

“ Labouring Nuts in Western India: Cashew in Transnational ‘Production Networks’ and Decent Work Agenda”

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Cashew Nut of India has a rich and a global history tracing back to its import by Portuguese, who brought it to coastal India and planted to prevent erosion. Although controversial for cashew shell’s toxic properties and ecologically damaging outcomes yet cashew nut has emerged to be one of the most expensive, global commodity consumed worldwide. India is one of the key exporters contributing about 65 percent of world's export of processed cashew nuts. In 2013-14, India generated cashew export revenue of 825.89 million USD (IBEF, 2014). Processing of cashew nut is labour intensive and highly feminized. Lindberg (2001) highlighted that most of the workers in cashew nut processing are women and belong to historically disadvantaged sections of Indian society such as Dalits and lowers castes. Studies conducted in the state of Kerala have firmly underpinned "the caste and gender linkages in the cashew nut processing units and highlighted severe health problem, working conditions and access to lack of health care (Thresia, 2007).

Despite the extensive works carried on the study of wages, employment and conditions of cashew workers in Kerala highlighting "occupationally exposed health risks" of the workers yet concrete policies and mechanisms to address the occupational risks and women's contribution remains neglected. On the contrary, the government has incentives for agro-processing and rural entrepreneurship while ignoring the living and working conditions of the workers employed in these factories and processing units.

India is also unique for its uneven regional development, diversity besides the levels of unionization. Sector wise for Cashew workers, Kerala is one of the highly unionised states whereas Maharashtra, Karnataka and Goa as states which has higher productivity of 770 tonnes per hectares with the largest share of cashew cultivation and processing has very low levels of unionisation.

This paper aims to throw light on the existing "production network" (Sturgeon, 2000) of cashew nut and its organization in the western India, namely in the state of Goa and Maharashtra. Based on the primary and secondary data the paper is meant to document lives of the women workers in these production networks, their life histories and working conditions in factories and processing units. Further, the paper explores the challenges and opportunities of implementing decent work agenda in such transnational production networks. Lastly, the paper addresses the potential role of the state and unions as "indispensable" to address and fill in the decent work deficits.

Key words: Cashew Nut, Production Networks, India, Gender and Decent Work