



SHEA BUTTER IN OKERE

A Gift from Nature

Ojok Okello

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The people of Okere who offered their time and insights to inform this report take the biggest gratitude.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of Shea to the socio-economic realities of the people in Okere cannot be underestimated. Unfortunately, the role of Shea as a tool for economic emancipation and social transformation in Okere has been dwindling over the past years. This predicament is occasioned by a number of factors but the conflict that Northern Uganda got embroiled in for over two decades was one of the major contributory factors. Nonetheless, selling Shea nuts continues to be one of the livelihood alternatives for hundreds of households in Okere and other surrounding parishes.

Generally, efforts to conserve, protect and sustainably manage Shea trees in Okere have been non-existent. The same is partly true for efforts to promote the value chain development of Shea butter in the village. Women still engage in Shea butter production like it was done centuries ago. Many challenges being faced today in relation to conservation and value addition are still akin to those faced decades ago.

It is this neglect of both the conservation of Shea trees and value chain development of Shea butter that prompted the establishment of Okere Shea Cooperative Society in 2020.

The Cooperative, one of the initiatives of the Okere City Project seeks to position Shea as one of the central foci of economic development in the village. The mandate of Okere Shea Cooperative Society is particularly important because of the rising global significance and demand of Shea butter. The current global Shea butter market is USD 1.12 billion and it is expected to cross the USD 2.9 billion mark by 2025 according to data from the Global Market Insights . The main driver is the increasing demand for natural and organic cosmetics on the global market. In the year 2019, Uganda earned USD 706,000 from exports of Shea butter and there is a potential of this export tripling by 2025.

Spot light on
Shea Butter
Globally

USD 1.12 billion

The current global Shea butter market

USD 2.9 billion

The estimated global Shea butter market by 2025

USD 706,000

Export earnings of Shea Butter in Uganda estimated to triple by 2025

With a view to understand the various aspects of Shea in Okere, such as, the perception of the people towards it, challenges and opportunities in its conservation and value chain development, major actors involved in the value chain, forestry and gender dimensions, this study examines:

- i) the economic resilience and livelihood alternatives derived from Shea nuts in terms of income, assets and savings;**
- ii) the local, community, political and policy actions/possibilities to protect Shea trees and promote Shea value chain development in Okere;**
- iii) Okere people's vulnerability and the challenges they face in the Shea industry, particularly the factors influencing Okere people's ability to access more lucrative activities in the value chain.**

The findings and insights in this report are analysed from interviews with 208 residents of Okere village – 60% of whom were women and 40 men; 20 key informant interviews with decision and opinion leaders and 5 focus group discussions. The interviews were conducted between September to December 2020. Additionally, reviews of multiple literatures on the subject were conducted to contextualise the study within a broader local, national and global debate.

Among the key findings, the research undertaking found out that rate at which households in Okere depended on Shea butter both for consumption and income generation was reducing. Resultantly, this had a negative impact on the level of importance that the local community attached to Shea and its products. When a community attaches less significance to a natural resource, the incentives for them to protect and conserve it reduces.

Therefore, one of the key recommendations from the research is that there should be deliberate efforts to enable the people of Okere to reimagine and appreciate the significance of the Shea trees and its associated health and economic benefits.

The study also found out that despite the limited existence of Shea butter value chain development opportunities, the existing opportunities are haphazardly operated and quite often than not, being done with properly contextualization of the live realities and actual challenges that the local people contend with.

SHEA TREES IN OKERE

Okere Mom-Kok is a parish in Adwari Sub-County, Otuke District. Otuke is one of the 7 districts in Uganda that forms part of the Kidepo Critical Landscape (KCL) covering more than 10,700 km of the north-eastern corner of Uganda. Other districts of the KCL include; Kitgum, Agago, Pader, Kaabong, Kotido and Abim.



