



CECI IN THE SHEA BUTTER SUBSECTOR
POSITIVE IMPACTS FOR THOUSANDS
OF WEST AFRICAN WOMEN

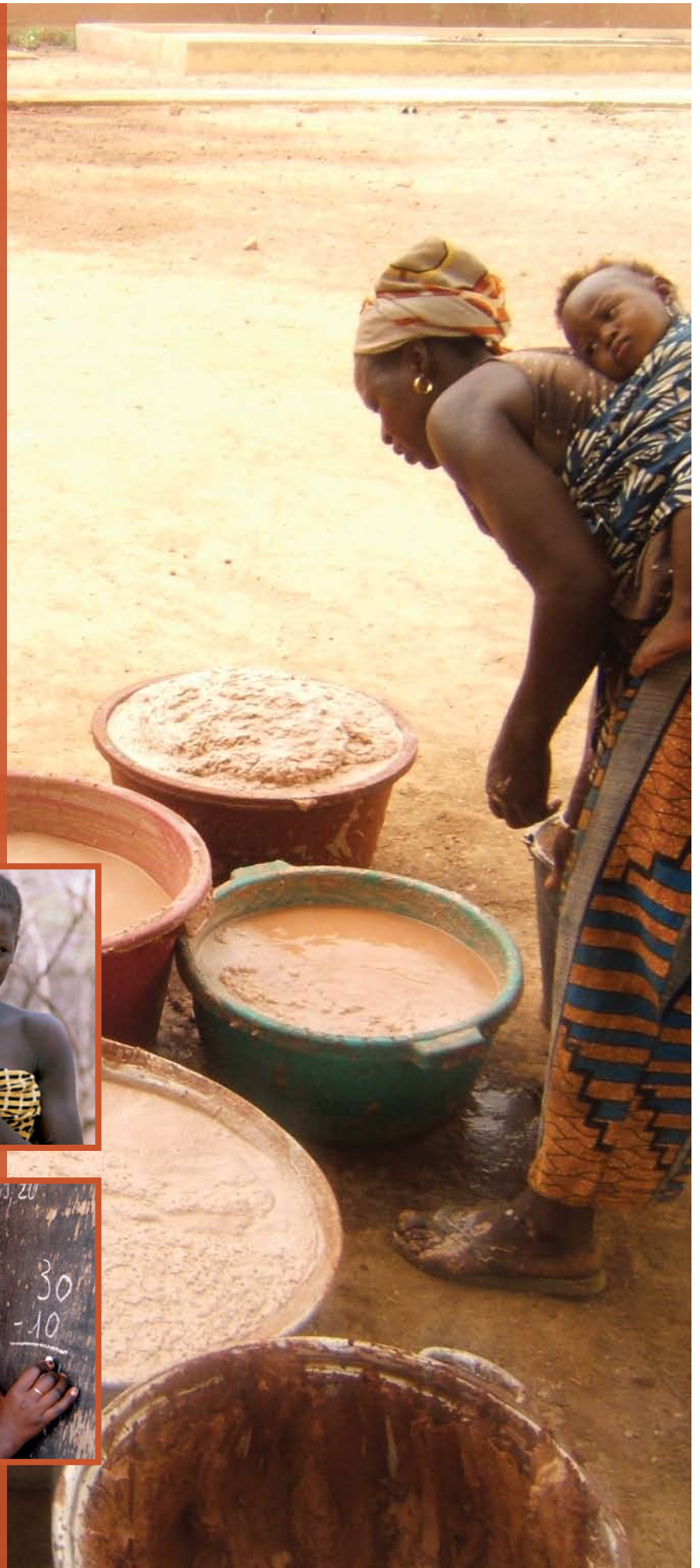


CECI

Shea butter and West African women

The shea tree grows only in Africa, in a geographical zone spanning the continent from the west coast to the east, from Senegal to Sudan. The greatest concentration of these trees is found in West Africa, in the following countries: Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Guinea, Mali and Nigeria.

