

Not too young to shea: Linda Nsobila and her mission to show the place of the youth in the shea industry



"I am young. I am educated. Being a leader in the co-operative is an opportunity for me to contribute to something that I love and that serves as a source of livelihood for so many other women like me." Linda Nsobila

In the Bongo Balungo community of the Upper East Region of Ghana, Linda Nsobila, a 23 year old high school graduate, is the Secretary of the Pogesi Maltaaba Shea Co-operative, a collective of 812 women shea producers. Five years ago, Linda joined one of the many informal shea groups in her community, when she started collecting and processing shea. In her group, she served as Secretary, supporting the documentation of their activities, especially their Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) contributions. When these smaller groups came together to form a shea co-operative 2 years ago, Linda was once again nominated and elected to be the co-operative Secretary.

The creation of the Pogesi Maltaaba Shea Co-operative and the formalisation of their activities was carried out as part of the Shea Business Empowerment Programme (SBEP), led by the Global Shea Alliance (GSA), in collaboration with Women for Change, in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation.

The formation of co-operatives plays a pivotal role in strengthening economic prospects and empowering women by uniting individual producers into a collective, giving them agency, a voice in decision making and the power to advocate for their rights. In rural areas, where social norms often limit women's independence, achieving this individually is challenging. Co-operatives provide a platform for women to support one another, share experiences and

amplify their voices for effective change. This collective approach not only strengthens economic prospects and social status within communities but also turns young women shea producers into influential leaders. Through active participation in decision making, they become advocates for their communities. The empowerment women experience through co-operatives elevates their socio economic status and creates lasting transformation in their households and communities.

“As the Secretary, I make sure I take minutes at every meeting because this is how we keep records of the decisions that we make as a group. The training we received in record keeping has also helped us to properly track our shea business, know what we are putting in and how much profit we’re making.”

At the broader co-operative level, women shea producers are leveraging business training to diversify their portfolio. Linda’s improved business skills are not only impacting her shea business, she has started a pastry business, taking orders for events and selling the pastries in the village market during the shea off season. In addition to shea kernels and shea butter,

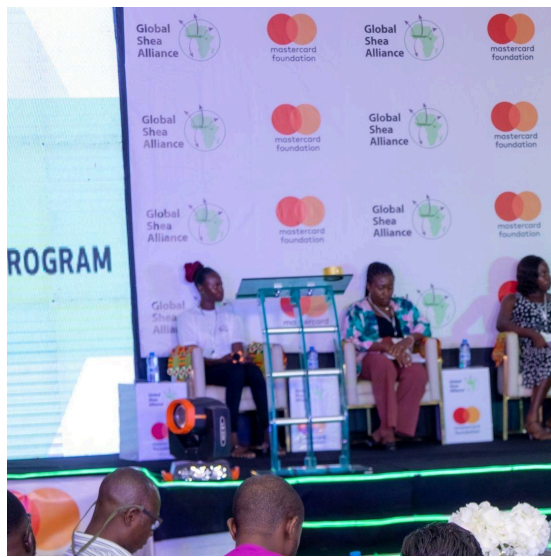


the co-operative plans to start a cosmetics business as a source of additional income for the co-operative.

“More young people are showing an interest in shea and have been asking to join the co-operative. We accept them because we know that with more young people, we can become even more efficient and expand our business beyond our community and even beyond the country”.

As the average age of shea collectors rises, it's vital to engage more young people in every aspect of the value chain to ensure the industry's long term sustainability. Their fresh perspectives, energy and innovative ideas are key to driving growth, improving efficiency and expanding opportunities in the shea sector. Beyond generational renewal, involving young people in co-operatives further empowers the group, as their education enhances the

co-operative's capacity and influence. Through the Shea Business Empowerment Program



(SBEP), young leaders like Linda are reshaping perceptions in shea producing communities, highlighting the vast potential within the industry.

Empowering young women to enter the shea industry revitalises the sector with fresh ideas and opens up new avenues for economic empowerment, community growth and sustainability. Shea is more than a global commodity, it's essential to food security,

women's livelihoods and environmental resilience in many developing regions.

By contributing to the shea sector, young women play a key role in driving transformation, building resilient, inclusive and sustainable communities.