



Partnerships4Purpose Mel-O Africa, Sierra Leone



Mel-O Africa supports subsistence farmers to become more competitive through the growth of the apiculture and cashew industries. It is one of the partners of the International Trade Centre's **SheTrades West Africa** project that works with business support organizations and the private sector to create sustainable and inclusive value chain development. SheTrades West Africa equips partners such as Mel-O with tools and methodologies to improve their services to women entrepreneurs and farming households, allowing greater impact at scale.

Funded by the Korean International Cooperation Agency, the project is committed to improving the lives of 10,000 women in agricultural value chains in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.



The challenge

Women farmers are left behind.

Women are key agents for achieving systemic changes in agricultural value chains. However, they are primarily involved in less visible parts of the value chain, often low paid and unskilled parts of the employment chain.

They also have little control over their earnings and income distribution. With limited access to technical training, education, finance, and agricultural inputs, these impediments are further aggravated by global shocks such as pandemics, climate change and disruptions to supply chains.

The cashew nut sector in Sierra Leone

A new value chain with potential (and problems)

The cashew nut sector is relatively new in Sierra Leone. With strong global demand for cashew, it has the potential to contribute significantly to farming households' incomes when integrated into their farming production systems.

However, farming households typically receive limited support (training and agricultural inputs) to help them boost their production and maximize the quality of their cashew crop to meet buyers' requirements.

"I can now equally contribute to managing the cashew activities, how to plant and what amount to harvest. My husband and I plan together!"

Woman farmer, Karene district

Support for farming households

Most of the support that cashew farmers receive is from private buyers looking to strengthen their supply base, rather than from government agencies given their limited outreach capacities. Most of this support goes to male household members, who tend to dominate cashew

production and sales, even when much of the work is carried out by women. Consequently, women farmers with their limited access to training, inputs, and markets are left behind.

SheTrades West Africa – strengthening the cashew value chain

In Sierra Leone, ITC's SheTrades West Africa project seeks to improve the lives of women in farming households by strengthening the entire cashew value chain. It does so by:

- building women's production capacity and improving household gender dynamics;
- increasing the support women receive from business support organizations and private service providers;
- strengthening the competitiveness of small businesses within the value chain, connecting them to international markets.

"Previously, I found it difficult to communicate to female cashew farmers. But now I feel much more confident in approaching and addressing their concerns."

Sakaty Kamara, Head of Cashew Business at Mel-O Africa



Why Mel-O Africa?

Increasing outreach along supply chains, encouraging unity in households

As one of the few private companies that export organic cashew in Sierra Leone, Mel-O Africa works closely with its farmer supply base, making it an ideal partner for the project. By opening a dialogue on the importance of taking a more gender-sensitive approach to its operations, ITC and Mel-O's management agreed that making their cashew purchasing and extension practices gender inclusive would improve women's

lives while also boosting supplier productivity. This would make Mel-O's own business more competitive.

Mel-O's extension staff attended the ITC training on gender-sensitive value chain development, including how to deploy tools in the field with cashew producers

to identify women's contributions and constraints, recognizing the key role that women cashew farmers play in nursery management and post-harvest processing.

"Seeing how impactful the collaboration has resulted in improving lives of women in farming households is encouraging. We support such a positive and dedicated initiative."

Woo Chan Chang, Country Director Nigeria, KOICA

"We are excited to work with Mel-O to generate gender-smart solutions. Empowering women as change agents in agribusiness is key for sustainability and impact on the ground."

Anna Summer, Project Manager SheTrades West Africa, ITC

The impact

Mel-O prioritized two actions following the training: First, it committed to gender mainstreaming through farm inspections, where its staff also assessed farmers' compliance with good farming practices and organic standards. **They reached 2,000 agricultural households, of which half implemented gender-respectful changes.**

Second, Mel-O pledged to target women farmers for post-harvest handling training. The extension workers also benefited from the training at the household level, with over 70% of male staff members reporting positive changes in their own family interactions.

Although gender equality is considered a sensitive subject in some of Mel-O's operational districts, the

extension workers are now instructing their farmers on a more participatory and gender-sensitive approach, guiding discussions on women's and men's roles in rural households. In this regard, Mel-O will continue to work on improving the training for women and increasing the prominence of female lead farmers.

The long-term impact on both the industry and the society can be transformative. It shows how smart partnerships can have both a profit and a purpose.

"I now disclose my monthly pay to my wife. We also have a joint bank account. We have a greater sense of serenity and trust in our relationship."

Emmanuel Kamara, extension officer

Partnerships4Purpose



The International Trade Centre recognizes that 'Partnerships4Purpose' can contribute to impactful projects and sustainable outcomes. To celebrate the teamwork behind these efforts, ITC is proud to highlight game-changing initiatives that are made possible through strong and meaningful collaboration.