The shea tree produces an edible fruit that contains an almond-shaped nut from which fat is extracted to make shea butter. African women produce the natural shea butter by using the traditional method of manually crushing and churning the nuts, a kind of know-how that has been passed from mother to daughter for many generations. Shea butter production is often the only source of revenue for African women, often representing 80% to 100% of their income. These earnings are of crucial importance because they meet the needs of children, for food, health care and school supplies.



CECI'S COMMITMENT TO THE SHEA BUTTER SUBSECTOR¹

In 1995, CECI took on a pioneering role by becoming involved in the shea butter subsector in Burkina Faso, an area it had been working in since the 1980s. It was the very first organization to adopt the "subsector approach"² towards this product throughout the country. CECI subsequently broadened the scope of its program supporting shea butter women producers in Mali (2001), in Niger (2004) and in Guinea (2005). In addition, discussions have been initiated with organizations in Ghana.

There are more than 200 million accessible shea trees in West Africa, representing an estimated production potential of 1.2 millions of tons of shea nuts. Only 693,000 tons were exploited in 2005, an amount representing slightly over half of the total potential. The demand for shea butter is growing, on the sub-regional market as well as on the international market. There is already a significant demand for the product in national African markets, where it has been used since time immemorial for cooking, for traditional medicinal purposes and for body care. In addition, the cosmetics industry and the food industry (for chocolate production) are showing an increasing interest in shea butter because of its exceptional qualities.

If CECI has been involved in the shea butter subsector for more than ten years, it is because it recognizes the potential of this subsector as an agent for economic growth and job creation. Particular attention is given to improving the women producer organizations' capacities so that the shea butter subsector development benefits first and foremost the very women who are at the heart of its production. CECI's objective in the shea butter subsector is to increase the economic and social well-being of African rural women and to contribute to their poverty reduction.

An efficient intervention in the value chain

CECI focuses its interventions on strengthening women producer organizations and their access to markets, to create wealth and improve their working conditions. It supports women wanting to associate or form cooperatives.

The main challenge is the low price paid by most shea buyers: local middlemen, exporters or multinationals. The great majority of shea (95%) is sold internationally in its nut form to be transformed into shea butter and finished goods by foreign industries. This kind of trade does not profit women producers.

The CECI believes that it is important to encourage businesses to purchase shea butter directly from the women producer organizations, since the on-site transformation creates locally added value and contributes to an increase in women's income.

Our interventions focus on four main areas of expertise

- Organizational capacity building and facilitation of collective action
- Production and quality improvement
- Commercialization support: access to national, sub-regional and international markets
- Shea resource management

Sustainable impacts

▪ Reduction of poverty

The shea butter subsector is a source of socio-economic development and contributes to poverty reduction for women and their families. Studies have shown that development projects targeting women have a direct impact on the children and on the entire family's standard of living.

▪ Sustainable management of the resource

Using shea as an economic resource has led to increased environmental awareness in local populations regarding agro-forestry management and preservation.

▪ Emancipation of the women producers

Due to improved practices in shea resource exploitation, women's income has increased, enhancing their status and their standing within the family and the community. As a result, women feel more confident and better able to participate in local decision-making bodies. For example, in the Siby Commune in Mali, fourteen women producers are candidates for the Communal Council in upcoming April 2009 elections.

¹ Subsectors are distinct areas within a broader sector; they are subsystems within a larger system. For example, vegetables, dairy and shea butter are some subsectors of the agriculture sector. Subsector should contain all the major actors and linkages, while being small enough to be manageable.

² The subsector approach takes into account every local actor of said subsector involved in its development: from access to inputs to product merchandising. This approach aims to evaluate the links within the subsector and identify constraints of inequity and ineffectiveness, so that interventions will address them specifically and focus on capacity strengthening and improved efficiency at all levels of the value chain.

Organizational strengthening

For over ten years, CECI has been developing specific expertise by strengthening the capacities of shea butter women producer organizations. Its vision is based on fundamental values such as partnership development, participation and team work, with the goal of reciprocated capacity building and efficiency. In the shea butter subsector, it promotes collaboration between individuals and supports organizations who meet social economy and solidarity criteria, i.e. those who endorse a democratic decision-making process as well as the values of fairness and of sharing wealth.