Shea tree in Okere bearing fruits



A huge Shea tree in Okere

600-1400 mm

The KCL area receives
Rainfall per year

25°–33° C

favourable temperatures
for shea trees to thrive

98%

Of the households in
Okere have more than one
Shea in their farmlands

The tree component of the vegetation of the KCL is dominated by shea trees. Shea trees are robust and survive in this belt because it receives 600-1400 mm rainfall per year and has altitudes ranging between 100-1200m.a.s.l. The temperature of Okere that ranges between 25–33 degrees Celsius all year round also provided a favourable climate condition for Shea trees to thrive. Additionally, the sandy and loamy alluvial soil on the surface and brown stones/rocks at the bottom provides a firm base for holding the deeply penetrating tap root systems of the Shea trees. Because of these natural conditions, Shea trees in Okere grew and continue to grow naturally. Factually, 98% of the households in Okere have more than one Shea in their farmlands. 97% of the shea trees were established through natural regeneration while only 3% of the trees were planted by the farmers.

SHEA BUTTER IN OKERE
A Gift from Nature

In Okere, Shea leaves get eaten by butterfly caterpillars usually between October and November before the Shea trees start flowering. According the local community in Okere, when the leaves of Shea trees get eaten by the butterfly caterpillars, it is actually a blessing in disguise as all the old eaten leaves fall off occasioning the growth of fresher leaves which helps for facilitating a more robust flowering.



Image 1: shows a butterfly caterpillar



Image 2: shows the butterfly eating the Shea leaves

Flowering of Shea trees in Okere usually begins in November – a process which lasts for 30-75 days. Flowering of Shea trees are both cross and self-pollinated, meaning that bees help to facilitate the pollination processes of Shea trees. True, the local people in Okere have confirmed that once Shea trees located in areas where there are bee-hives produce more fruits. Fruiting begins around January and it takes about 4months for the fruits to mature early in the raining season. The sugary pulp of Shea fruits makes it attractive to a wide range of animals, especially birds and primates who eat and disperse the seed in the process .

In Okere, Shea trees grow wildly and are usually left unman-aged. You can spot them densely populated in one site and sparsely distributed in another area. Shea tree can exist with other natural and local tree species such opok, odugu, cwao, among others. It was noticed that a Shea trees that existed inside a densely populated eucalyptus farm were stunting because they were not receiving enough light – as Shea trees are light-demanding species of natural trees. Shea trees in Okere are found in agricultural farmlands and they do not exist as organized Shea parklands.



Image 3: shows leaves of the eaten Shea tree completely eaten by the butterfly caterpillar.

30-75 days

is how long flowering of Shea Trees lasts



Image 4: shows flowering of the Shea tree.

SHEA BUTTER IN OKERE
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70%

of the Shea Trees are
less than 15years

15-20 years

is the time Shea trees start
bearing fruits

Shea trees can continuously
bear fruits for over

300 years

Most of the Shea trees in Okere are young. In fact, up to 70% are less than 15years and most of them have not yet started fruiting. Shea trees start bearing fruits after 15-20 years and they can continuously do so for about 300 years. The few existing giant Shea trees in Okere are mostly found in compounds of people who ruthlessly protected them from being cut down for charcoal burning.

Shea trees, life and livelihoods in Okere are inextricably linked. Decades ago, Shea trees were revered and cherished by the elders, adults and the children alike. Actually, Okere was a green Shea belt. Whether it was for protecting and conserving the environmental; or providing a source of rich nutritional supplements; ointment for beautification and skin protection; jelly for cultural rituals, timber for housing construction and rich organic fertilizer for soil manuring, etcetera, shea trees and its butter product formed a quintessential facet of the day to today living in Okere.



**“Cutting down a
Shea tree was
unheard of and
abhorred”
said Imat Berici**

Whilst it wasn't conserved and protected for commercial purposes, the nuts from Shea trees were locally processed to produce edible Shea butter which was used both for frying and flavouring food. Shea nuts were also barter-traded with other food crops such as beans, sorghum and millet, etc. for household consumption. “Cutting down a Shea tree was unheard of and abhorred” said Imat Berici, one of the elders of Okere. “Even when a Shea tree was in the middle of your garden, one would rather cut down its leaves or some of its branches to create space for cultivable land rather than cut it down completely” she recalled.

