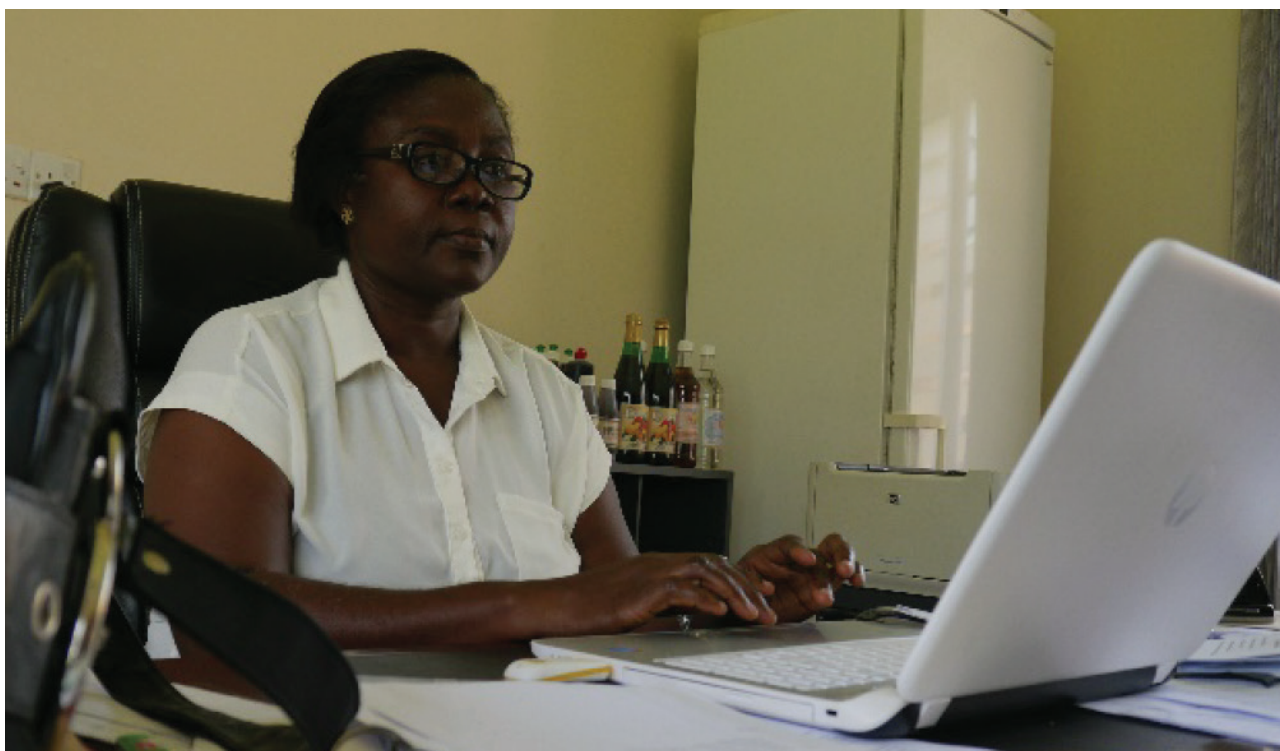




ON THE JOURNEY TO ZENITH

Dr. Esther Gyedu-Akoto

A flower doesn't bother about the land that it is planted in, it is not concerned of the surroundings. All it focuses on is to bloom and spread the fragrance to everyone around. And such is its attitude, the flower even give its fragrance to the hand that tries to crush it.



The theory of one of the most accomplished women

One who believes that she can perform excellently no matter where she is, Dr. Esther Gyedu-Akoto is tailor made to prove the above metaphor true in every letter. She is certain that with focus, determination and hard work, she has made the best of wherever God has placed her in and she is of the opinion that everyone can do the same. This is the theory by which one of the most accomplished women in the Ghanaian cashew sector lives by.

Many degrees to her name

A well-read woman, with a deep rooted love for learning and progress, she has a vast educational background. Dr. Esther Gyedu-Akoto studied at the University of Ghana, where she graduated in 1992 with BSc Food Science and Biochemistry. She proceeded to do her national service at the Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana (CRIG) in New Tafo-Akim in the Eastern region of Ghana. After she had finished with her national service, she became an assistant researcher in the New Product Development Unit at CRIG. Between 1997 and 2000, Dr Gyedu-Akoto studied for and obtained an MPhil in Food



Science at the University of Ghana. On completion of the course, she became a Research Scientist which is the same as a Deputy Manager of the New Product Development Unit.

