

Wheels of Change: How new tools are driving youth participation in the shea value chain



Credit: GSA Sustainability partners Right Shea & Agritree



Credit: Women4Change

Caption: Young people transporting shea from the parkland to their household for processing

The shea industry has been a key part of the local economy of Northern Ghana for centuries, serving as a source of livelihood for women shea collectors, processors and marketers. Nevertheless, for young people, the industry has always been considered unappealing, at best. In recognition of this missed opportunity, the Global Shea Alliance in collaboration with *Women for Change*, [Advans](#), [Agrocenta](#) and [theSOFTtribe](#), and in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation, launched the Shea Business Empowerment Program (SBEP), designed to increase the participation of young people in the shea value chain.

So far, the program has successfully trained over 16,000 young individuals in various aspects of business management, such as sales and marketing, accounting and finance, as well as granted them access to warehouse facilities, trading opportunities and other commerce resources. Additionally, the program has distributed 220 tricycles to shea cooperatives, benefiting 36,105 women, of which 44% are young people.

For the women collectors who now have access to the tricycles, this has made a significant difference in their shea operations. It marks the distinction between a season of poor collection, leading to low income and a season where they can efficiently reach more shea trees, collect a greater quantity of fruits and effortlessly transport their harvest to their respective homes. The tricycles have provided a practical solution to improve their livelihoods, enhancing their ability to gather shea kernels effectively and boosting their overall income.

“I can see the difference between what I am doing and what my mother and her mother did before me.” Abdulai Chimsi Latifa is a 26-year-old shea collector, who joined the Wundua Gbangbebu Women Cooperative in 2022. Like many young people in the shea producing communities, she was exposed to the crop at a young age, as her mother and grandmother were both shea collectors. *“But I never saw myself joining them in the business because I wanted to be ‘somebody’ in the future.”* Latifa is a beautician and runs her own salon in the community. *“Now, I know I can still be a shea collector and operate my salon. During the peak season, I co-ordinate with other cooperative members, we get up at 5:00 am and with the tricycle we collect shea fruits. I do this for 2 hours in the morning after which I get ready to go to my salon”.* This would not have been possible for Latifa given the long distance she would have had to cover to collect shea each day.

Business advisory and access to financial services provided through SBEP are changing the outlook of shea collection and processing in the 50 beneficiary communities. Tricycles are not only optimising the shea collection process, but they are also serving as a source of additional income for shea cooperatives. Each cooperative is assigned 2 tricycles and during the collection season, shea collectors register to use a tricycle, paying a subsidised fee. These fees, in addition to the rental of the tricycles during the shea off season are used to pay the drivers and cover maintenance costs where necessary.

For the producing communities of northern Ghana, shea is a familiar source of food and an integral part of local traditions. However, with the introduction of new tools, training and business support services, the wheels of change are turning, and

young people are seeing the business opportunities that exist within the value chain.