SHEA BUTTER IN OKERE
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There were also informal cultural norms and family values that ensured that Shea trees were conserved. Particularly, because edible Shea butter, locally known as Moo-yao is a traditional delicacy and cultural food in Okere, efforts and practices such as teaching women how to produce Shea butter were passed on from one generation to the next. “In fact, a woman who didn’t know how to make shea oil would lose a bit of respect, culturally speaking”, an Okere elder said. Children were also smeared and encouraged to eat Shea butter so that they would start valuing both the oil and trees from a young age.

In fact, data and insights from the field confirm this reverence for Shea trees in general and Shea butter in particular. For instance, 98% of older interviewees (aged 40 years and above) said they had never cut down a Shea tree until about twenty years ago (circa 2000s). On the contrary, 98% of all those interviewed said they had cut down more than one Shea tree in the past 10 years. In the past two years, 56% of the respondents had cut down Shea trees and 44% had not. It is thus clear that most of the destruction of Shea trees in Okere intensified starting from around 2000 until 2018 when the destruction started taking a downward spiral.



Shows many fallen Shea Trees as a result of being cut down

“In fact, a woman who didn’t know how to make shea oil would lose a bit of respect, culturally speaking”, an Okere elder said.

In 2000

98% of people interviewed said they had never cut down a shea tree before



by 2020

98% of people interviewed now say they have cut down a shea tree before

TWO DECADES OF SHEA BIODIVERSITY LOSS IN OKERE

More than
80%

of the Shea Trees' cover
was lost between 2000
and 2020

More than
90%

of this destruction occurred
between 2000 and 2014

As shown in the previous page, between 2000 and 2020, Okere lost more than 80% of its Shea trees' cover. More than 90% of this destruction occurred between 2000 to 2014 with a slowdown from 2015 to down. This is a biodiversity loss of gigantic proportions considering the fact that Shea trees are one of Africa's most sustainable natural resources. So, what exactly happened that the decimation of Shea trees in Okere did not only become so apparent but also proliferated in the past two decades?

Northern Uganda Conflicts and its Impact on Shea Trees

**During the conflict,
Shea trees were
among the resources
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Instead, they were
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by LRA rebels.
This is because Shea
oil was a ritualistic
resource.**

Before the civil war in Northern, Shea trees were sustainably used and protected by the local community – only the fruits collected, pulp eaten and oil processed for local use. Anyone found cutting a Shea tree would be summoned by the local leaders and punish. However, the conflict that engulfed Northern Uganda for over three decades sowed the current seed of Shea destruction. Okere, just like most parts of Otuke District, was one of the areas most affected by the activities of the LRA rebels and Karamojong cattle rustling insurgencies. These wars displaced and destabilised livelihood options for the majority of the population. During the conflict, for instance, 99% of the population in Okere were displaced mostly at an IDP camp in Corner Adwari and many others at IDP settlements in Lira Town.

During the conflict, Shea trees were among the resources that were left untouched. Instead, they were jealously protected by LRA rebels. This is because Shea oil was a ritualistic resource. For instance, upon abduction, children were smeared with Shea nut oil.

The oil was placed on each child's forehead, chest, back, hands, and feet in the sign of the cross. Norah Ogwal, an Okere resident who was abducted by the rebels said. The smearing with Shea oil means that "you are no longer with your mother and father, but for the LRA. If you leave, they will kill you" as explained to Human Rights Watch by one of the abductees. The use of Shea butter as a ritual oil also dates back to the Alice Lakwena rebellion when it was fruitlessly used as an anti-bullet magic oil.



Shea Oil extract ready for consumption from Okere City

Unfortunately, When the people of Okere started returning to their homes from the IDP camps towards the end of 2004, livelihood options were limited. Agricultural activities in the form of growing food and cash crops was difficult as the Okere returnees were too poor to afford any basic and modern farm tools to do so. "What else could I have done to survive apart from cutting down the Shea trees in my compound and gardens to burn charcoal?" said of the focused group discussants.