Associations and cooperatives fit perfectly with the on-site reality and with the women producers' needs. These types of organizations allow women to:

- Have access to additional resources (ex.: equipment);
- Evolve in a structured framework;
- Improve the product selling price negotiations;
- Share risks and earnings.

Working as a collective has other impacts:

- It increases productivity;
- It improves the quality and quantity of the products;
- It gives access to more profitable markets;
- It increases sales and earnings.

In short, not only is the laboriousness of their work reduced, but women see an earning increase and an improvement of their social situation.

This type of structure has undisputed advantages for CECI and its funding partners. The financial resources invested benefit a large number of individuals. Moreover, supporting groups rather than individuals leads to more sustainable results, by promoting knowledge transfer and the continuity of the invested efforts.

For the sake of efficiency, training and business support are given to the governance bodies that, in turn, disseminate this knowledge to their members. Hence, the coaching and technical support provided to the organization ensures the creation of statutes and regulations that promote transparency, and an understanding, on the part of the members, of their rights and responsibilities. Accompanying organizations at the grassroots thus insures that the earnings remain with the women producers.

CECI also encourages women producers to get involved at every stage of the shea butter value chain, from production to product commercialization. Based on principles of empowerment and collective action, the objective is to promote women producers' independence and eventually reduce the need for supporting structures in the long term.

Facilitating collective action

Stimulating the shea butter subsector requires collective action between the various actors. Our approach consists of supporting the actors throughout a given country – producers, manufacturers, distributors, exporters, etc. – and of facilitating concerted action between them. CECI primarily works with local organizations (NGOs and others) and relies on its national teams and volunteers to implement the approach. Accompanied by national experts, the Canadian volunteers specializing in sectors like production, quality control, marketing and organizational strengthening, are there to support partner organizations.

At the same time, CECI promotes exchanges between women producer organizations evolving in the same country and between organizations from different countries. In this way, it supports networks and linkages on the national level as well as on the sub-regional level, in order to disseminate the knowledge and expertise to a greater number of women producers. These networks also defend the interests of the women producers via advocacy and lobbying proceedings.

Actions undertaken by CECI

- Organizational participatory assessments have been carried out to identify the organization's challenges and appropriate solutions
- The administrative and financial management of the organizations have been improved due to training and business coaching services
- In Mali, the Siby and Zantiébougou cooperatives, accounting for more than one thousand members, have adopted a cooperative organization model
- From 2006 to 2008, annual sub-regional workshops have been organized. These meetings promote collective action and these interactions allow women producers from various West-African countries to identify common challenges and solutions
- Exchange visits between women producer organizations from various countries have been organized to promote knowledge sharing



Burkinan women producers share their knowledge

Thanks to the Shea Filière Project (SFP), CECI has improved the management and production techniques of over fifty shea butter producer organizations. In total, from 1996 to 1998, CECI has trained 9,924 women from 25 village groups on the shea nut storage and processing, and 3,750 women from 150 groups on the shea butter extraction techniques. CECI has also broadcasted many radio programs in local languages so that the greatest number possible of women could have access to the knowledge for improving shea nut and butter quality. Even today, CECI is still broadening and strengthening its support in Burkina Faso. In 2007, a new association was created in the Tiébélé region, whose membership extends to 39 groups and 900 women producers.

CECI has contributed to making Burkina Faso a leader in the shea butter subsector. Today, thanks to the Unitererra Voluntary Cooperation Programme, CECI organises visits to Burkina Faso for representatives of organizations from other countries so that they can learn from the expertise of their Burkinan sisters. In 2007, 15 women producers from Niger have benefited from best practice production training during an exchange with the Union des groupements de productrices de produits de karité des provinces de la Sissili et du Ziro (UGPPK) based in Léo, in Burkina Faso. This training was then given to more than 40 women producers in Niger. Before this training was given, the butter was sold at an average price of 375FCFA per kilo. Now that they can produce better quality butter, they can sell it at 1,600FCFA on the Niger markets.

