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# Agriculture & trade

## The Gambia

sounding out its  
agricultural potential

In **Malawi**, enriching what  
happens between farm and table

As **one woman**  
**innovates**,  
a nation's exports set  
to bloom

Photo essay:  
**Comoros**  
making scents



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“ Voices for trade and development in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) ”

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Trade for Development News is a place to share EIF stories on the ground, across 47 Least Developed Countries (LDCs), 4 recently graduated countries and several themes and sectors. From op-eds to impact stories, videos to photo essays, this platform is a window into the far-reaching impact of the EIF.

Also designed with a strong focus on partner content in mind, Trade for Development News is intended to be a knowledge hub on all things trade for development and aid for trade. We invite you to share your stories with us, so we can disseminate them further to our readers.

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# The Gambia sounding out its agricultural potential

Deanna Ramsay

With cashew prices surging and armed with solid trade policy, the country is looking to boost its farmers and processors.

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Every few minutes a slight thump would indicate another ripe fruit hitting the ground. Bright orange and smelling sweet and faintly sour, the cashew fruits brimming off Alieu Faye's ten hectares of trees were definitely ready for harvest.

"Cashew starts from the seed. But you don't pluck it from the tree. You have to let the fruit fall down itself and when you pick it up you unpluck it from the fruit," Faye said.

Faye, who is also President of The Gambia Cashew Farmers Association, started farming cashew in 1998, obtaining his first plants from neighboring Guinea-Bissau, where the cashew sector is, shall we say, fruiting.

For The Gambia, a small West African country fresh from a period of government instability and looking to alleviate its economic insecurities, cashew is offering one avenue for profit and financial sustainability for its people.

“30% of The Gambia’s GDP is agriculture and 70% of the people are employed in the area of agriculture. Now, there is this effort being made to improve the value of agricultural products apart from the raw products. We are now trying to add value particularly in the area of cashew, sesame and groundnuts,” said Isatou Touray, then Minister of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration and Employment, in an interview in Banjul in May 2018.

## Going nuts

Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) trade studies of the country in 2007 and 2013 noted cashew’s growth prospects and income potential, pending productivity increases and processing improvements, among other recommendations.

As a result of this analysis, the country has foregrounded the sector in its trade strategies, and on-the-ground efforts include working with farmers to improve yields and quality, and support for processors with machinery and the food standards certification needed for exports.

For Faye, following EIF-supported trainings on planting techniques and farm management, cashew cultivation has brought profits and a sense of security. And, he employs five workers at his farm on the North Bank of the Gambia River.

“I’m retiring very soon to concentrate on cashew farming – so retiring from my actual work and going to the cashew farm means that cashew is very valuable for me,” Faye said at the nursery where he now cultivates seedlings before taking them to his nearby farm.

“I am making more money now than before the EIF training,” he added.

He says his yields have improved, and he has access to processing equipment in the village provided by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Now, he can sell his cashews processed, which means they garner higher prices.

Faye noted that raw cashews sell for approximately 3,000 dalasi (USD 62) per bag, which holds about 85 kilos. Processed cashews, on the other hand, can sell for between 5,000 and 10,000 dalasi.



## Critical mass

An important step in improving The Gambia's cashew exports is the commercialization of the industry, in part through access to the technology needed to develop export quality nuts.

"In cashew production – a crop that is part of the government's diversification of its agriculture – we are trying to see how we bring everybody together in order for us to create that critical mass for export going with the standards, with the quality and all the other processing value chains that are necessary to attract the right markets," Touray said.

Small businesses in the country face challenges in complying with the international food safety and quality standards required to export, and part of EIF and its partners' work in The Gambia addresses this obstacle by supporting the necessary Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HAACP) certifications and providing packaging equipment.

Buba Jawneh manages his family's cashew processing company, which is one of seven local processors that received support to obtain HACCP accreditation.

"Processing capacity here as of now is two tonnes per month, that is 2,000 kilos of kernels of output. The partnership with the EIF has helped a lot, it has improved our processing capacity, and because of the intervention we have customers and there is always a ready market for our products," Jawneh said.

## Baked in profits

With orders scheduled ahead of time from countries as far-flung as Switzerland and buyers at the ready, Jawneh said the only thing keeping them from expanding their business is the size of their oven – a key tool

in the transformation of a hard cashew seed into a tasty roasted and salted snack.

"In order to expand the business we would like to have partners to increase the processing facility. And we would then like to have finance so that we can secure more cashew nuts from the farmers so we can do year-round cashew processing," he said.

Jawneh & Family Cashew Processing Enterprise can currently process cashews in amounts big enough for cargo flights, but not enough for a cargo container, which is a cheaper way of transporting goods, he explained. With the removal of the oven bottleneck, he said they could compete well on the international market as there were plenty of raw cashews to be had.

