



SHE TRADES WEST AFRICA

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JANUARY 2022



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ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL TRADE CENTRE

The International Trade Centre (ITC) is the joint agency of the World Trade Organization and the United Nations. ITC assists small and medium-sized enterprises in developing and transition economies to become more competitive in global markets, thereby contributing to sustainable economic development within the frameworks of the Aid-for-Trade agenda and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

ABOUT THE SHETRADES INITIATIVE

ITC SheTrades Initiative is a global platform that empowers women to engage in business, creating value for both them and their communities. The Initiative ensures the right capacities and conditions are present to foster inclusive and sustainable trade.

ABOUT SHETRADES WEST AFRICA

Under the framework of ITC SheTrades Initiative, the SheTrades West Africa project, financed by the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), is working to improve the livelihoods of 10,000 women in agricultural value chains in Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. The project engages with actors across value chains to enable women to benefit from trade.

Partners and beneficiaries of the project include policy makers, Business Support Organisations and the private sector, SMEs within the target value chains (exporters, traders, and processors), and Farming households.

By adopting a value chain approach and building partnerships with national institutions and service providers, the project creates lasting change within the business eco-system. This enables women to continue benefiting from trade beyond the life of the project.



Mel-O Africa

“Earlier I found it difficult to talk to female cashew farmers. But now that I have attended and learned from the SheTrades Gender Training, I have gained immense confidence in approaching and addressing their concern.”

– Mr. Sakaty Kamara (Head of Cashew Business, Mel-O Africa)

MEL-O AFRICA INCREASES OUTREACH TO WOMEN FARMERS IN ITS CASHEW SUPPLY CHAIN

Mel-O Africa is an agri-business company based in Sierra Leone that exports organic honey and cashew nuts. The company sources its products from nearly 4,000 smallholder farmers and supports them in various steps along the value chain.

Women in farming households play a key role in cashew production - planting seedlings, monitoring plantations, cleaning, weeding and selling produce. However, to date, only 20% of Mel-O’s registered cashew farmers are women, as most households only register men. Women also receive significantly less revenue from cashew sales than men, despite

their significant contribution to production.

Through the SheTrades West Africa project, Mel-O recognized that it needed to adopt a gender sensitive approach to increase women’s benefit from cashew farming. Mel-O extension staff took part in a SheTrades training on gender-sensitive value chain development. Together with a gender expert, they learned and analyzed gender dynamics among their suppliers and explored their repercussions on agricultural production. The extension staff applied tools to identify women’s contributions against their constraints, and thereby recognized the key role women cashew farmers play in nursery management and post-harvest handling - key stages that determine cashew nut quality.



Following the training, Mel-O's staff felt better prepared to involve women in their extension activities. Mr. Sakaty Kamara, Head of Cashew Business at Mel-O Africa, said, ***"Earlier I found it difficult to talk to female cashew farmers. But now that I have attended and learned from the SheTrades Gender Training, I have gained immense confidence in approaching and addressing their concerns."***

Mel-O is motivated and committed to supporting women in its supply chain beyond the project. Mel-O will be extending its outreach to 400 new farmers by 2023. To ensure that women household members also benefit, Mel-O will encourage male farmers' spouses to participate during its farm inspection visits, where field staff will be providing guidance on good agricultural practices and raising awareness of gender issues. Mel-O will also be training a further 300 women farmers on Post-Harvest Handling, an activity where women dominate.

Ministry of Trade and Industry



“The new Cooperatives Policy will create a more enabling trade environment in the country and encourage women in business in Sierra Leone to take advantage of increased trade opportunities through inclusive cooperatives”

– Ms. Saffie Deen-Tarawally (Director of Policy and Planning, Ministry of Trade Sierra Leone)

POLICYMAKERS OF SIERRA LEONE TAKES STEPS TO MAKE COOPERATIVES MORE GENDER INCLUSIVE

Under the SheTrades West Africa project, ITC has worked closely with the Government of Sierra Leone to support the development of gender-responsive policy options that ensure women are able to benefit equally from their participation in trade.