Production and quality improvement

Buyers are increasingly looking for premium quality shea butter mechanically transformed in a way that both respects the environment and preserves all its natural properties. When produced mechanically, shea butter is rich in unsaponifiable matter, fatty acids, latex, and vitamins A, D, E, F and K. It can be used in its pure form, or as a basic ingredient in the preparation of various products: body, facial, lip and hair care products. Thus, it is important to distinguish it from the “refined” butter industrially processed. It is also important to emphasize that European and Asian oil mills extract the oil from the nuts by using solvent agents and resell it to the cosmetic industry. This butter, hardly comparable to that of traditional African producers, is then used as basic ingredient for numerous products containing very little shea butter.

However, the poor quality of shea nuts and of the butter produced locally by women is one of the reasons why they obtain such a low price for their products. Furthermore, we know that butter quality can change from one order to another, which represents a major obstacle for the development of this value chain.

To address this situation, CECI and its partners have established two priorities: improving the product quality and then maintaining the higher level of quality.

CECI's objective in supporting production and processing activities is to allow women producers the opportunity to offer high quality products that meet the national and international buyers' standards and requirements. It has been possible to identify some production methods to obtain a butter of better and constant quality, while respecting the traditional production methods. For example, women producers receive training on a nut processing method that permits better preservation.

CECI has also established priorities for improving the abilities of women producers and reducing the laboriousness of their work.

Firstly, training is offered to the women to increase their processing capacities, to diversify their product line and to market them more efficiently. Making various finished goods (salves, soaps, etc.) from shea butter also creates added value and thus promotes wealth for women producers and their community.

Secondly, appropriate equipment is supplied to the women to facilitate their work and increase their productivity. It is however necessary that they deem this equipment truly useful and that they know how to use it in order to fully integrate it into their production techniques. To do so, CECI volunteers offer training sessions and business support at every stage, from nut harvesting to butter transformation.

Equipment influences positively the strength of the organization. Studies have shown that with trainings and a better access to equipment, women producers have a greater sense of belonging, of ownership and of commitment within their organization.

Actions undertaken by CECI

- Studies conducted to determine the best techniques for each stage of the production: nut harvesting, preservation and butter transformation
- Training modules distributed to thousands of women producers
- Training for women facilitators who, in turn, train women for every stage of production

Between 2005 and 2008, 2,100 women from Burkina Faso were trained on high quality shea butter production techniques.

- Purchasing equipment such as crushers, mills, roasters, churn barrels, stockpots and filters

The Howick Foundation of Canada granted \$40,000 to CECI to provide women from Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger 300 individual pieces of simple equipment such as stockpots, basins, 55-litre barrels and fabric screens.

- Construction of production and storage buildings for nuts and butter
- Identification of packaging suppliers and funding for improving the packaging of bulk butter and finished goods
- Setting up quality control systems
- Financial and technical support provided to women producer organizations so that they can obtain organic and Fair Trade certifications

In Burkina Faso, a women producer organization has obtained its organic ECOCERT certification, and another the Fair Trade FLO-CERT certification in addition to its organic certification.



Léo's Union

Since 1997, CECI has been supporting the Union des groupements de productrices de produits de karité (UGPPK), whose head office is located in Léo, in Burkina Faso. The Union of Léo brings together 2,884 women members scattered in 67 groups from 39 villages and sectors. Due to CECI's support, 1,800 women producers were trained to improve butter quality and hygiene. Moreover, 40 local women facilitators and 596 women shea nut harvesters were trained to improve harvesting techniques, nut processing and preservation. This Union has produced 102 tons of butter in 2007, of which 95 were exported to Canada and France. In comparison, in 2001 only 5 tons were exported. Their total production capacity is evaluated at 250 tons per year and could increase to 500 tons before 2011.

The UGPPK obtained its Fair Trade FLO-CERT certification in 2006 and its organic ECOCERT certification in 2007. Due to Fair Trade and fairer pricing, 200 women were taught literacy, 80 AIDS orphans received school supplies and more than 500 women producers have been educated on the risks associated to HIV/AIDS.

