

Chapter 9

Cashew (*Anacardium occidentale* L.) Breeding: A Global Perspective

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9.1 Introduction

The cashew tree (*Anacardium occidentale* L.), which first originated from Brazil, is now found throughout the tropical world and in some subtropical areas with favourable climatic conditions: rainfall not so heavy and a dry period between rainy seasons. Its economic importance lies in the commercial value of the kernel extracted from the fruit, one of the tastiest and much appreciated by the nut consumers. The cashew nut producing chain provides employment and income for thousands of people and a significant turnover for agri-business dependent countries (Barros and Crisóstomo 1995).

The Cashew was introduced from Brazil into India by the Portuguese during the sixteenth century. Following its introduction into southwestern India, the cashew probably diffused throughout the Indian subcontinent. Cochin served as a dispersal point for Southeast Asia as well (Johnson 1973).

A look at the evolution of the world production of cashew nut gives an understanding on how the geography of the production is changing fast. From the early 1990s, a number of Asian countries have become important producers that did not appear in the statistics previously (Table 9.1). This is a clear indication that unless the traditional producers change the systems of production in utilisation through adding technologies capable of increasing production and productivity, very little will actually be achieved to improve its capability to compete with Asiatic producers in the international market.

The most important nut producers are Vietnam, India, Brazil, Nigeria and Tanzania. Collectively, these countries account for 78% of the world production, according to FAO' statistical data from 2004. Vietnam has seen dramatic increases in production over the last 10 years, rising from 202,000 mt in 1995 to approximately 675,000 mt in 2004. This represents 31% of the world production

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