

Title: Empowering the Next Generation: Youth Engagement in the Shea Value Chain

A dominant narrative within the agriculture industry across Africa is the lack of interest and participation from young people. This is particularly relevant since it is estimated that about 70% of the population in sub Saharan Africa is below the age of 30 and young people constitute about 37% of the workforce. As efforts are being made globally to transform agrifood systems, it is evident that this can only be achieved with increased participation from the youth.



Under the Business Coaching and Entrepreneurship Support pillar of the Shea Business Empowerment Program (SBEP), the Global Shea Alliance has partnered with the University for Development Studies (UDS) to drive youth engagement in the Shea value chain through an internship program. The program is designed not only to drive youth interest but, through business training, also increase the student's knowledge of the immense opportunities available within the sector. Between June 2022 and October 2023, 170 students were paired with 110 cooperatives and an industrial processing facility to provide various hands on support and business services. The students were selected from the BSc Agribusiness, Food Science Technology, Mechanical and Electrical Engineering programs, ensuring that the placement was directly related to their areas of study and career prospects. "Students were selected based on the relevance of their course of study to the shea value chain, their academic performance, and their interest in Entrepreneurship," said Franklin N Mabe, PhD, Director of the Centre for Agricultural Productivity and Policy Studies (CAPPS).

Once selected, students receive training in co-operative development and administration, as well as co-operative financial management, sustainability and technology integration, to ensure they have a thorough understanding of the shea value chain and its unique attributes. For 2 to 3 months, the students are assigned to shea co-operatives, with varying duties based on the individual needs of the co-operative.



Yakubu Zuwera said “As an agribusiness student, I have learned a lot about the business opportunities in agriculture, but shea was not one of the value chains I thought about, even though I come from a shea growing community. Working with the Yawungu Gbubkatimali Shea Cooperative in Yawungu, located in the Gushegu District of the Northern Region of Ghana has been an eye opener and has caused me to start thinking differently about shea and how I can make an impact with it. During my 2 months internship, I supported the co-operative in adopting a simple bookkeeping system to help track their production costs and optimise profits. This helped them document all costs related to production and determine prices accordingly”.

While the internship is for 2 to 3 months, the students are leveraging the opportunity to build long term partnerships with the co-operatives they are placed with, serving as a network of supply for future opportunities. Ten of the 170 students who participated in the internship program have started a successful business within the value chain.



In all, 170 students have been deployed to 110 co-operatives impacting over 60,000 women shea collectors over the 2 years of the Shea Business Empowerment Program (SBEP).