



Context

With the recent rise in popularity of natural cosmetic products in Western countries, the cosmetic industry's demand for organic ingredients, such as shea butter, has hugely increased. Being the home to an estimated two-thirds of the so-called "shea belt", a region of wild-growing shea trees that covers 19 African countries, Mali has the greatest potential to benefit from this demand. However, today, the country only uses 32 per cent of its current shea butter production potential. Referred to locally as "women's gold", shea butter is commonly produced by women who, due to inefficient production techniques and the lack of managerial skills, are unable to benefit from the economic opportunity this presents.

Strategy

In a collaborative effort with the Ministry of Women, the Ministry of Industry and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and with funding from UNIDO and the Government of Luxembourg, UNIDO initiated an entrepreneurship programme to improve the income opportunities of women in the shea sector whilst enhancing the competitiveness of small-scale shea butter producing groups managed by women. Focus is on the Dioila, Ségou and Sikasso regions.

Current results

- 3 pilot centres set up in Dioila, Ségou and Sikasso regions
- 1,000 women across 100 villages trained on shea nut processing technology, management and marketing; in addition, more efficient production equipment provided
- Private sector investment attracted by the women's cooperative in Dioila, thus giving them direct access to international markets
- In 2011, the French cosmetics company Chimitex bought 40 tons of shea butter soap directly from the Dioila women's cooperative. In 2012, the company will buy 100 tons. The

Current results

- partnership has improved the livelihood of over 300 women and provided a catalyst for other such ventures
- The shea butter product (sold under the brand name "Kaloje") won the first prize for the best cosmetic product in the International Exhibition on Karité called "Siko" held in 2009 in the capital Ouagadougou.
- Bio-organic certification for Shea butter received in 2011
- The now higher quality shea butter sold by the women has enabled them to sell their product at a higher price (100% increase)

Impact/Outlook

Although small in overall terms, the development is a breakthrough for women shea butter producers in Mali who have struggled to produce higher value products and gain access to international markets. Not only that, it has enhanced the women's opportunities and allowed them to improve their living standards and advance to more rewarding positions. The lessons learnt, particularly the good practices acquired from the pilot centres, have allowed the Government to expand its programme and replicate the approach in hundreds of villages.

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At a glance:

Goal: Entrepreneurship development for youth
MDG: 1. Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger
 3. Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women

Thematic area: Poverty Reduction through Productive Activities

Donors: Government of Luxembourg, UNIDO
Partners: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Ministry of Women, Ministry of Industry

Budget: EUR 1,000,000

Status: Ongoing

Duration: 2008 – 2013