Besides, there were other risks related to landmines planted by government soldiers as counter fighting measures against the rebels. With agricultural options sorely limited, people resorted to the cutting down and burning of shea trees for charcoal. Shea trees which once formed the densest vegetation cover in Okere became a relic of bygone environmental conservation glories.

The smearing with Shea oil means that "you are no longer with your mother and father, but for the LRA. If you leave, they will kill you"

Norah Ogwal, an Okere resident who was abducted by the rebels said

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Shea Trees and charcoal burning

91%

of people who cut down Shea trees in Okere do so for charcoal burning purposes.

96%

of respondents knew about the local government ordinance against cutting down shea trees

91% of people who cut down Shea trees in Okere do so for charcoal burning purposes. Others also cut down Shea trees to get construction materials and clear their farmlands. The cutting down of Shea trees continues despite a local government ordinance in Otuke District against cutting down the trees. In Adwari Sub-County where Okere Parish is located, a local government ordinance was passed by the sub-county councils and endorsed by district council. When respondents were asked about their knowledge of local government ordinance against cutting down of Shea trees in Otuke, almost 9 in 10 respondents (96%) knew about it. The cost of cutting down a Shea tree according to the ordinance can range from imprisonment to financial fine and community service.



Effects of bush burning on shea trees in Okere

70% of the respondents reported a lack of awareness about the enforcement of such an ordinance despite the knowledge of its existence.

Whilst all the respondents (100%) said that they know of or have heard about someone who ever cut down a Shea tree, over 94% of the respondents said they have never seen or heard anyone who was made to pay such fine or penalties. More so, respondents were asked what could have made enforcement of ordinance difficult and 23% reported lack of political will, 15% reported weak enforcement by the local authority and 15% reported corruption. 70% of the respondents reported a lack of awareness about the enforcement of such an ordinance despite the knowledge of its existence.

Respondents were asked if they could report anyone cutting down shea tree to authorities, most of them (93%) said they would because of a number of reasons such as; the premium value they attach to Shea trees, their knowledge that cutting down a Shea tree is illegal and finally that protecting Shea trees in their collective responsibility. For the few respondents that could not report (7%), most of them were scared of being hated and others could not in case the trees are not theirs.



A police constable arresting a young man who had cut down a Shea tree in Okere to make charcoal

But there is a huge discrepancy between the existence of the Ordinance and the Uganda Police Force – the authority in charge of its enforcement. “I have only vaguely heard about such an ordinance but not the fuller details of it” said Mr. Egwaru, the O.C in Charge of Okwongo Police Station. “Without such details, my work becomes difficult. Maybe, the political leadership of the district should take it upon themselves to inform and train the law enforcement authority to make fighting the illegal cutting down of Shea trees easier” Egwaru said.

93%

of respondents said they would report anyone cutting down a shea tree

7%

of respondents said they would not report because they would be hated

“I have only vaguely heard about such an ordinance but not the fuller details of it”
said Mr. Egwaru, the O.C in Charge of Okwongo Police Station.

How bush burning stifles the growth of Shea Trees



The two images were taken on the same day from fields just 10 meters apart.

The first image shows a freshly burnt Shea tree while the second image shows a Shea tree untampered by fire.



Bush burning is one of the greatest nemeses of biodiversity management and conservation. In Okere, Shea trees have to face the wrath of bushfires year-in, year-out. Okere just like most of Otuke District experiences semi-arid climatic conditions such as long dry spells and hot temperatures averaging 30 degrees centigrade between the months of November and March. During these months, farmers deliberately burn the elephant and spear grasses in their gardens to make it easier to plough it when the rains return. This dangerous practice continues unabated despite the glaringly clear negative impacts. When the bushes burn, the fires indiscriminately destroy every vegetation in sight. Young/short trees suffer the most when bushes are burnt.