With demand for cashews increasing worldwide amid the nut milk and superfood trends, The Gambia's moves in this industry are strategic and timely.

"There is a positive trend that we can see. The statistics reports have shown that the value of domestic exports increased from 606 million to 754 million in 2016 and this trend seems to be continuing," said Touray.

Faye said of the income-generating nut, "Cashew is so valuable. Cashew has so many uses. You can eat it raw. You can process it. And you can export it... I paid my daughter's school fees with the profit.

"It's not only cashew that I'm doing now, it is because of cashew that gave me the courage to go into other things. For example, the nursery is not only cashew as you see, I have lime, I have mangos, I have other types of things. Each of them I sell," he said, amid flocks of birds clamoring behind him.







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## Ibrahimia Sittina Farate: As one woman innovates, a nation's exports set to bloom

*Deanna Ramsay*

In Comoros, a doyenne has plans for her country's unique yields.

Bottles of varying sizes were filled with scents, serums, potions and lotions – all made with Comoros-grown items that are definitely also made in Comoros.

Sitting in Ibrahimia Sittina Farate's sparse living room amid an afternoon downpour, her Biozen-branded products were lined up on a side table. She described the ingredients in each one and their unique, therapeutic properties.

Having studied agronomy at the University of Madagascar, her business is creating what she calls "biocosmetics", specialty

items perfumed with ylang-ylang, infused with cloves and tinged with vanilla. Those components are also her country's specialty, high-value export crops, but she is putting them to many new uses.

"I want to do things differently. Just because we've been doing something for hundreds

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of years doesn't mean we should continue to," she said. "Why can't we change?"

After graduating she returned home and to her family's ylang-ylang fields. Her father had been harvesting the flowers and selling them to distillers. She asked him why they didn't process them into essential oil themselves.

That is when her business started in 2015, and she is now an expert in the entire ylang-ylang process from flower to the human physique, innovating with what she is producing on very limited means.

Handing over a plastic bottle of liquid smelling vaguely of ylang-ylang, she said, "Hydrolat, which is like flower water, is created during distillation along with the ylang-ylang oil. People frequently just waste it by letting it run back into the ground. I keep all the byproducts and use them."

"You have likely used hydrolat without knowing it. If you have used shampoo or body lotion, then definitely there was hydrolat in it."

She makes a spritz of ylang-ylang water as well as using hydrolat in the vanilla lotion she produces. Following Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) support with distillation equipment, packaging materials and branding, she hopes she can catalyze her business, her brand and her markets.

"I sell the essential oil I produce at my distillery to a middleman, who sells it to a French perfumery," she said.

But, she hopes to sell her items directly to those abroad. Accessing those markets depends on certifications and export policy, among many outside factors.

With the Government of Comoros focusing on lifting up its agricultural sector –especially so its high-potential, high-value ylang-ylang, vanilla and cloves – the foundation is in place for entrepreneurs like Sittina to

succeed. Next is access to financing and credit, and the easing of markets.

Down a lush, lava-rock filled road outside Moroni sits Sittina's distillery, amid her three hectares of ylang-ylang trees. She describes the distillation process and what other plants she want to employ in her products.

She is also aware that what her land is now providing is no guarantee into the future, conscious of dwindling resources and the need for sustainable production. She currently uses the wood of mango trees growing on her land, but is concerned that in a few years there may not be enough. So she is already thinking and planning.

"Deforestation is happening in Comoros because everyone needs wood to distill ylang-ylang. I have a plan to use solar panels to feed the distillation system instead of it being wood-fired, but that will be expensive. But with those panels it should provide enough energy for the whole village here," she said.

"Ideally we could mobilize the community to purchase the solar system together."

It is this community-oriented thinking that has brought her this far. For the community of people that make up the three islands of Comoros, similar planning and partnerships is what will take the country's trade – and with that its economy and its people – to the next level.





# Comoros making scents

Deanna Ramsay



It is likely many people haven't heard of ylang-ylang, although those same individuals have definitely smelled it. A key ingredient in popular perfumes and beauty products, ylang-ylang flowers are as delicate as they are aromatic.

And three tiny, volcanic Indian Ocean islands are producing 60% of the world's supply.

That supply comes from the ylang-ylang orchards that dot the islands, with the flowers carefully collected by local women and sent to nearby distilleries where others extract the essence.

Now, following a unique partnership between the Government of Comoros, EIF and UNDP, ylang-ylang cooperatives are being formed to safeguard Comoros' ylang-ylang pickers, distillers, perfumers and exporters, expanding the opportunities for income and helping to increase productivity.

Djamalia Alaoui collects ylang-ylang flowers for a living near her home on the island of Anjouan.

