

# Business

SUNDAY, APRIL 18, 2021

## Africa cashew farmers not reaping benefits

### Less than 15% of continent's nuts de-shelled on African soil

ABIDJAN: The three million African farmers who supply most of the world's cashew nuts aren't cashing in on the booming demand due to a lack of processing facilities, a UN body said on Friday. World production and trade in raw cashew nuts have more than doubled since 2000 with African producers, led by Ivory Coast, accounting for almost two-thirds of the growth.

But the continent's farmers and exporters get only a fraction of the final retail price, according to a new report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). "Countries that grow cashews but don't process them at a significant scale retain only a small share of the value created as the nut travels from the farm to store," said Miho Shirotori, who leads UNCTAD's work on trade negotiations and commercial diplomacy. "African farmers, exporters and workers are missing out on a wealth of opportunities," she added.

Cashews thrive in the tropical climates of 20 western and eastern African nations, where about 90 percent of the raw cashew nuts traded in the global market are grown. Behind Ivory Coast the main producers are Tanzania, Nigeria, Benin,

Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and Ghana, according to UNCTAD.

But less than 15 percent of the continent's cashew nuts are even de-shelled on African soil. The rest is exported mainly to Asia, where more value is added. India and Vietnam accounted for about 98 percent of the world's raw cashew imports between 2014 and 2018, according to the report.

More than 60 percent of the traded kernels are then roasted, salted, packaged and consumed as a snack or an ingredient in other products, in Europe and North America. While admitting to difficulties in calculating just how much the Africans are losing, the report estimated that by the time cashews are processed in the EU their price is about 8.5 times higher than when they left the farm in Ivory Coast.

"This shows the potential for value creation in African cashew-growing countries, 14 of which are classified as 'least developed'," Shirotori said. "And value creation can lead to better wages for workers and more money for the local economy." Between 2000 and 2018, world trade in raw cashew nuts more than doubled to 2.1 billion kg, according to UNCTAD. — AFP



ABIDJAN: In this file photograph taken on May 12, 2016, raw cashew nuts are checked at a warehouse ahead of being prepared for sale. — AFP

## Chadian women crush gravel to make ends meet in dust and heat

N'DJAMENA, Chad: In one hand Idjele grips a heavy hammer, in the other a block of concrete that she smashes into pieces with heavy blows that narrowly miss her fingers, her gaze towards the horizon. She has been crushing gravel for so long that the gestures of the job have become second nature.

In the heart of N'Djamena dozens of women spend up to 12 hours a day bent over this work, pulverizing concrete, cement or brick chunks while children hover around them in the dust and heat of 45 degrees Celsius. The women work on piles of debris along roads and in vacant lots at the foot of the modern buildings that make up the Chadian capital's business district.

The United Nations ranks Chad as the third least-developed country in the world and these women are at the heart of a side industry re-using building materials. Men buy blocks from demolition sites and sell them to the gravel crushers, who break them down and re-sell them to those who cannot afford concrete. Mixed with mud or a little plaster, the gravel will serve as building material for new homes.

### 'All I could find'

Idjele is only 38 but like the women around her she bears the marks of grueling work, her face smudged with dust that reddens her eyes, her lips cracked and swollen and fingers raw from constant contact with grit as she sifts sand for even the smallest stone. Her 80-year-old aunt did the same work until she went blind. Now she sits behind Idjele, a mother of six who was widowed three years ago, keeping her niece company and serving her tea.

"I've been doing this since my husband died," Idjele says between hammer strikes, adding that her eldest children work with her. "My husband was a soldier and after his death I wasn't able to receive his pension. I had nothing left so this is all I could find to feed my kids," she says. Nearby, a tiny boy naked from the waist down clambers over a pile of dusty blocks.

