Scaling up shea nuts harvesting and marketing in Burkina Faso

Farm Radio International at the service of women who harvest shea nuts

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Uniterra is a Canadian volunteer cooperation and international development program that is jointly operated by WUSC (World University Service of Canada) and CECI (the Centre for International Studies and Cooperation). The program supports inclusive economic development to benefit women and youth in 14 countries across Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Uniterra works with key private, public, and civil society partners to facilitate growth and change in markets that have the greatest impact on the marginalized.

In the shea sector value chain, women harvest the nuts and represent 80% of the sector's labour force. However, despite the major potential in terms of shea almond[1] processing (annual production is about 850,000 tons), it is estimated that just 50% of harvested nuts are processed, and this low proportion fluctuates from year to year. Moreover, as shea nut harvesting and marketing are relatively unstructured activities, the women who harvest shea nuts receive low prices. Clearly, there is a problem in terms of optimizing the harvesting and marketing of this resource. More specifically, there exist multiple concerns regarding organizational issues, sustainable management of the resource, quality control, as well as a lack of skills, knowledge and access to information on markets.

Opportunities for women in the shea value chain

The Nununa Federation *(www.facebook.com/federationNununa)*, a Uniterra Program partner, is an umbrella organization of shea butter producers in Leo, Burkina Faso, which includes 9 syndicates, 125 women's associations and 5,000 members. With support from Uniterra, it endeavours to improve, via coordinated efforts, how the shea sector is organized and structured to enable women to surmount the difficulties encountered in harvesting and marketing. More generally, Uniterra seeks to economically empower the women active in this sector.

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Key themes of the story
Radio broadcasts targeting the shea sector

1. The fruit of the shea tree is referred to as the shea nut and its kernel is called an almond. So, while one speaks in terms of shea nuts harvested, shea butter is actually only made from the almonds.

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Thanks to the radio programs, we learned everything we didn't know about shea trees. We learned that harvest wastes are useful... so we will no longer discard them. We will put what we've learned into practice. We now know how to protect the shea tree.

Adissa Ouedraogo
of the Nongtaaba Association, Lan

A strategic partnership

In 2015, the Uniterra Program established a strategic partnership with Farm Radio International enabling the Program to operate on a large scale and reach more people with information and training. This radio and communications strategy for large scale work is also in operation in Senegal, Ghana and Tanzania.

Farm Radio International at the service of women shea nut harvesters

The Uniterra Program joined forces with Farm Radio International (FRI), a Canadian non-profit, which works in direct partnership with over 500 radio stations in 38 African countries to fight poverty and defend food security. Together, they implemented interactive radio campaigns based on the listening posts format to actively engage target communities on issues such as shea tree protection measures, shea almond and shea butter quality management, market intelligence, waste management and recycling, etc.

Over a period of fourteen weeks (January to March 2017), programs based on the listening post format were produced and broadcast by two local radio stations; moreover, a dozen community listening groups were specifically organized for women on subjects of interest to them to encourage their participation in these radio programs. In addition, RRI trained the staff at the radio stations on the listening post format and monitored the quality of these broadcasts.

The objective was to reach as many women in the shea sector as possible to provide them with information and opportunities for communication, the skills and knowledge necessary to enhance the structuring and organization of their associations, as well as, in the longer term, improve their socioeconomic conditions.

Outcomes

There were over 6,098 interactions, consisting of feedback from targeted communities in the form of calls, interactive voice responses, *sms/whatsapp messages* on a variety of topics raised during the radio programs. These programs led to changes in behaviour and enhanced knowledge and skills. In addition, 30 information skits and bulletins were produced with the participation of women and broadcast to facilitate and increase their participation.

These radio programs encouraged discussions in many families concerning the protection of shea trees. Women are now more conscious of almond quality. In effect, the radio programs widely publicized good practices, which led women to adopt new methods in harvesting, storage and shea butter processing. For example, they now boil the shea almonds immediately after harvesting them. This improves the quality of the almonds processed and, thereby, the butter produced. "After the radio programs, we completely changed how we do our work," explained **Sala Sawadogo** of the Nongtaaba Association, Lan.

Among the other short term results achieved:

- mobilization of the private sector to improve Nununa's access to micro-financing
- increasing interest in shea tree protection and the necessity of waste treatment
- appropriation of shea tree related issues by local communities and authorities
- increase in the Nununa Federation's visibility