In 2020, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, through the Cooperatives Department, was in the process of reviewing the Cooperatives Policy and requested ITC’s support to mainstream gender in the **“National Policy and Strategic Objectives for the Cooperatives Sector in Sierra Leone”**.

Guided by the national policy priorities and policymaking process, ITC supported with the facilitation of a consultation workshop with key public and private stakeholders to gather gender-specific inputs in December 2020. Further to this, ITC completed an initial review of the Policy and provided written comments to the Ministry of Trade and Industry in order to strengthen the gender aspect of the policy document. In February 2021, the Cooperatives Department invited ITC to participate in the validation workshop for the Policy, during which there was a dedicated session to discuss gender mainstreaming.



To complement this work, ITC developed a policy brief that summarized the stakeholder discussions and gender-responsive recommendations for the Policy as well as a second brief with a mapping of good practices across countries that have mainstreamed gender in their Cooperatives Policies and Acts to provide inspiration.

As of March 2021, the Government of Sierra Leone officially validated the revision of the Cooperatives Policy, including the gender-responsive inputs. ITC is currently working with the Ministry of Trade and Industry to support with dissemination of the Policy and awareness-raising activities to ensure women beneficiaries understand how they can benefit.

Ms. Saffie Deen-Tarawally, Director of Policy and Planning, Ministry of Trade Sierra Leone, hopes that the new Cooperatives Policy will ***“create a more enabling trade environment in the country and encourage women in business in Sierra Leone to take advantage of increased trade opportunities through inclusive cooperatives.”***

Recognizing the importance of cooperatives, particularly with respect to the agricultural value chains in the SheTrades West Africa project will promote women’s participation in cooperatives discussion. This is especially the case for women-led cooperatives, with the aim of improving their livelihoods in the long term.



Aminata Fornah

“The training and the supply of cassava cuttings was very beneficial for me and my family because it helped me to solve most of my problems and the replanted cassava cuttings will continue to benefit us in the next coming years as I will keep replanting it each year.”

– Ms. Aminata Fornah

CASSAVA FARMER IMPROVES FOOD SECURITY AND INCREASES PROFITS THROUGH CASHEW-BASED INTERCROPPING

Ms. Aminata Fornah is the chairlady of Rorenka village, a cashew growing community in Bombali, Sierra Leone. After losing her husband during the civil war of 2002, Ms. Aminata has been the sole bread winner for her 3 children and 5 grandchildren. Since 2019, she has been supported by the SheTrades West Africa project to address the constraints faced by women in the cashew value chain, including lack of access to seedlings to intercrop in their cashew farms.

Ms. Aminata was among over 600 farmers that the project trained in Sierra Leone on Good Agricultural Practices (GAP). The training covered a wide range of topics, including farm maintenance through pruning, weeding, and intercropping. In collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, the project supplied Ms. Amanita and her trained community members with cassava cuttings, which they used to intercrop in their cashew farms. This was part of the COVID-19 recovery strategy and an emergency response to cashew market disruptions.

By adopting improved cassava planting methods and GAP, Ms. Aminata increased her cashew harvest in 2021, sold some of her cassava produce in the local



market, and was able to explore other market opportunities. She is currently planning to sell her cashew produce to Balmed, a leading Sierra Leonean agriculture company operating in the cashew, cocoa, and coffee sectors.

This increased Ms. Amanita's income, which enabled her to pay for her family's medical needs, her son's college fees, and other food items. The enhanced cassava yield provides staple food self-sufficiency for Ms. Amanita's household - she uses the cassava to feed her family, and has replanted some of it to ensure food security for next year. She anticipates good quality yields for next harvesting season, and plans to sell the 2,500 cashew seeds she has nursed in preparation for next year.

"The GAP training and the supply of cassava cuttings were very beneficial for me and my family because it helped me to solve most of my problems. The replanted cassava cuttings will continue to benefit us in the next coming years as I will keep replanting it yearly", Ms. Amanita says.

Ms. Aminata adds that the diverse project activities have motivated her to invest more income and time in her cashew and vegetable gardening activities.