The certification allowed them to sell the butter at a price three to five times higher, which considerably increased producers' income. Their average annual income has almost quadrupled: it went from 26,000FCFA (\$57CAD; 40€) in 2005 to 91,000FCFA (\$200CAD; 140€) in 2007 (\$1CAD = 456FCFA and 1€ = 656FCFA).

www.afriquekarite.org



Commercialization support: access to national, sub-regional and international markets

The commercialization of bulk shea nuts, of improved butter and shea butter-based products is a crucial step in generating revenues for rural African women in order to reduce their poverty. Being aware of the importance of finding outlets for their products, CECI focuses its support on developing access to more profitable markets.

CECI helps women producer organizations to establish profitable and sustainable strategies such as specializing in one or many targeted markets' key niches (health, hygiene, cosmetics and food). In particular, CECI conducts market studies, assists organizations to improve the product packaging and labelling, facilitates certification processes (Fair Trade and/or organic) and assists them in diversifying product lines.

Communication strategies are put in place to promote shea butter. CECI begins by promoting a local strategy, given the importance of African markets for shea butter. These markets represent millions of potential clients who are familiar with shea products and who use them regularly. These markets are nearby and directly accessible to the women producers.

At the national and sub-regional levels, CECI's strategic efforts aim to improve product image. Shea butter is a traditional product used since time immemorial for cooking, for traditional medicinal purposes and for body care. The challenge thus consists of adding greater value to the product by giving it a more modern image and creating a trend in West Africa as a whole for using the newly developed products. Organizations from several countries are already having consultations to work together on branding their image.

On the international level, the challenge consists in furthering the popularity of traditional African shea butter and Fair Trade certified shea butter. In Canada, CECI participated in the National Fair Trade Weeks and in many other fairs, presenting the partner organizations' products. With its "Good for you, Good for them" campaign, launched in 2006, it aims to raise awareness of Canadian businesses and consumers about the advantages of purchasing Fair Trade shea butter, made by African women producer cooperatives that follow the traditional production methods. CECI endeavours to market this resource whose benefits are still relatively unknown, and to focus on the economic benefits for rural African women.

Actions undertaken by CECI

- Hiring local marketing specialists, who work directly with the organizations to increase their sales nationally and regionally
- Sales and marketing training
- Market studies
- New shea butter-based products development: soaps, salves, etc.
- Brand image and product packaging improvement
- Promotional material: flyers, Websites, posters, etc.
- Access to international markets: contact with potential buyers, export standards training and European and North-American market requirements training, participation in commercial fairs and visits to Canadian businesses
- Support to obtain certifications (organic with ECOCERT, Fair Trade with FLO-CERT)





Innovation leads to success for Songtaaba, in Burkina Faso



Women from the Association Songtaaba Yalgre (ASY), supported by CECI for more than ten years, have demonstrated a strong sense of innovation. In 2006, due to a Canadian volunteer's support specialized in industrial engineering, they developed a brand new product: the Karidéllice jam, certified organic and made with the pulp

of the shea fruit. This bold business plan allowed them to win many prizes, including \$30,000 US offered by the World Bank.

Karidéllice, which promotes shea in a new and nutritious way, is now sold in Europe and in many Burkinan hotels. Shea jam production and marketing not only ensured that Songtaaba is internationally recognized, but led to the establishment of a semi-industrial production unit, and an increase in revenues as well as job creation. Today, Songtaaba counts more than 2,000 women members working in shea butter and jam production and sales.

www.songtaaba.net

Shea resource management

Shea parks are increasingly threatened throughout West Africa. This resource is threatened by repetitive droughts and the aging of the shea trees. Human activity is also adding to this burden because of bush fires, uncontrolled deforestation and shea tree cut-and-runs. The combined effect of all these threats results in the reduction of the average density of the shea parks, and has created a situation where mainly the older, less productive trees are left across the entire territory.