Clad in striking pink and purple one morning in May 2018, she explained how to determine whether it is the right time to pluck the blooms, and that flowering season spans May to December each year.

Now, with a ylang-ylang cooperative newly established in her village, the flowers she



picks go directly to an adjacent distillery where they are transformed into essential oil and exported to France.

Others in Comoros are taking that oil, transforming it and looking for their own export markets.

“I receive the ylang-ylang essential oil from the distillery. I then go on to dry and filter the oil to make sure it’s clear and pure... I make essential oil that is very expensive and very popular. We are very proud because it’s a local product that is in demand all over the world,” said Houria Said Muhammed, owner of NectaLab based out of her home in the Comoros capitol of Moroni.

NectaLab employs five people, and Houria’s products range from perfumes to toners to lotions, all made with Comoros-grown ingredients like ylang-ylang, vanilla and cloves.

“My dream is to no longer have a small laboratory at my home. But instead to create an enterprise and employ a lot of people,” she said.

The Government is targeting its precious ylang-ylang, vanilla and cloves – key cash crops with global demand. Through the partnership with EIF, cooperatives, trainings for female entrepreneurs like Houria and

small business support in the form of vats, labels and processing items have laid the foundation for increased trade for the country.

“Today we have more yields thanks to the EIF. But we’ve also acquired equipment and we’ve also trained our farmers. And all of that has allowed us to improve the production of our cash crops,” said Vice President in Charge of Economy, Energy, Industry, Handicraft, Tourism, Investment, Private Sector and Land Affairs Djaffar Ahmed Said Hassani at his office in Moroni.

He added, “Yes, we need aid and support and assistance. So I’m asking for other partners to align with the EIF to help us grow our cash crops. And in return, as the government of Comoros, we’ll also work hard to ensure that our three cash crops will make their mark on the world. Because it’s these crops that are directly affecting our economy, and our poorest people.” ■

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# In Malawi, enriching what happens between farm and table

*Deanna Ramsay*

The country is working hard to get its harvests to consumers – in the country, region and beyond

In the “Warm Heart of Africa”, as Malawi calls itself, agriculture lies at the center.

Approximately 80% of the population of 19 million consists of smallholder farmers who work plots of land of less than one hectare, and the country is one of the world’s poorest.

In a bid to leverage the potential of its people and possibilities of its land, the Government of Malawi is pursuing a targeted

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strategy to boost the country’s agriculture exports and engage new markets – all in order to reduce poverty and improve conditions for Malawians.

“Malawi developed a diversification strategy in 2013 taking into consideration the increased trade imbalance, and we implemented the National Export Strategy to deal with issues relating to enhancing our productive capacity,” said Christina Chatima, Director of Trade at the Malawi Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism.

“One pilot effort has supported smallholder farmers and we have seen that enhanced productive capacity has been achieved and the farmers involved benefited a lot in income, and poverty levels have really gone down. So we are very happy to be working to achieve the implementation of the export strategy as well as the government agenda in terms of poverty reduction,” she said.

The country is largely planted with maize and tobacco, and the government's plan looks to expanding markets for new agriculture items for export, including higher value processed items ranging from salted peanuts to soybean cakes and powder.

The return on these more expensive items means improved incomes for rural farmers via better prices for their harvests, jobs for people in processing centers in Lilongwe, and more opportunities for Malawi-born businesses and cooperatives.

## Going to market

Finding and strengthening markets is a cornerstone of the country's trade plan, and the Malawi Investment and Trade Centre (MITC) is directing its efforts to penetrating regional markets, promoting Malawi-made products based on research and demand, and creating special economic zones.

MITC CEO Clement Kumbemba said, "The focus of our government now is to increase trade because we see trade as the only sustainable route to our development... Trade must be strategic, and the production that our farmers and our industry is focusing on is informed by what MITC does in helping to secure markets, because we believe as a country that our production must be demand-driven."

New markets have been forged in Zimbabwe and South Africa, among others, amounting to USD 47 million in exports. And with a government office that includes a marketing specialist now established in Tete, Mozambique, making connections and determining what importers want is even easier.

Market research in Tanzania and Zambia has helped to identify gaps, and MITC is also working with local businesses to enhance their marketing capabilities based on research findings.

"The economy has benefitted very much from the integration. The Ministry has worked closely with MITC in terms of enhancing markets for some of our products. We have seen exports of a lot of agro-processed products to the region, so this partnership has had a very big impact in Malawi," said Chatima.

## First harvest

That partnership comprises Malawi's Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism; the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF); MITC; and the National Smallholder Farmers' Association of Malawi (NASFAM), all working toward increased and sustainable trade in the country's agricultural yields.

Agriculture accounts for approximately 1/3rd of Malawi's GDP; the sector is an essential one that definitely has room to grow.

