



project results

BRC CERTIFICATION FOR CAJOU ESPOIR IN TOGO



Beneficiary organisation

Established in 2004 in Togo, Cajou Espoir is one of the few African cashew processors and the only company processing raw cashew nuts in Togo. Cajou Espoir purchases raw cashew nuts from 1,500 smallholder farmers located in villages around Tchamba (northern Togo) and Blitta (central Togo). The company focuses on local value addition by processing locally, selling cashew nut kernels under favourable conditions, sharing profits, guaranteeing market prices and enhancing the cashew value chain for African producers. The company primarily exports premium kernels internationally (90%) and regionally (10%). It is recognised as a key West African supplier by European and US buyers.

The challenge

The global cashew market is highly competitive. Consumer expectations regarding food quality and safety are increasing. Consequently, more traders and retailers are seeking certified products. **Cajou Espoir saw the need to obtain an internationally recognised food safety certification to remain competitive.**

However, cashew processing is complex, involving around 13 stages such as heating, cracking, peeling, grading, etc., each requiring specific areas, equipment, and workers. **This complexity makes obtaining food safety certifications challenging for local companies in developing countries.**

The proposed solutions

The technical assistance (TA) project aimed to help Cajou Espoir obtain the **BRC certification**. The BRC Global Standard for Food Safety is the leading global certification and consumer protection scheme recognised and required by traders, retailers, and customers worldwide. It is, hence, key to global market access. Global buyers are willing to pay higher prices for BRC-certified cashew kernels, particularly those sourced from a 'country of origin' processor like Cajou Espoir.

The following project outcomes were expected:

- 1 **Ensure the quality of cashew kernels processed, improve operational efficiencies, and mitigate food safety risks at both processing factories.**
- 2 **Generate additional margins of 2% from the sale of BRC-certified products.** This will boost annual profits, enable higher employee salaries, and finance training for farmers to obtain other sustainable certifications such as Ecocert. As cashew prices are volatile, these extra BRC-related margins will also enable the company to level up its profitability in difficult years.
- 3 **Cajou Espoir will become Togo's only BRC-certified enterprise.** This unique status will improve the reputation of local suppliers, secure contracts with reputable buyers, increase market access and create export opportunities. Therefore, the project will further promote a sustainable African cashew industry by adding local value, stimulating employment and driving economic development.



Internal management



IMPACT INVESTOR



BENEFICIARY ORGANISATION

Cajou Espoir

buying from

1,500 smallholder households

Togo

AGRICULTURAL VALUE CHAIN

Cashew nuts

START DATE

June 2022

END DATE

November 2022

TOTAL EXPENDITURE

€ 258,000

of which € 70,000 (27%)

financed by SSNUP





key results



Cajou Espoir obtained the BRC Certification in December 2022

- ✓ Cajou Espoir was able to cover a significant portion of the costs associated with hiring an external consultant in BRC Certification thanks to the project funding.
- ✓ A comprehensive list of precise corrective actions needed to pass the BRC Certification audit was created. This list served as a working guide throughout the project, requiring a thorough review of the company's documentation, processing equipment, procedures and other assets.
- ✓ Cajou Espoir was able to meet all the requirements in terms of Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP), quality management, site standards, product controls, process controls and staff management. All these BRC Certification sections required extensive documentation and capital expenditure.
 - **Documentation:** Cajou Espoir now has up-to-date, standardised documents, such as product specification sheets, which can be shared with international buyers.
 - **Capital expenditures:** Cajou Espoir significantly upgraded its factory and transportation equipment to meet BRC standards.

SDGs supported by the project



2. Zero hunger

2.4 Adoption of productive, sustainable, and resilient agricultural practices



1 new female employee was hired to ensure quality and adherence to procedures and to oversee the annual BRC renewal audits, ensuring certification is maintained.

> 1000



factory workers (around 600 in Tchamba and 400 in Blitta) were trained on the new procedures including pest control, hygiene, sanitisation and the Global Food Safety Initiative.



1 new buyer was onboarded thanks to the certification.



EUR 2,984,312 was lent by responsAbility to support Cajou Espoir through campaign financing, consisting of short-term loans disbursed each year at the beginning of the cashew season. While the TA project did not directly help raise this loan, the BRC certification enhances the company's reputation, making it a more reliable borrower for future financing rounds.



lessons learnt

✓ Obtaining BRC Certification requires time and money

This project was complex, necessitating extensive time for an in-depth review of the company's processes, as well as substantial capital investments to upgrade the premises to BRC standards, all in remote areas of Central Togo. Therefore, any project covering such a complex certification should allocate ample time and anticipate delays.

✓ Regular monitoring and a well-established action plan with identified priorities were key to the project's success

Numerous corrective actions were listed to prepare for the audit, challenging the team to prioritise effectively while ensuring nothing was overlooked. Therefore, Cajou Espoir's task force established weekly update calls with the consultant to establish weekly action plans and discuss progress, effectively advancing the project and reducing delays.

✓ The project's success was significantly influenced by an experienced consultant

The consultant was familiar with BRC Certification projects in sub-Saharan Africa, understanding local challenges and finding solutions that balance company capacities and BRC standards. This was crucial as a BRC project in Togo differs significantly from one in a developed country. The consultant understood the company's challenges, such as limited resources, expertise and qualified staff, and found solutions that balanced these limitations with BRC standards. He was able to identify the 'must-have' and 'nice-to-have' activities without compromising certification requirements, leveraging knowledge from prior experiences and an in-depth understanding of a processing company's operations.

