



The Centre of Social Excellence Africa

Tatiana Eboua: an ally to the company, community and environment

A Case Study

How one CSE alumna is creating real positive change
for the environment, company, and community.

Part 1

Changing the course of history

How CSE Africa inspired a real change in career path for Tatiana

Introducing Tatiana Eboua

10 years ago, Tatiana Eboua enrolled in a Centre of Social Excellence (CSE) Africa long course. From that moment on, her life - and lives of countless others- changed forever. Thanks to the best-in-class training and resources offered through CSE Africa, a chain of positive impact has boosted corporate responsibility, community rights, future CSE students and huge swathes of the environment. With great loyalty and a commitment to the company she works for - OLAM - Tatiana is eager to continue increasing the progressive social and environmental practices that brings recognition, certification and profit to her workplace.

Tatiana, from Mekambo, North-East Gabon, came from a family focused on public services. But after studying with CSE Africa, Tatiana was enthralled by the dynamic pace of work, responsibility, and value of corporate social responsibility work. Tatiana loved how CSE Africa's training wasn't just theoretical. It covered practical topics such as conflict management over land rights and stakeholder consultation and integration. She believes CSE's training and ethos prepared her for life. It instilled the skills of 'autonomy' and 'personal responsibility'. As she says, CSE "provided the tools that allowed me to get to where I am today: at the heart of this company." It instilled an entrepreneurial spirit and encouraged her to take "risks that often pay off well."



Preparation of participatory mapping phase with community members

Part 2

10 years of impact

Step-by-step changes to an entire company

Shaking up the status quo

OLAM Group, in Gabon, has always put in budgets for social activities. Except that he did not necessarily have the necessary skills internally to implement an effective social management plan. In fact, for many years, communities in which the company worked often expressed frustration at the lack of voice they were given; local infrastructure was deprioritised or unavailable, including education and healthcare; and Claims regarding use of resources were rife.

Yet over the past 10 years, Tatiana, together with OLAM's sustainability team, have been implementing step-by-step a mutually advantageous plan for social and environmental sustainability that has gathered all stakeholders around the table and led to impressive results.

Getting community buy-in

On the community level, OLAM has recognized the importance and potential of community buy-in and budgets to mainstream its community development work.

Local communities are now more partners to the company, understanding themselves not as victims but as part of the discussion towards solutions. There are regular meetings that bring together all key stakeholders, as well as appointed monitoring committees and steering committees.

Communities have benefited from improved infrastructure, including schools and health centres, realised in coordination with the company and local government. Tatiana also highlights how her CSE training helped her to create positive working relations with local NGOs, who partner with OLAM to strengthen their engagement with the local communities.

According to a leader of one such NGO, Brainforest, Tatiana has brought far-reaching changes in the local civil society ecosystem, with significant impact on local communities, especially in terms of livelihood enhancement.

"Tatiana is a major player in OLAM and has succeeded in opening negotiations to collaborate on important social development projects. Before, we did not engage with OLAM, because we believed that their land permits were not legal and that local communities had not been adequately consulted. Over time, we have changed our perspective, and this is in large part because of Tatiana. It is due to her approach, which is really quite unique to find in a business person. She has humility, an ease with people, and she genuinely listens. Also, rather than just being satisfied with 2 or 3 large players, she brings together all stakeholders and makes sure that everyone plays to their strength. She really stands out compared to others in the sector, due to her approach and her skills - we need more people trained by her school!"



Creation of a participatory map with community members



Part 2 10 years of impact [continued]

Generating community impact

From not having a team dedicated to corporate social responsibility, now, Tatiana, as Country Manager of Environment and Social at OLAM, leads a team of 75 staff, overseeing 140,000 hectares of surrounding land and managing relationships with 84 communities, or 26,000 people in Gabon.

Central to this growth has been embedding and mainstreaming a key component of the CSE Africa training programme: Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). Through this practice, Tatiana and her team have been able to solve land claims and established fair and trusting relationships. As she says, “FPIC is the fundamental element in, for example, Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) certification. Having learned it at CSE, I was equipped with the skills to implement FPIC in our 7 plantations, including even places where it was not required by the certification like in our rubber plantations, where we negotiated social contracts with the communities”.

On top of this, together with the community, she works to create a local economy in the villages around the plantations through the promotion of income-generating activities such as chicken breeding and establishing community plantations.

Protecting the environment

On the environmental level, Tatiana has been able to work with communities using participatory mapping methods she learned at the CSE to identify and protect key areas of land. Demarcating these areas for special protection is preserving valuable flora and fauna, through restricted use of pesticides, and regulated hunting. Taking an additional short-course run by CSE Africa in 2016 in Abidjan has further enabled her to boost the environmental aspects of her work.

Giving back to CSE Africa

But Tatiana’s impact goes further still. With an ethos of sharing learning and training with the next generation, Tatiana has for a long time been giving back to CSE Africa. This includes hosting CSE interns in OLAM under her supervision, three so far, an opportunity to create opportunities for young professionals but also to challenge her own views and assumptions.

As Tatiana says, the internships provide “an invaluable opportunity for students to be confronted with the reality of the professional context.” Current CSE interns working under Tatiana are leading ground-breaking research on gender rights, opening up new ways of perceiving social relations within the company and with neighbouring smallholders.

Here, she can share the experiences she’s had and offer critical lessons. One such lesson is on how to bring about social change. “Today, what I explain to new CSE students is that it is true that you have been trained to bring about change, but you have to understand the context. You must not be the ‘black sheep’ in the company. You have to be an ally of the company, not so much as an activist, but as an employee.”

Meanwhile, Tatiana has continued attending CSE trainings, but also facilitated access to CSE’s short courses for the Olam sustainability team, helping to strengthen their knowledge-base and encouraging greater initiative-taking. More informally, Tatiana benefits from a network of CSE alumni who are all aligned in the goal of bettering social practice across Africa. As she says: “I am lucky to be always in contact with the CSE. When I have difficulties at work, I can seek advice from them or I can go back to my fellow alumni from the CSE, especially from my cohort.”





Tatiana with CSE 2020 Phoenix Class in the Dja Forest Reserve, Cameroon, with a group of cocoa producers



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The Centre of Social Excellence (CSE) is a strategic programme of Earthworm Foundation. CSE's mission is to create an enabling environment for social harmony and realised human rights by equipping companies, civil society, and governments with well-trained social practitioners from the regions where they operate.

We mobilise diverse social experts who have real-world experience addressing social issues to design and teach courses to students on the front lines of company-community interactions in Africa, Asia and Latin America. CSE's Africa training centre is based in Yaoundé, Cameroon. [Learn more about CSE.](#)

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