Especially to Shea trees, the impacts of bush burning are catastrophic as most Shea trees are young and short as matured ones were already cut down for the thriving illegal charcoal burning enterprise. More so, bush burning has led to severe stunting of Shea trees in Okere. Just when the young trees are blossoming towards the end of the rainy season, the dry season sets and the flourishing and leafy trees are destroyed. When the trees are not completely destroyed, their growth process is slowed down and growth pattern negatively altered and interrupted due to stunting. When the rains return, the flourishing starts and is again altered in dry season - an inevitable predicament Shea trees in Okere have to deal with. As noted by one of the focus group discussants that the “conservation of Shea trees and other natural trees species in Okere will continue to be a lost cause if bush burning isn’t stopped”, indeed, the people of Okere should start taking deliberate efforts to stop this dangerous practice of bush burning while the local leadership should as well institute and position some policy measures to curb the bush burning vice.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESTORING SHEA TREES IN OKERE

Despite the challenges that Shea trees in Okere face, there are also exist many opportunities that could be tapped to protect, conserve and managed the trees. The opportunities are varied and they range from dynamics within the village by the local community members and also by other actors external to the village.

There is an increasing appreciation of the value of Shea trees in Okere

Evidence on the ground and insights from the people in Okere indicate that there is a general appreciation of the increasing menu of values that Shea trees offer which has indeed led to the slowdown in its destruction pattern over the past five years. In fact, so much value is being attached to Shea trees that the focus group discussants argued that instead of concentrating much effort in enforcement of the local government ordinance, more efforts should be done to add value and its conservation and protection will naturally happen. “Once people begin reaping big from Shea nuts, the trees will automatically be protected because you cannot cut down what is bringing more money to you at household level”. This is mostly true as some people in Okere have begun to sleep under their Shea trees during the Shea nuts harvest season to protect their nuts from being stolen by other people.

During the Shea nuts harvest season, women and children take the collection of Shea fruits very seriously. As the old “early bird catches warmth” adage goes, women and children wake up as early as 4am in the morning to collect the fruits less one risks finding none if they wake up late.

“Once people begin reaping big from Shea nuts, the trees will automatically be protected because you cannot cut down what is bringing more money to you at household level”.



A young boy collecting shea fruits in Okere

Women and children wake up as early as 4am in the morning to collect the fruits less one risks finding none if they wake up late.

The People in Okere are Interested in planting more Shea trees

95%

of respondents said they were interested because they have Shea trees as important resources

5%

respondents that were not interested, majority did not have enough land and they also needed more knowledge of how to plant Shea trees.

All the Shea trees in Okere have naturally regenerated themselves since time immemorial. Most of the seeds are dispersed by bats that pick up the shea fruits during the fruiting seasons between May and July each year. The fruiting season also coincides with the rainy season. Upon eating the fruits, the bats throw away nuts which then germinate to produce more Shea trees. Because this naturally recurring process is unsustainable practice in the long run, it begs the need for community members to artificially plant more Shea trees. Thankfully, the people in Okere are desirous to increase the Shea trees' coverage through afforestation efforts. When asked if they were interested in planting more Shea trees in future, about 95% said they were interested because they have Shea trees as important resources that have the potential of increasing their resilience to both economic and natural shocks and uncertainties. For the respondents that were not interested (only 5%), majority did not have enough land and they also needed more knowledge of how to plant Shea trees.



Image 1: Fresh Shea nuts placed in the hole to be buried



Image 2: Shea nuts buried in the soil

In fact, in 2020, Okere Shea Co-op successfully executed a Shea trees' regeneration experiment. The experiment was executed after gathering enough information from the local community. Equipped with all the necessary local knowledge, the community members collected fresh shea fruits and buried them on the ground for two weeks. When the soil was removed, the shoots had started coming out of the Shea nuts. The nuts were then nursery bedded to enable them to grow up to a height of about 15centimeters. The Shea seedlings were then transplanted to the garden and continuously watered when the rain waters were not sufficient. 90% of the transplanted seedlings successfully grew and continue to flourish to date. In the coming years, Okere Shea Co-op will take a front seat in the establishment of Shea Parklands using this proven process in a bid to increase the cover of Shea trees in Okere

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Image 1: Shoots emerging from the Shea nuts after staying buried for two weeks



Image 2: A six months old Shea tree planted from the seedlings

Shea Tree Grafting Research Project in Okere

The project also aims to build the capacity of tree farmers to manage, harvest and process Shea butter into various products as a way of promoting value-addition.