When asked what advice she would give to her fellow women to help them improve their livelihoods, Ms. Aminata said, ***"Women like us who were not educated should put our heart in agriculture, especially in farming permanent crops such as cashew. After the first 3-4 years, the income from it will sustain us for many more years to come and even for a lifetime if one has a big plantation"***.



Balmed Holdings Ltd.

“This year, our business experienced problems on exporting our raw cashew nuts due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was the ITC SheTrades West Africa came who assisted us with a new buyer for our cashews.”

– Ms. Victoria M Bangura (Balmed Holdings Ltd.)

CASHEW EXPORTER IN SIERRA LEONE GROWS BUSINESS THROUGH MARKET LINKAGE AND DIGITAL STRATEGY

Balmed Holdings Ltd. is a leading agriculture company operating in the cashew, cocoa, and coffee sectors in Sierra Leone. The company started its operations in 2005 and has since then been working closely with smallholder farmers. Currently, the company works with over 13,000 registered and certified cashew, cocoa, and coffee farmers in Sierra Leone.

Balmed’s team of managers and extension workers have been attending the SheTrades West Africa trainings on branding, packaging, digital marketing, data management, and gender sensitive value chain development over the span of 2 years.

Based on these activities, Balmed has increased their outreach to women farmers along their supply chain. They launched community initiatives and carried out training activities for farmers to improve farming community livelihoods in Sierra Leone. The company has also made significant organizational changes by increasing the number of women in managerial positions. In addition, Balmed developed new branding materials, including company logo, branding guidelines, a website, brochures, and business cards for their business.



During the COVID-19 pandemic, Balmed experienced a collapse in its international sales due to disruptions in global value chains. The project was able to connect Balmed with a new international buyer, to export cashews to Nigeria. As a result, Balmed logged sales of \$70,000 in 2021, which generated essential revenue for the company, as well as for the 200 farmers (70% of them women) who supplied the cashew nuts for the shipment.

“This year, our business experienced problems on exporting our raw cashew nuts due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was the ITC SheTrades West Africa came who assisted us with a new buyer for our cashews.”, Ms. Victoria added.

Federation of Business Women and Entrepreneurs

“The support by SheTrades West Africa has been an integral part of FEBWE, helping our organization to be more efficient in providing services and products that are beneficial to our members.”

– Ms. Stephanie SalaMartu Duncan (Chair of FEBWE, Liberia.)

FEBWE POSITIONS ITSELF AS A LEADING BUSINESS MEMBER ORGANIZATION FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN LIBERIA

The Federation of Business Women and Entrepreneurs (FEBWE) is a non-governmental, non-political and non-profit organization engaged in advocacy efforts to empower women entrepreneurs and women-led trade associations in Liberia. FEBWE has engaged with the She Trades West Africa project since 2020, with ITC providing the organisation with advice and training on institutional strengthening.

Led by women entrepreneurs, FEBWE has significant outreach in Liberia, and is aware of the needs and challenges of businesswomen in the country. By participating in the project’s webinars and coaching sessions on service portfolio design,

FEBWE was able to evaluate and redesign its service offering to entrepreneurs and was able to identify its customer segments. As a result of this work, FEBWE now prioritises providing additional support to women entrepreneurs to register their businesses. Women often do not properly register their businesses because of the cost and complexity of government procedures and because they lack the necessary information to do so.

REGISTERING YOUR BUSINESS
IN 4 SIMPLE STEPS

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REGISTERING YOUR BUSINESS
IN 4 SIMPLE STEPS

GET IN TOUCH

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BENEFITS OF REGISTRATION

- It makes it easy for potential customers to identify you as a reliable or credible business.
- You will be able to openly promote your business nationally and internationally.
- To qualify for a business loan, you must have an official business registration. Investors are more likely to take you seriously if you are asking for investment in a registered business.
- Once your business is registered you will be able to seek business opportunities and export your products.

