

# Reducing waste and empowering women through green financing in Côte d'Ivoire

All too often, the burning of waste from production processes causes environmental damage. In Côte d'Ivoire, this problem has been transformed into a green business that has mobilized investment from around the world. AXXIOM, a small business, supports mushroom farms using agricultural by-products to grow food that improves nutrition.

The seven women-led farms supported by AXXIOM required an investment of \$15,000 each. They now employ five people each and provide a net profit of 30% on the investment. The company itself has grown rapidly to 12 permanent employees and 40 suppliers. The farms grow mushrooms that are consumed by families or sold to domestic supermarkets. The enterprise aims to export mushroom products and by-products to other African countries, Europe and Asia.

## Turning waste into a business opportunity

AXXIOM was founded in 2015 by Elmine Kouyaté. Building on her expertise in food safety and agronomy, Ms. Kouyaté realized that the waste generated in agricultural production was not being used efficiently. She thus began providing technical assistance in good environmental practices to small businesses. This led her to create AXXIOM, which organized women into groups, provided training and helped them to install mushroom houses.

Initially financed with her own funds, AXXIOM went on to win the Best Start-up Award from the Africa SME Champions Awards given by the African Guarantee Fund. The prize brought \$10,000 in external funding to finance the first farms.

As the mushroom farms use agricultural by-products as inputs, these are not incinerated as waste. Productive use of by-products reduces land pollution from waste deposits and air pollution from fires. This helps mitigate greenhouse gas emissions while encouraging sustainable economic development.



## An empowering business model

At the same time, the women-led mushroom farms empower women financially and improve their nutrition and that of their families.

AXXIOM's mission is for mushroom growing to become a safe way to promote healthy eating as well as encourage women's self-reliance and empowerment in Côte d'Ivoire. 'Reaching this goal is more than a duty for us to trace the path of an Africa respectful of its environment,' says Ms. Kouyaté.

In June 2018, AXXIOM participated in a conference and training programme aimed at educating green SMEs about accessing green finance. The International Trade Centre (ITC), the African Guarantee Fund and the African Development Bank organized the events together. The company has gone on to win the 3rd prize of the Pierre Castel de Solibra Award; the 4th prize of the Academy of Sciences, Arts, Cultures of Africa and African Diasporas; and \$15,000 from the Global Environment Facility to open a mushroom farm for women in the village of Seguelon in Côte d'Ivoire.



### Assistance bolsters access to finance

Green finance is a real opportunity for companies like AXXIOM to finance their expansion operations on good terms. As Ms Kouyaté puts it, 'Thanks to the training that ITC and partners organized in June 2018, we have access to a database of impact investors and commercial banks that finance green projects. It would be very useful for development institutions like ITC to support SMEs and start-ups in developing business plans and applying for green finance.'

As part of its mandate to facilitate access to finance for SMEs for trade, ITC is assisting financial institutions and SMEs to mobilize funding for environmentally friendly and climate smart projects and initiatives. In this context, it helped AXXIOM prepare its successful financing application to the Global Environment Facility.

ITC programming on green finance includes conferences for key stakeholders in the financial and green economy sectors. ITC is a member of the Africa NDC Hub, a platform established to support African countries in achieving their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. ITC partners with green economy focal points, the African Development Bank, African Guarantee Fund and other actors in the Africa NDC Hub to deliver capacity building. Green financing training sessions are organized separately for financial institutions and small businesses.

**Source:** ITC.

