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The USAID John Ogonowski and Doug Bereuter Farmer-to-Farmer Program



How a 24-year-old Became the Star Cashew Nurseryman for Benin's Ministry of Agriculture



Donatien at his cashew nursery in Oueme, Benin
Photo by Nestor Alokpai/CRS

Twenty-four-year-old cashew farmer Donatien Kouakanou produced about 3,000 cashew seedlings on his half-acre plot in Benin's Ouémé region in 2018. Yet after losing 30 percent of his grafted plants Donatien questioned his future as a cashew farmer.

Donatien continued to supplement his income by working as a laborer for various cashew producers in the region. In 2019, Donatien participated in a two-week training on cashew nursery management and grafting at the Regional Union of the Cashew Producers of Ouémé and Plateau (URPA-OP), one of Donatien's employers. The

training, conducted by Dr. Joshua Idassi, an Agriculture and Natural Resources Specialist at North Carolina's Agricultural and Technical State University's Cooperative Extension Program, covered specific techniques to increase yields in cashew seedling and the best practices in cashew nursery management. Idassi came as a volunteer consultant under the USAID funded Farmer-to-Farmer program.

Joshua noted, "Donatien is a young cashew farmer with an outstanding attitude. He has great leadership potential. He participated in hands-on demonstration exercises on how to graft the cashew seedlings using the wedge cleft grafting technology with ease. He is a great mentor to the new, young and beginning cashew growers. He opened his nursery for our one-day hands-on training where participants engaged in practicing how to perfect the wedge cleft grafting technology, nursery sanitary and the use of neem bio-insecticide to control insects attacking young grafted cashew trees"

Through the training, Donatien learned that his current cashew nursery was not planted in an optimal area. The same year he moved it to a larger location away from his garden crops, as Idassi recommended. Eight months later, Donatien's nursery produced 8,000 cashew seedlings — a yield with less than 1 percent of loss and an earning potential of \$2,780. Impressed by his results, URPA-OP introduced Donatien to representatives at the Departmental Direction of Agriculture, Livestock and Fishery of Ouémé and Plateau (DDAEP-OP). Their meeting and Donatien's success was subsequently reported to Benin's Ministry of Agriculture. The ministry recognized Donatien as one of the country's top nurseryman and included his name in their cashew nurseryman directory. They will follow up with him on an annual basis to track his progress.

The ministry anticipates buying thousands of grafted cashew seedlings in 2020 to help promote plantations with grafted plants, and Donatien hopes to capitalize. This year he sold about 8000 seedlings and helped other nurserymen sell more than 20,000 seedlings to the Ministry of Agriculture for about \$25,000. At 24 years old, Donatien now sees a future as a cashew farmer.