The United Kingdom's Department for International Development has been supporting agriculture efforts in Malawi with the aim of increasing development. "XXX," said XXX.

"My feeling is that we are making progress. We have realized after negotiating all these markets that they need products and that means we need to enhance our capacity. So we are not only talking about working in isolation, we are looking at how we work together in these value chains to achieve the diversification and the industrialization path that the government has undertaken," Chatima said.

That working together is expanding even further with the target to create zones, in conjunction with the World Bank, to facilitate trade and business across borders, modeled after successes for countries in the region like Ethiopia.



groundnut fields, where the mingling of the goals of country and individual stand manifest.

Bester Glandson is part of one of the pilot efforts to improve Malawi's agricultural production, trained how to plant soy and groundnuts on a one-hectare plot of land she was loaned by NASFAM. This education and land has meant a lot to the woman raising two small children, as she has built a brick home with her earnings and has extra cash for her kids.

"I used to not have a house. I was unable to look after my children... My life has improved a great deal," Glandson said against a backdrop of mountains marking the border and amid soy crops to be harvested the next day.

The soy and nuts she has planted and harvested herself over three years can now be sold raw to buyers in Mozambique, shelled and blanched for sale in Zambia or roasted, salted and sold as fair trade in the United Kingdom. And, with NASFAM's pilot work seeing average farmer incomes more than double, smallholder agriculturalists like Bester, MITC's newly found buyers and markets, and the Government are all winning.

"Malawi's work – from a targeted trade strategy implemented through improved farming, processing and opening access for firms to international markets – is a great example of how informed trade planning can work for development goals. EIF looks forward to even more export markets for Malawi and through this increased productivity and income for farmers," said EIF Coordinator Simon Hess.



"Agriculture remains the bedrock of our economy, and what is coming out as paramount is that we find a way of speeding up agricultural investments in Malawi. One quick way, looking at the economic models that have prevailed in the world, is the creation of special economic zones and for Malawi the sector to start with has to be agriculture," Kumbemba said.

He added, "As a country we are very excited because these special economic zones will open up Malawi to attract more companies in agro-processing. It will see the creation of many jobs for our youth and for our women."

## Inside and out

At NASFAM's processing center in Lilongwe, women work at sorting groundnuts while machines sit at the ready to shell, to blanch and to bag. Men carry large burlap sacks full of fragrant rice ready for export, perhaps to one of MITC's recently forged markets in South Africa.

A few hours' drive from there near the border with Zambia are NASFAM's

## Benin cassava flour makers seek geographical indication

Originally published by UNCTAD

Two dozen Beninese women making a unique type of garri flour sign up to a new code of practice to better market their product and boost incomes

Garri, a type of flour made from cassava root, may be a staple in West Africa, but Gari Sohoui is special. That's because it can only be made from cassava grown in the central Collines département of Benin, and using only the artisanal methods unique to the area.

Marketing the crisp, slightly acidic flour as a premium brand depends on protecting its unique geography and production techniques. And in November, two dozen women Gari Sohoui producers met at a workshop in the regional capital Savalou to agree on a way of doing just that.

The key is to assert the same kind of intellectual property right that means Scotch whisky can only be made in Scotland or champagne from the Champagne region of France. It's called a geographical indication, and a GI certification anchors a special product to a specific location and adds value by attesting its authenticity.

During the two-day workshop, the women carefully reviewed a draft code of practice to ensure that the document precisely reflected traditional knowledge of how the final product, Gari Sohoui from Savalou, is made.

The code of practice was validated at the end of the workshop, and all 24 women

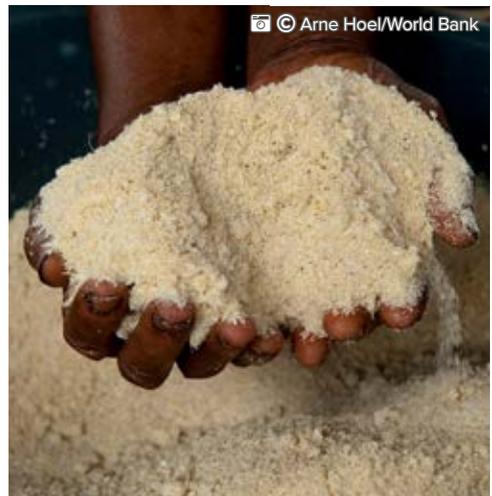
signed an agreement to distribute it and make sure it is followed.

The workshop, which was organized by UNCTAD, was a milestone on a path to bringing Gari Sohoui from Savalou to bigger markets and boosting the income of the specialists who make it. It is an example of how often unique foodstuffs and handicrafts in some of the world's poorest countries lie undiscovered and ripe for better distribution.

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