

Face to Face at World Cashew Convention 2017

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Mr. Mahesh Patel, Executive Director of ETG

An Exclusive Interview with Mr. Mahesh Patel, Executive Director of ETG, at the World Cashew Convention, 09-11 Feb, 2017, Singapore



ETG has been a recognized Global leader in its chosen segment. What is more interesting is ETG has balanced the social prospective into its Business and had demonstrated a new way of Business which is sustainable, socially responsible at the same time profitable. You're the visionary and architect of ETG. Please take us through your experience.

Thank you for inviting to participate in this conference. It's also our privilege to ensure and see that it adds value. ETG started its journey from Kenya in 1967 and our first aim was staple food for Africa which is predominantly maize and beans, which was grown by smallholder farmers and making it self sufficient rather than importing from International Companies. Our first focus was to ensure that the farmers are motivated to grow and we were successful in making staple food self-sufficient in Africa in 2000. Thereafter, we saw that these small farmers can grow something more. We focused on them, advising them and supporting them to grow pulses for Indian and Middle East market, sesame for Japan, Turkey and Korea market as well as cashew nuts. These were the objectives taken by us in order to empower them, create a value chain, and make them self-sufficient and reliable. We slowly and gradually over a period of time, are able to procure 5.2 million tonnes out of that nearly 80% comes from smallholder farmers. We still feel there is lot of potential from farmers as well as the same land to make the yield to grow 5-10 folds. We are helping and encouraging them with semi-mechanization, improved seeds, right fertilizers, knowledge on pre-harvest loss, insuring them on improving on it. The slogan of our group is “As they Grow, We Grow”. We feel that Africa today is the future where we have 60% of the world's arable land still available, which will help not only Africa, but also the rest of the World.

Please let us know, in your opinion what the key trends are shaping this Cashew sector.

We need institution and Government participation in helping and educating the smallholder farmers. I see the future is bright. From this conference, we take a lot back for empowering and increasing the production of cashews in Africa.

You are in a host of commodities; you are a global leader in pulses sector, in sesame, in cereals and so on and so forth, having seen so many sectors. What do you feel cashew sector can learn from other sector?

When we look at the present scenario, production of raw cashews is growing day-by-day in Africa. We look at the problems in the Asian countries mainly India and Vietnam, we see raw cashew production trend going down mainly due to agricultural land constraints. Shortfall can be compensated from Africa by supporting

them, as there is a lot of scope for growth in Africa. We would like to see two-way trade, where people must be encouraged and supported to trade with Africa.

On “Empowerment of Women”, we hear a lot of positive and encouraging stories that your cashew factories have empowered women. What was the thought process behind? How was the journey?

As cashews are usually grown in the rural areas, we saw that there was quite a lot of unemployment in those areas and the governments were worried as to how to find a solution for this problem. So we thought the solution can be processing in the rural areas where these women are idle and they do require income. We could improve economic status of these women. This process begun slowly and gradually developed, thus encouraging rural woman to be self-dependent and self-sufficient. The future is bright because when we look at the production figures, we have lot of scope to improve processing in Africa providing lot of room and opportunity for rural women to grow.

We have a large gathering of over 500 delegates in WCC. What’s your message?

This conference has brought people together, with lot of knowledge to share with each other. We all have certain soft holes, which we are able to understand through this conference and improve on it. Also, on the future prospects, as the demand is increasing and I feel this demand can be fulfilled through Africa. It is an opportunity when people from other countries especially Asia like India and Vietnam to invest in Africa and help in improving the African industry further. As the African leaders are very encouraging and this is the right opportunity to think and move ahead. WCC opens door for everyone to understand and collaborate.