HOW TO REGISTER YOUR BUSINESS

2 CHOOSE A UNIQUE BUSINESS NAME
 Check if your name already exists. If it does not exist, then register it.

4 PAY FEES AND PROVIDE PROOF OF PAYMENT
 Upon payment of the registration fee, the officer issues a flag receipt. Government of Liberia payment. The proof of payment is submitted to the initial officer with the application. Keep a copy of the receipt.

FEBWE co-designed a webinar with ITC tailored to Liberian female entrepreneurs to support them in formalizing their businesses. The session clarified the registration process and included Q&A sessions and peer-to-peer experience sharing. The participants were empowered with information on how to solve potential challenges with the Liberian business registry, with the webinar acting as an in-depth guide on the registration stages.

ITC also provided participants with leaflets containing the information delivered during the webinars. Participants then shared their newly acquired knowledge with other businesswomen, encouraging more businesswomen to register, increasing their businesses' visibility and international growth opportunities.

Reflecting on her experience with the SheTrades West Africa project, Ms. Stephanie SalaMartu Duncan, Chair of FEBWE says, ***"The women entrepreneurs and members of FEBWE owe many thanks to the team at She Trades and the International Trade Centre for providing technical assistance and human development that has helped forge one of the only business member organizations exclusively for women in Liberia. ITC SheTrades team has been an integral part of FEBWE, helping our organization to be more effective in providing services and products that are beneficial to our members."***



Juma Sackila

“I thank SheTrades West Africa and KOICA for the business management training I attended which gave me the knowledge to lead the development of a financial policy for my cooperative. The changes we have seen in our revenue since this policy was developed is huge. We have good savings, and we are spending efficiently.”

– Ms. Juma Shakila

CASSAVA FARMER EMERGES AS COOPERATIVE LEADER IN LIBERIA

Mrs. Juma Sackila is a cassava farmer from Bomi County in Liberia, and head of the PO River Cassava Cooperative. When members asked Mrs Juma to head up the cooperative, she lacked the skills and confidence to effectively lead the women and men in the cooperative. **“I didn’t know what it meant to be a leader. Therefore, for some time, the farm was not prospering. Everyone was doing their own thing”** she said.

Determined to enhance her leadership skills and increase the farm’s yield, Mrs. Juma attended the SheTrades West Africa project trainings on Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), Cassava

Processing, Cooperative Business Development and Business Management. The GAP training brought together a total of over 280 farmers and tackled fundamental topics in cassava production such as site selection and land preparation. As an outcome from this training and the application of newly acquired agricultural practices, Ms. Juma yielded higher income and was able to acquire new land where she and her husband are also growing cassava. The expansion of cassava production was followed by other farmers in the cooperative.

Furthermore, following her successive participation in the project’s Business Development Training, Mrs. Juma learned about financial management and how to develop an effective financial policy



for the cooperative and establish saving plans. Having the financial means to now invest in her cassava farming, she explained that farmers, including herself, are benefiting from a sustainable income that positively impacts the lives of their families.

“I thank SheTrades West Africa and KOICA for the business management training I attended which gave me the knowledge to lead the development of a financial policy for my cooperative. The changes we have seen in our revenue since this policy was developed is huge. We have good savings, and we are spending efficiently.” She adds, ***“It is from the farm I just paid my daughter’s school fees. When she graduates, I will encourage her to be a farmer because there is lot of potential in this business.”***



Federation of Shea Producing Unions

“Due to the project’s trainings on good practices of shea processing in Upper Guinea, we have been able to increase the quality and quantity, from 32 – 56 tonnes of our products and have improved the management of our cooperatives”

– Ms.Moussoken Sangaré, (Member of FUPROBEK)

SME RECORDS HIGH SALES AMIDST PANDEMIC DUE TO SUCCESSFUL TV MARKETING

The Federation of Shea Producing Unions (FUPROBEK) is a Kankan based shea producing organisation in Guinea. The organisation was registered in 2013 and is composed of twenty unions, 182 groups with a workforce of 5,093 farmers of which 91% are women farmers. They manufacture shea-based products such as shea almond and natural shea butter.