It is only recently that women producer groups have clearly identified the need to become more knowledgeable about shea park renewal and preservation. Associating an economic value to the shea tree is a clear incentive to protect this resource. CECI and its partners recognize the importance of protecting this natural resource to ensure the subsector economic sustainability.

Actions undertaken by CECI

- Identification and analysis of threats, such as tree aging, phytosanitary problems, bush fires and illegal cuts
- Studies to identify best practices for protecting and regenerating shea trees
- Setting up projects to evaluate the possibility of cultivating the shea tree (grafting, seeding) in Burkina Faso and in Mali
- Public awareness campaigns and coordination of citizen actions to foster local awareness concerning the importance of protecting and regenerating the shea trees

A walk for raising awareness about the shea trees protection and regeneration was organized on May 29, 2008 in Léo, Burkina Faso. This walk mobilized a great number of women producer organizations and other actors belonging to the shea butter subsector in the country.



Community management of the shea park in Siby, Mali

In Siby, a Malian Commune consisting of 21 villages with a combined population of 18,983 inhabitants, CECI is supporting the COOPROKASI cooperative, consisting of almost 800 women producers. This cooperative offers various products: unrefined improved shea butter, five varieties of soaps and salves for hair and body.

In addition to the support for the women producers, since 2003 CECI has been carrying out a management and protection project for the shea parks, with the collaboration of the Association conseil pour le développement (ACOD), a local NGO partner. This community initiative for the shea park management is seen as an example throughout the country and is considered as a model for success by the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

The project's success resides particularly in the collaboration between CECI and ACOD with the main actors of the Siby Commune: the local population, city hall, technical services and nature conservation services. Participation of the local actors is essential to the success of a community management project for protecting and renewing a natural resource. Another factor in the success of this project has been the participation of the community radio stations, whose far-ranging broadcasts have greatly helped the awareness campaign.

This project brought about many very positive results:

- 756 producers were trained on the cultural practices and silvicultural techniques such as fighting against mistletoe, assisted natural regeneration, rejuvenation by pruning and planting
- 80 producers were trained on the grafting techniques
- 2,731 shea trees were treated against mistletoe by pruning/pollarding
- 483 shea trees were grafted
- 6,223 shea trees benefited from assisted natural regeneration

www.maisondukarite.org



Many challenges were identified in the framework of regional consultations with various actors of the shea butter subsector: women producers, cooperatives, researchers, NGOs and ministries.

In particular, shea butter women producers have reiterated their need to be supported by CECI in the coming years, on the technical level as well as on the financial level. Below is a summary of the identified challenges:

Organizational strengthening and collective action

- Shea butter women producer organizations must become profitable, self-sufficient and financially and technically independent
- They must be able to offer their members equipment, training and technical support for the stages following the transformation of the butter (filtering, homogenization)
- They must be able to have enough working capital to buy the shea nuts from the producers; this working capital would enable them to guarantee stable incomes to these women who, to survive during the lean period, tend to sell their nuts to middlemen at ridiculously low prices
- The women must continue their exchanges and collective action efforts to increase the number of women producers who benefit from the training, at the national and sub-regional levels

Production and quality improvement

- Increase the number of training sessions on improved butter production techniques
- Assist organizations to diversify their product lines
- Support organizations in their certification process
- Support the most efficient organizations to assist them in setting up semi-industrial production units run by the women producers

Marketing

- Support the development of national and sub-regional markets by working on the image of shea butter by fostering knowledge about the products produced and by identifying new key niches
- Develop communication and promotional tools
- Assist the organizations in establishing selling prices according to production costs, to market prices and to estimated profits
- Continue the collective action efforts between organizations to increase selling prices and to ensure solidarity and nonprice competition
- Conduct quality requirement and price market studies for the growing demand of foreign businesses

Shea resource management

- Promote knowledge and implementation of the most appropriate silvicultural techniques for agroforestral park preservation
- Broadcast this knowledge in the various countries concerned
- Encourage local and regional authorities to get involved in favour of an integrated management of the resource
- Continue information activities to raise public awareness, with the support of local media and on-site mobile teams
- Initiate studies to recycle shea butter transformation process residues (press cakes, wastewater), particularly in the form of renewable energy





LIST OF PROJECTS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Since 1995, thanks to financial support and to partnerships with many funding partners and via its national teams and Canadian volunteers, CECI has acquired a recognized level of expertise and has helped foster great progress in the shea butter subsector.