The Government of Uganda through the National Environmental Management Authority and the National Forestry Authority with support from UNDP has been implementing the Kidepo Critical Landscape Project. Among others, the project is mandated to support the establishing and manage tree nurseries and plantations for drought tolerant tree species as well as promoting the on-farm conservation high value indigenous tree species such as Shea trees.



Established in 2019, the Shea Demonstration Site has over 50 grafted trees and the scientific undertaking is closely being monitored by the research team.

The project also aims to build the capacity of tree farmers to manage, harvest and process Shea butter into various products as a way of promoting value-addition . As a way of promoting the multiplication of Shea trees, the project is piloting a Shea grafting activity in Ader, a village in Adwari. Established in 2019, the Shea Demonstration Site has over 50 grafted trees and the scientific undertaking is closely being monitored by the research team. Whilst this is a great scientific initiative to promote Shea afforestation in Okere, locally proven Shea afforestation alternatives should equally be supported by such project.

CHAPTER II

VALUE CHAIN ANALYSIS OF SHEA BUTTER IN OKERE

This chapter reviews pertinent questions, such as; what challenges and opportunities exist in as far as adding value to the Shea butter is concerned? who are major actors involved in the value chain? To what extent does Shea butter provide economic resilience and livelihood alternatives in terms of income, assets and savings to the people of Okere, especially the women? What factors influence/inhibit Okere people's ability to access more lucrative activities in the value chain?



Women as Major Actors in Okere's Value-Chain

A value chain analysis of Shea butter in Okere is incomplete without a comprehensive look at the women as the major actors. Shea trees and resilient women are perhaps nature's greatest gift to Okere. Women are not only considered as custodians of Shea trees but most of the benefits derived from Shea trees have a direct bearing on the day to day realities of the women. Whilst men destroy Shea trees, women protect the trees, collect the nuts, process the Shea butter and take it to market. Women and children contribute all major roles around the picking of Shea nuts. They wake up early in the morning to collect the Shea nuts from the fields both within their homesteads and those in the distant farmlands.

They wake up early in the morning to collect the Shea nuts from the fields both within their homesteads and those in the distant farmlands.



A woman selling Shea oil at Okere City, a local market in Okere



For instance, it is a rare or its completely impossible to see a Shea butter seller who is male. In Okere, Shea butter constitutes a key source of income for women and the production of this commodity has been acknowledged as 'women's work' by most people in the area. The contribution of shea butter to women's ability to maintain their families and communities is enormous in Okere. The analysis of field data indicates that about 25% of women in Okere depend on incomes from the sales of Shea nuts and Shea butter as a means of their daily sustenance like supplementing the family food budget and meeting medical and educational expenses.

The contribution of shea butter to women's ability to maintain their families and communities is enormous in Okere.

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Shea Products in Okere

i. Trading Shea Nuts in Okere

Many products can be derived from Shea butter, for example, edible Shea oil, Shea butter for cosmetics use, soap, among others. Whilst Shea butter is an essential ingredient in cosmetic, confectionary and pharmaceutical industries, Shea in Okere is eaten, sold as nuts and/or consumed as edible Shea oil.



Mary Achen, one of the women in Okere who participates in Shea nuts trading activities

87%

of the people in Okere believe that selling Shea nuts have led to an increase in their household income.

2%

of the population due to Okere shea butter bought land

22%

of the population are able to pay school for their children from proceeds of Shea nuts sales;

Collecting and trading in Shea nuts provide a livelihood alternative for many people in Okere. For instance, in the past 12 months, 87% of the people in Okere believe that selling Shea nuts have led to an increase in their household income. More particularly, selling Shea nuts have enabled 2% of the population to buy land; 22% of the population are able to pay school for their children from proceeds of Shea nuts sales; 34% of the population in Okere are able to meet medical cost from revenues generated from the sale of Shea nuts, and; 45% of the population are able to buy other household items through incomes generated from Shea butter. "Selling Shea nuts is the most important supplement to my household income" said Mary Achen.

ii. Shea Butter as a Cosmetic Product in Okere

Whilst all Okere community members eat and appreciate the nutritional value of Shea oil, up to 75% of the community members have never used Shea butter as a cosmetic product in their adult life. “Traditionally, we use Shea butter to smear our children” said one of the focus group discussants. “But as one grows up, the smell of Shea butter becomes strong and unpleasant to use. That’s why we decide to buy other sweetly perfumed petroleum jellies which are also cheaply available in the market” she reiterated.