The organization was struggling with the quality of its product to target new potential buyers and export their goods. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated FUPROBEK’s situation as potential customers suddenly terminated their engagement and packaging products were no longer available.

Since 2020, FUPROBEK benefited from SheTrades West Africa’s activities such as Digital Marketing Training, Normality and Certification Training, shea processing and attended a B2B conference in Mali, to tackle these challenges and expand its client base. The project enabled an advertising spot for the organisation and broadcasted it on the Djoma TV group, which has national and international coverage. These initiatives acted like a catalyst for their growth.



Ms. Moussoken Sangaré, Member of FUPROBEK states, ***“Due to the project’s trainings on good practices of shea processing in Upper Guinea, we have been able to increase the quality and quantity, from 32 – 56 tonnes, of our products and have improved the management of our cooperatives.”***

Moreover, the TV advertisement has enabled the organization to showcase its products and attract new buyers, which resulted in new market linkages with clients from Guinea and France. This has increased FUPROPEK’s sales by over 60% with total revenue of over \$400,000: Ms. Bintou Sahnou, President of FUPROEK said, ***“Thanks to SheTrades, the TV coverage during the Digital Marketing training by Djoma TV, our sales have increased significantly over the last two months”.***

As a result of these new market linkages and increased demand for their products, the enterprise has increased the orders from women farmers and entrepreneurs’ suppliers by 73% ensuring a trickledown effect for women shea processors and improved benefits for women in trade.



Hadja Djenaba Bangoura

“We have learned new techniques that make our work easier for us and now we are more committed to improve the shea butter production”

– Ms. Hadja Djenaba Bangoura

SHEA COOPERATIVE STRIKES DEAL WITH INTERNATIONAL BUYER

Ms. Hadja Djenaba Bangoura is the president of Cooperative des Producteurs d'Arachide, de Karité et de Miel (COPRAKAM), a farmer cooperative based in Dabola, Guinea. Ms. Hadja was born and raised in Dabola, within a family where shea butter production was the main income generating activity.

Prior to joining the SheTrades West Africa project, the quality of her shea was not good enough for the international market due to old post-harvest handling techniques she applied. Ms. Hadja was also producing low quantities and could not tap into national demand. In 2020, Ms Hadja participated in a training on Good Practices of Shea Production along with 450 other women farmers. The training included improved techniques on the nine steps

in shea butter production from selection, sorting of the nuts, first and second drying techniques, processing, and humidity control for storage.

After the training, Ms Hadja and farmers in her cooperative improved their production practices. As a result, her cooperative produced 50 tonnes of superior quality shea in 2021 and increased its production levels by 25%. With the improved quality of her products, she increased her sales in the local market. She also succeeded in finalizing a significant deal with an international buyer.



Along with the rise in sales, she observed more transparency and collaborative economic decision-making in her household. She used the sales revenue for household expenditures, her children's education and invested in basic processing tools. Observing the successful results from the training, she trained a further 50 women farmers on the good practices of shea transformation to upscale the benefits to other women in her community.

“This training was very beneficial for me and the members of my cooperative because women used to suffer a lot during shea harvest and the transformation process. Thanks to the trainings, we have learned new techniques that make our work easier for us and now we are more committed to shea production”, She adds.



Société de Production et de Distribution

“With the help of coaching on packaging, marketing, and branding by SheTrades West Africa, there has been an increase in my sales, particularly after redesigning the company’s branding collateral.”

– Mme. Jacqueline Djiré (Owner of Société de Production et de Distribution)

SME EMPOWERED THROUGH DIGITALIZATION AND REBRANDING

Société de Production et de Distribution (SPD) is a women-owned enterprise based in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. SPD sells a wide range of agri-based products including fruit juices, cashew jams, cashew paste and cashew oil in the domestic market through distribution channels such as supermarkets, shops, and hotels. Since its registration in 2016, the company has been closely working with women farmers and entrepreneurs to source the cashews and fruits for its products.