Here are some of the projects in which CECI has been involved.

Globally, in the sub-region (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Guinea)

> 2007-2008

Special access to shea markets project Accès aux marchés du karité, financed by CIDA³, targeting the development of markets in Canada, Guinea, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso

> 2005-2008

Capacity-building project for shea butter women producers from Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, financed by the Programme québécois de développement international (PQDI) of the MRI⁴

> 2004-2006

Regional Prokarité project, established by the CRIAW-Sahel in collaboration with CECI, in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger

Au Burkina Faso

> 2004-2005

Project to support the UGPPK, in collaboration with a French NGO, TECH-DEV; this collaboration led to the establishment of the first shea production and commercialization centre

> 2002-2003

Project to support the development of small and medium-sized businesses in the shea-based cosmetics and soaps sector, financed by the CIDA Voluntary Cooperation Programme and by French Cooperation

> 1999-2001

Projet d'appui à la commercialisation du karité (PACK), financed by UNIFEM⁵

> 1996-1998

Shea filière project (SFP), financed by CIDA

> 1997-1999

Projet femme et filière karité (PFFK) in Burkina Faso, financed by UNIFEM

> 1995-1997

Projet d'appui au collectif d'associations de productrices de beurre de karité et autres produits (PA-CAPB/AP), financed by CIDA through the Programme micro-réalisation (PMR)

In Mali

> 2002-2008

Projects to support improved shea butter women producers in the Siby Commune, including an approach for the management and protection of the shea parks; financed by the Programme québécois de développement international (PQDI) of the MRI and by the Small Grants Programme of the Global Environment Facility (SGP/GEF)

In Guinea

> 2004-2005

Project to support shea commercialization in Haute Guinea to contribute to increasing women's economic power in the shea butter value chain, financed locally by CIDA

³ CIDA: Canadian International Development Agency

⁴ MRI: Ministère des Relations internationales of the Government of Québec

⁵ UNIFEM: United Nations Development Fund for Women

Support from CECI and potential of the shea resource in 2008 in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Guinea and Ghana

Burkina Faso

Support from CECI in Burkina Faso: around 7,000 women from roughly one hundred groups
Shea tree population: 30 million
Potential nut production: 150,000 t
Quantity of nuts harvested: 75,000 tons (t)
Domestic consumption: 35,000 t
Nut exportation: 37,000 t (92.5% of shea exportations)
Butter exportation: 3,000 t

Mali

Support from CECI in Mali: 2 cooperatives numbering 1,200 women
Shea tree population: 50 million
Potential nut production: 250,000 t
Quantity of nuts harvested: 150,000 t
Domestic consumption: 97,000 t
Nut exportation: 50,000 t (94%)
Butter exportation: 3,000 t

Guinea

Support from CECI in Guinea: 350 women
Shea tree population: 5 million
Potential nut production: 25,000 t
Quantity of nuts harvested: 5,000 t
Domestic consumption: 4,500 t
Nut exportation: 450 t (90%)
Butter exportation: 50 t

Niger

Support from CECI in Niger: 11 groups numbering 1,776 members
Shea tree population: 3 million (estimation)
Potential nut production: 15,000 t
Quantity of nuts harvested: 2,000 t
Domestic consumption: 2,000 t
Nut exportation: NA
Butter exportation: NA

Ghana

Support from CECI in Ghana: NA
Shea tree population: 40 million
Potential nut production: 200,000 t
Quantity of nuts harvested: 130,000 t
Domestic consumption: 70,000 t
Nut exportation: 45,000 t (75%)
Butter exportation: 15,000 t



Mali Niger
Burkina Faso
Guinée
Ghana

Sources:

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- Faculty of Agronomy of the Niamey University, Niger.

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