four-fold. At the peak of the harvest, up to 20 employees help her, earning about \$130 a month. USAID also helped negotiate Beve's first contract with a Gambian company that agreed to cover her up-front production costs, which they deduct from her exports. She estimates selling about one ton of processed cashews in 2007. Beve has made back her leap-of-faith investment, doubling her funds to about \$9,000.

Beve plans to continue her nut processing business and hopes it will keep growing. "If there are people from Asia coming for our nuts, why shouldn't I do something if I am already here?" she said.

Photo: Projet Croissance Economique