Unlike the edible Shea butter which is produced through a hot pressing traditionally technology, Shea butter for cosmetics use is produced through a cold-pressing process. Currently, this technology doesn’t exist in Okere. However, neighbouring sub-counties have benefitted from the Government’s Kidepo Critical Landscape project which has a Shea value addition component. Similarly, other private players are making significant investments in Shea value addition. The most important player is Moo Me Gen Shea Factory located in Okwang Sub-County, 16KMs from Okere. Moo Me Gen Shea Factory currently produces one of, if not the best cosmetic Shea butter in the Ugandan market.

Decades ago, the Cooperative Office for Voluntary Organizations (COVOL), a now defunct NGO implemented a USAID funded Shea Project for Local Conservation and Development (The Shea Project) from 1990 until early 2000s within Adwari and other sub-counties. The project had invested in some value addition and organizing farmers through Northern Uganda Shea Producers Association (NUSPA). Unfortunately, no tangible impact of the project can be traced in Okere.

75%

of the community members have never used Shea butter as a cosmetic product in their adult life.



Shea butter for cosmetics use is produced through a cold-pressing process. Currently, this technology doesn’t exist in Okere.

100%

of the community members
knows and use the edible
Shea oil.

68%

of Okere residents apply Shea
oil in their meals at least thrice
every week.

82%

of the oil that is consumed in
locally produced at home by
the women.

iii. Edible Shea oil

In Okere, 100% of the community members knows and use the edible Shea oil. In fact, 68% of Okere residents apply Shea oil in their meals at least thrice every week. 82% of the oil that is consumed in locally produced at home by the women. Edible shea butter – which has a strong nutty smell is popularly used for smearing children in Okere. Over 99% of mothers in Okere have used Shea butter for smearing their children because the butter protects the babies' skin from the scorching heat and direct sunlight – almost a constant weather condition in Okere. Edible Shea butter is locally produced by the women in Okere in a laborious, exhausting and time-consuming process passed on from one-generation to another. Up to 90% of the women in Okere know how to locally produce edible Shea butter using the traditional production process.



Collin, one of the women in Okere who derive her family's livelihood from Shea oil in the process of making edible shea butter. She is now in the cook emulsion stage.