Mamadou Youssouf, 42, arrives pushing a



N'DJAMENA: Habiba, a gravel crusher who thinks she is between 50 and 60 years old, and Idjele, 38, choose slabs of stones from a cart near the Cite Internationale des Affaires on April 12, 2021. — AFP

makeshift wheelbarrow heavy with 100 kg of stone he bought for 1,000 CFA francs - €1.50 - and will sell to the stone-crusher women for twice the price. Idjele fills bags with stones she sells for 500-600 CFA francs each to men who come to load their pickup trucks. In one day she may take home 500 to 600 CFA francs - between 70 and 90 euro cents.

Children squeal with delight as Youssouf dumps his load of stone near their mothers sending up a cloud of dust. Their hair has a rusty color, which could come from the powder of broken bricks or be a symptom of malnutrition. One out of five children born in Chad dies before the age of five and 40 percent suffer from delayed growth according to the World Bank, which estimates that 42 percent of the population live below the poverty line.

### 'I am free'

A quick internet search reveals the dangers of inhaling cement dust, including irritation of the eyes and sinuses, lung problems and even cancer. In Europe workers on construction sites are required to wear FFP2 masks and gloves - but these women barely cover their noses with their shawls. Habiba has been doing this for eight years. "I used to be a

cleaning woman but as I got older I couldn't work as well and my bosses yelled at me, insulted me, fired me," she says, her eyes red. "I could no longer feed my seven children.

She isn't sure how old she is - "between 50 and 60" she guesses. "Now I work 12 hours a day but at least no one gets angry with me and I can feed my kids and send them to public school," she says before adding with a wide smile, "I am free."

Haoua Mahamat says a sense of freedom unites all the women here, transcending differences of tribe, ethnicity or religion that are often the root of conflict in this vast country. They are also united in death, admits the 30-year-old who has been crushing stone for 10 years, explaining that nearly all her colleagues have suffered the loss of a spouse and the income he used to provide.

And while they have no boss to harass them, the women are also without any offers of help. "Free?" scoffs Therese Mekombe, president of the Chadian Women in Law Association, who says neither the state nor the UN or any other charity has showed the gravel crushers any concern. "They may have a mother's pride in being able to feed their children - but at what cost?" — AFP

## New Greenland govt vows to level rich-poor gap

COPENHAGEN: A left-wing party opposed to a controversial mining project in Greenland on Friday unveiled the coalition which is going to govern the Danish territory after a snap parliamentary election. Inuit Ataqatigiit (IA), which garnered 36.6 percent of the vote giving it 12 seats in the 31-seat Greenlandic national assembly, will govern with the pro-independence Naleraq which has four seats.

Liberal conservative party Atassut, which holds two seats, will support the government in parliament without joining the coalition. IA's biggest rival Siumut, a social democratic party that has dominated politics in the Danish territory since it gained autonomy in 1979, came in second in the election held this month.

The IA and Naleraq have agreed on a program to deal with major social issues, education, fishing and climate change. The chasm between the haves and the have nots in Greenland is one

of the biggest in prosperous northern Europe. "The inequalities have become too big and must be levelled," said IA leader Mute Egede, who at 34 is the world's youngest prime minister.

The Kuannersuit deposit, in the island's south, is considered one of the world's richest in uranium and rare earth minerals - a group of 17 metals used as components in everything from smartphones to electric cars and weapons. IA has called for a moratorium on uranium mining, which would effectively put a halt to the project.

Divisions over Kuannersuit originally triggered the snap election in the territory after one of the smaller parties left the ruling Siumut coalition. Since 2009, the ice-covered territory has managed its own resources but still relies on annual subsidies of around 526 million euros (\$625 million), accounting for about a third of its budget, from Copenhagen.

Denmark, which is not opposed to Nuuk's independence, also controls issues of diplomacy and defense. Nuuk is therefore seeking to diversify its own income, notably through more sustainable fishing, as well as tourism and agriculture. Traditional fishing currently accounts for 90 percent of its exports. — AFP

## Suez snarl-up, virus hit UK gnome market

LONDON: High demand during lockdown and supply problems following the Suez Canal blockage have caused a shortage of garden gnomes in Britain, the BBC reported on Thursday. The small bearded characters - often with a trowel or fishing rod in hand or sitting beneath a toadstool - have been beloved by British gardeners since the 19th century.

