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## Link Between Cash Crop Production and Household Food Security in West Africa: The Case of Cashew Promotion in Benin

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### Abstract

Cash Crop production often is suspected to be contradictory to food security. In order to understand the impact of cashew promotion on food security in Benin, a survey has been conducted by the African Cashew Initiative (ACi) in 2010–2011.

In Benin, cashew nuts represent the second export cash crop after cotton. For about 200,000 people the cashew sector plays an important role in setting their livelihoods, within those 180,000 small scale farmers. In 2011, the total cashew export from Benin was about 140,000 MT and its contribution to GDP was 4 %. With about 1–2 ha only, Cashew orchards are largely cultivated by small-scale farmers beside food crops for consumption and selling.

Data from 657 cashew farming families in 13 districts was collected and used to (1) determine the extent to which income from cashew helps to avoid or helps to reduce the frequency, duration and severity of poor households' food shortages and (2) to determine the potential impact of the ACi interventions on household food security, especially the potential for reducing or eliminating food shortages.

The findings show, as dry season coincides with the start of the cashew harvest and trading, farmers have the chance to earn money by selling cashew and to reinvest it into households' food security. One can state that cashew production and selling helps to avoid food shortages. 43 % of the surveyed households experienced food shortages while 57 % did not. Amongst those who had experienced food shortages, 94 % pointed out that income from cashew had worn away households' food shortage and/or reduced the severity of the situation. Concerning the group who had not experienced food shortages, 75 % mentioned likewise their additional income from selling cashew.

The Benin case shows, that cash crop production and food security are linked and not necessarily contradictory. Small-scale farmers do profit from income generated by cashew production on their fields especially in a time, when households need money to stay food secure.

**Keywords:** Benin, cash crop production, Cashew, food security, small scale farmers