



# SURVIVING ALL Odds

*Taraf Georgette*



A land of music and dance, housing numerous tribes with unique choices of attire and ornaments, and well preserved flora and fauna, is Benin, a French-speaking West African nation. It is popular for its Beninese cuisine which incorporates exotic ingredients and involves the use of a number of sauces, the traditional trade of this place being agriculture and cotton manufacture and production. Although regarded as a region of economic instability, it is rich in culture while people are wealthy in their hospitality.

Every person who survives the hardships takes back a lesson with them. Success or failure, both are our teachers and the experience received by dealing with the tests of life makes us rich with time. It's never about the adversities; it's always about withstanding the tides and emerging victorious. And one person who is a commendable example and fits perfectly in such a perspective is Ms. Taraf Georgette – a native of Benin, who is the owner and managing director of NAD & Co Industry, a cashew processing unit.

### ***A prominent personality***

With about two decades of experience in this field, Madam Taraf is one of the most prominent personalities of the cashew industry in the country. Having graduated from Benin University Law School, today, she works full time in the



establishment that she initiated and is extremely dedicated to her work. Until recently, she upheld the role as President of the African Cashew Alliance (ACA). Having been involved with ACA since its inception in 2006, Madam Taraf was elected as the first female President in 2012. Seeking this role as an opportunity, she hopes to encourage other African women to actively build careers and invest in cashew value chain.

### ***Taking the big step***

Peeping into her earlier life, we were informed that her mother was involved in the cashew business on a small scale and of the two women she knew in this industry before she took the plunge herself, she looked up to them as strong

people with appreciable managing skills. However, with no prior experience and trainings and limited knowledge from observing her mother's firm, when Madam Taraf started her own venture, it was a mighty step on her part. In 1996, she began her career as a buyer but it was only in the year 2000 that she initiated her very own enterprise. In 2008, she was given the opportunity to export raw cashew through AGRO-PHEN and in 2010, NAD and Co. Industries opened a processing facility in eastern Benin.

### ***Finding the middle path to strike a balance***

With the aim of seeking a livelihood in this field, along with the belief that value addition to the raw material can be a great source of economic progress in her country of Benin, she set up NAD and Co. Industries. But it wasn't easy, to say the least. As a single mother, there were times when she had to stay away from her daughter for extended periods and eventually, they managed to keep a strong bond as the two respected and understood the other's commitments. Now that her daughter is all grown up, Madam Taraf says she is able to spend more time at her enterprise and can entirely focus on her business.

### ***Climbing up the ladder of mastering the business***

Also, with no prior trainings, she took help from people who had enough experience in this field. Going from someone who started with very little information to mastering the business, her thirst for knowledge and observation has been a strong factor in bringing her this far.



Today, her processing unit has 300 workers, more than 200 of which are women. However, it isn't an easy task to hire employees for this kind of work as most of the activities are done manually, which require effort and the processing steps tend to get difficult. Besides, her unit is set up in such a place that is far from the general population and the road that leads to the enterprise is deteriorated, thus making commuting an issue.



### ***Providing special benefits to the womenfolk***

However, surviving all odds, she continues to excel in her field. For the benefit of women workers, she offers them training, social assistance and incentives are given for the best workers. Also, women who have familial difficulties receive financial support and advices if needed.

### ***Improvement in policies is the need of the hour***

In order to improve the position of women in the industry, she firmly believes that her country's policies about the cashew sector needs to be improved. She also thinks that, the government must support the processing sector as well as the processors by giving them priority and those willing to initiate their own enterprise should not be imposed with hazards that can be otherwise ignored. For, considering the bigger picture, these are the people who create employment there by benefitting the country's overall development.

### ***Finding a common ground and staying strong***

Talking about her products, she says they stand out in the market due to their quality, and she is always on the lookout to meet the buyer's requirements. The buyers dictate their prices according to the market prices and they seek to find a common ground together.

Some of the challenges she faces are related to the geographical location of the facility, the supply of raw materials, the lack of electricity, labor concern and the lack of support from the government. To overcome the electricity issue, the factory is powered by electric generators. As for the other challenges, they remain big with no immediate solutions in sight. However, from rising above all concerns and managing her entire enterprise, to getting work done in a remote place and yet promising the best quality, Madam Taraf is a leader in its pure sense as she juggles with hurdles and stays strong on her path to success.



***Passionate about her work***

While talking about her personal life, she comments, given the fact that her daughter respects her job and her siblings are supportive of her career, her entire focus is directed to NAD and Co. Industries. Her work is her passion and never for a moment does she view investing a majority of her time at the enterprise as a burden.

***Aiming to top the charts***

A dedicated woman and an influential personality, she has big plans that she hopes to accomplish within the next five years. In the next half a decade, she envisions herself to be the first and best cashew nuts processor of her country and the whole of West Africa. She plans to extend her factory so as to increase its production capacity and create more employment. Speaking of electricity issues, she is doing everything in her power to gain access to energy in the plant.





Apart from these, her biggest desire is to see several Beninese entrepreneurs embark the journey in the field of raw cashew nut processing to create more jobs and thereby contribute to reducing the levels of unemployment in Benin.

### ***Managing the tedious sector***

She firmly believes that she is acknowledged in the cashew processing business and being a woman does not prevent her from receiving such recognition. Although she admits that it is a tedious sector to work in, hard work, resilience and perseverance, she says, are the three factors that can help one flourish in the business.

### ***Confidence is key***

For current women entrepreneurs and women aspiring to enter cashew industry she advises, “We need more women in the industry. You must be confident in your abilities and judgments. You must have self assurance, not only in your personal life but as well as in your day-to-day life.” According to her, lack of self assurance is one of the leading factors that inhibit women from becoming leaders in the cashew industry.

Madam Taraf is eager to see more women in the leadership positions in the industry and is confident that the African cashew sector will flourish significantly with these valuable additions.

After all, she is a living example to her own theory! As she encourages young women to take up this field, from her advices it is clear that she is a woman of strength and perseverance. She is not the one to let shortcomings dictate her life and come what may, her dedication to rise above the odds speaks about her brilliant contribution in this field.