Her contribution as a food scientist

Today, as we applaud her for her mighty contribution to the field of cashew which has in itself initiated an array of future changes and opened avenues for innovation, we reminisce and are glad for the time she was allotted work in this field. Dr. Gyedu-Akoto's career in the cashew sector began in 2002 when the agricultural sector in Ghana started a cashew development project and CRIG was appointed as the research wing. She was selected to be the food scientist on the cashew research team and thus worked extensively on cashew processing, including researching into and developing new ways of processing cashew nuts and apples. Her involvement in cashew research led her to conduct more in-depth study into unexplored areas of cashew in 2005 when she decided to continue with her education.

In 2005, Dr Esther Gyedu-Akoto enrolled in a doctorate degree programme in Food Science and Technology at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST).

Cashew sector piqued her interest

Since winners are those that pave their own path instead of travelling someone else's footsteps, we are glad that the cashew sector piqued her curiosity, enough to encourage her to discover the field deeper and share her valuable insights. "Researching on cocoa had become an exhausted topic and to me, it was time to sniff around for new areas of research," she says in this reference and thus, this led her to do a doctoral thesis on the production and utilization of cashew tree gum. Her study revealed that cashew gum can be used in both pharmaceutical and food industries.

Thereafter, having completed the doctoral study in 2009, Dr. Esther Gyedu-Akoto was promoted to the position of a Senior Research Scientist. In this position, she researched further into other uses of cashew as well as good processing practices to aid the improvement of nut quality. In 2013, she was appointed as the Acting Head of the unit.

Creating a link between research and industry

Since her appointment, Dr Gyedu-Akoto has been working hard to contribute to this rapidly growing market to help take it to greater heights. She has made efforts to develop a link between research and industry and accomplished this through the organization of trainings for processors, her fellow researchers, business owners, agricultural extension officers, farmers and non-governmental organizations on cashew processing. Through these trainings, she imparts education on new discoveries which research has made to help improve the profitability and quality of cashew and its products.

Innovative products

Her relentless efforts to maximize benefits from cashew has led her to produce cashew jam and juice from the cashew apple. She has also worked with her team to produce vinegar, wine, gin and brandy from cashew. The team also developed a new method of roasting cashew which gave the nuts a unique taste.

Finding motivation in the challenging oppositions

However, even with such humongous contributions backed with authentic research to ensure higher success rates



for everyone in this field, she has had to face a fair share of challenges as a woman leader. “The main problem I have had to face as a researcher and woman leader in the cashew sector and at CRIG is the domineering nature of some men. They think a woman’s views should not be taken seriously. They ridicule my ideas and don’t appreciate anything I do and accomplish,” she comments.

In spite of this, Dr. Esther Gyedu-Akoto stands tall and has made significant contributions to the Ghanaian cashew sector with focus, hard work and determination. To her, opposition is not a reason to give up but rather a source of motivation to spur her on.

The hurdles in the path of women

According to her, the cashew sector is a lucrative one. However, even though many women are involved in processing cashew in Ghana, very few of them are entrepreneurs. She attributes this to a generally low level of education of women in the rural areas in Ghana. She explains that educating women would equip them with skills like account keeping and documentation of information.

“Another reason which accounts for the low number of women in the cashew sector is the non-availability of financial capital for educated women who want to venture into cashew business,” Dr. Esther Gyedu-Akoto adds.

When asked to give her views to improve the status of women in this sector, she states that supporting them with financial capital and other incentives like shelling machines could help play a mighty role.

Staying practical

Speaking of her plans as the head of her unit, Dr. Esther Gyedu-Akoto aims at creating a strong link between research and industry so that discoveries made in the laboratory would be used to improve yield, quality and profitability of cashew. As a sensible and practical person, she believes in the lab work being a foundation for the field related chores to be carried out for such a pattern would ensure better results.

An outstanding role model

As a mother of two, she tries her best to excel in all the roles that she is entrusted with. She enjoys reading motivational and religious books and given her positive growth chart, she aspires to own a food processing business someday.

Dr. Esther Gyedu-Akoto is a phenomenal example for all women in this field, and her knowledge and contribution is worth appreciation. She continues to serve as an inspirational figure and hope that if you are willing to open your eyes, your dreams aren’t too far away to become a reality.