Despite being awarded as the Best Cashew SME processor by the Government of Côte d'Ivoire in 2019, SPD was facing some challenges to meet export market standards. The enterprise needed support particularly in improving

food safety capacity building, acquaintance, and compliance with types of food industry certifications and quality standards, international market entry strategies and access to finance.

SPD started engaging with SheTrades West Africa in 2020, with its management team participating in the project’s trainings and workshops such as: Marketing and Branding Training, Packaging Training, and a workshop on Access to Market. The company learned about packaging materials, machinery, and was introduced to key information on labelling as well as how to distinguish itself from competitors.



SPD consequently re-modelled its product packaging and labels, recognizing the added value that these changes entail. The newly adopted rebranding strategies led to the enterprise's sales and revenues increasing by 60%, as products' increased appeal increased its popularity amongst existing customers and gained more visibility and qualification on the local market. In 2021, SPD logged in an annual sale of \$50,000 and business leads of \$50,000, all attributed to their new labelling and packaging designs.

SPD also benefitted from Selling and Negotiation Techniques and Supply and Stock Management trainings. With new lucrative developments and recently acquired market, SPD forged partnerships with new market channels such as Carrefour supermarket. Based on the increase in orders from suppliers of 30%, SPD, SPD was able to integrate 100 women farmers and entrepreneurs into its fruit and cashew supply chain, as part of its efforts of developing an inclusive sourcing strategy that benefits women producers.

"With the help of coaching on packaging, marketing, and branding by SheTrades West Africa, there has been an increase in my sales, particularly after redesigning the company's branding collateral. In 2020, I sold 578 bottles of juice in local market between March-August. However, in 2021 during the period, I was able to sell 2,123 bottles", Ms. Jacqueline Djiré, Owner of SPD adds.



Coulibaly Ya

“After the training, I deliberately took the lead in amending some practices, such as weeding our farm at an earlier schedule, so that our cashew trees can be well prepared for the upcoming season.”

– Ms. Coulibaly Ya

CASHEW FARMER EMERGES AS A COMMUNAL ROLE MODEL BY SCALING UP GOOD AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES IN COTE D'IVOIRE

Ms. Coulibaly Ya and her husband own 11 hectares of cashew plantation in their village – M'Borla Bambarasso in Northern Côte d'Ivoire. Alongside their cashew trees they cultivate food crops such as yam, cassava, maize, tomatoes, and cabbage. But the cashew plantation provides the household's primary source of income, enabling them to care for their five children and pay for education, healthcare, transport, and other basic needs.

The family planted the cashew trees in 2008. As the trees age, Ms. Coulibaly Ya has found that their return on investment declined. In 2015 they harvested 4 tonnes of raw cashew nuts, but only 2.7 tonnes in 2021 – a drop of 32%. With the cost of living rising, this directly affected their livelihood.

Ms. Coulibaly Ya attended trainings delivered by SheTrades West Africa in collaboration with Inades Formation Côte d'Ivoire & ONYX on Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), sustainable agriculture, gender awareness and farmer cooperative management. These trainings enabled Ms. Coulibaly to improve her family's farming practices, get better prices for their produce, and receive greater recognition within her household and her community for her agricultural expertise. Her



success is grounded in the GAP, as she was able to carry through improved and climate-smart practices such as weeding, pruning, aerating, and intercropping the cashew farm. These increase the cashew crop and improve soil quality. ***“I can now equally support in managing the farm with my husband. After the training, I deliberately took the lead in amending some practices, such as weeding our farm at an earlier schedule, so that our cashew trees can be well prepared for the upcoming season,”*** Ms. Coulibaly says.

As well as improving her family’s livelihood, Ms. Coulibaly’s newly acquired skills have earned her greater recognition for her role as a woman cashew farmer in her cooperative. Ms. Coulibaly Ya has emerged as a role model within her cooperative, as she in turn trained an additional 30 cashew farmers, 20 of them women. She acquainted them with foundational knowledge on good agricultural practices, focusing on cashew orchard maintenance to enhance production.



**SHETRADES
WEST AFRICA**
2019 - 2023

#SheTrades

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