But in the wake of last month's snarl-up in Suez, caused when a 200,000-tonne megaship got stuck in a sandstorm, supplies of the diminutive garden guardians have dried up. Many of the decorative ornaments, which can be made of plastic, stone or concrete, have been left languishing in shipping containers.

Garden Centre Association chief executive Iain Wylie said supply chains had been under pressure during the pandemic and because of the canal blockage. "With goods arriving from abroad, garden centers were

affected by the ship getting stuck in the canal as much as any other industry," he told the broadcaster. "Garden furniture, ornaments, of which gnomes would be some, being stuck in containers trying to come over here."

Ian Byrne, of Highfield Garden World in Gloucestershire, western England, said there had been a "massive upswing" in gnome sales during the coronavirus lockdown. "We haven't seen a gnome in six months now unfortunately," the assistant manager said, blaming a shortage of raw materials. "Gnomes of any type - plastic, stone or concrete - are in short supply. They've been very popular over the last couple of seasons."

The Swedish furniture giant Ikea said last month that it had similarly experienced supply problems because of high demand and shipping problems. Massive container ship the Ever Given got stuck on March 23, triggering a mammoth six-day-long effort to dislodge it. Maritime data company Lloyd's List said the blockage by the vessel, longer than four football fields, held up an estimated \$9.6 billion (£7 billion) in cargo between Asia and Europe each day it was stuck. — AFP

## Vaccine giant tweets Biden to end US raw materials 'embargo'

MUMBAI: The head of the world's largest vaccine maker directly tweeted US President Joe Biden on Friday urging him to lift an export ban on raw materials desperately needed to make more coronavirus shots. The unusual step by Serum Institute (SII) chief Adar Poonawalla underlined the crisis in providing vaccines to developing nations, many of which rely heavily on the firm for supplies.

"Respected @POTUS, if we are to truly unite in beating this virus, on behalf of the vaccine industry outside the U.S., I humbly request you to lift the embargo of raw material exports out of the U.S. so that vaccine production can ramp up," he tweeted. There was no immediate response from the US leader on Twitter.

The world's biggest vaccine producer by volume, SII has struggled to meet demand for the AstraZeneca jab, which it manufactures, after India put the brakes on allowing exports of the shots as it battles a ferocious second wave. Poonawalla said last week that production was "very stressed" and called on the Indian government to provide it with financial assistance.

The company's production of a jab developed by US firm Novavax has also hit roadblocks due to the US restrictions, with Poonawalla telling an Indian newspaper last week that the embargo was "as good as banning vaccines". Developed in record time, the dozen or so COVID-19 vaccines already in use around the world have already triggered an exponential increase in production, meaning raw materials are now running short.

SII, which struck a deal to supply 200 million doses to Covax, a World Health Organization-backed effort to procure and distribute inoculations to poor countries, has seen its profile soar since the pandemic, with rich nations also clamoring to buy its jab. But the Covax program has been hampered by wealthy nations hogging the supply, with the WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on Thursday criticizing the "shocking and expanding disparity in the global distribution of vaccines".

The company recorded annual revenues of more than \$800 million in 2019-20, but the export ban has prompted it to ask India's government for financial help since New Delhi pays it less per shot than it earns from overseas sales. New Delhi on Friday announced that it would provide financial support to Indian vaccine developer Bharat Biotech, so it could scale up its production of the home-grown Covaxin jab.

The government said it aimed to increase production capacity to nearly 100 million doses a month by September. India, which has recorded over 14 million infections since the start of the pandemic, began vaccinating people aged over 45 this month, aiming to inoculate 300 million people by August. So far it has administered around 117 million shots. — AFP