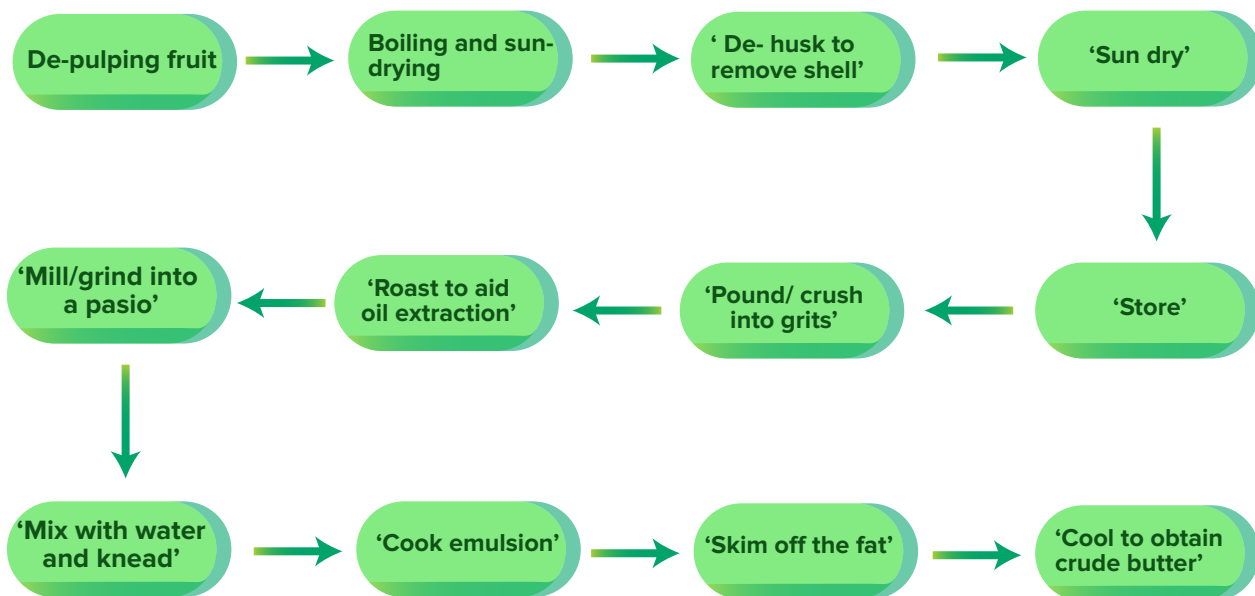


Diagram illustrating a traditional Shea production procedure used by the women in Okere

Shea kernels are obtained after de-pulping which is the removal of the fleshy mesocarp after initial fermentation of the fruit through burying. After de-pulping, the nuts are boiled and sun dried. Sun drying for 5-10 days reduces the moisture content to about 15-30%. After sun drying, the nuts are de-husked through a number of ways including trampling, pounding using a mortar and pestle and cracking between two stones. The de- husked nuts are also sun dried, stored, crushed into grits, roasted to aid oil extraction, milled or grind into paste, mixed with water and knead, cook emulsion, skim off the fats and cool to obtain Shea oil. The total time required to process the shea butter, excluding the harvesting and drying times, is approximately 12 hours.

Due to concerns about the time consuming and high labour requirement in the traditional method of shea butter production and the use of large amounts of fuelwood, there is need to rethink about other alternatives. For instance, in the Northern Ghanaian region of Tamale, women use a semi mechanised procedure enabled by a nut crusher, an improved roaster, a kneader or a hydraulic screw press to help reduce the drudgery associated with the traditional manual process of shea butter production . Indeed, during one of the focus group discussion sessions, some women in Okere said that they had started taking roasted Shea to a grinding machine facility located in Okwongo Trading Centre, 5KMs away from Okere. They said that grinding using the machine eased the process and reduced on the time spent in the production of the butter.

Market Dynamics of Shea Nuts and Shea Butter in Okere

Beside other key actors such the Shea nut pickers and Shea butter processors who are mostly women as explained above, the Shea nuts and Shea butter traders complete most parts of the commercial puzzles around Shea. In Okere, there are three types of Shea traders:

- 1) local traders
- 2) traders from Lira City – locally called Ocuboi or middlemen
- 3) big company traders like Guru-Nanak.

The local traders are entrepreneurs within Okere who buy Shea nuts from other Shea collectors. Usually, the local Shea traders are nuts collectors themselves. In addition to the Shea nuts they have collected, they buy more Shea nuts to add on their own. These traders trade in the ranges of 50KGs to 200KGs. Once they have collected and/or bought, let's say, 50 Kilograms, they take it to Pat Oali Makret and sell their nuts to other external traders, making a small profit margin. For instance, during the period of this reseach project, the local shea nuts traders bought Shea nuts at UGX 1,600 a KG and sold it to other external traders at UGX 1,800, making an extra UGX 200 from every Kilogram sold.

The other category of Shea traders are big buyers like Guru-Nanak. Until about 5 years ago, Guru Nanak Oil Mills (GNOM) was the biggest buyer of Shea nuts until recently when other competitors like Moo Me Gen Shea Factory was established in Okwang, Otuke District.



Okere traders trade in the ranges between

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to
200KGs**



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Pat Oali Market: Uganda's Shea nuts Hub

If a farmer has Shea nuts, selling is eased because many buyers throng Pat Oali, a local Market in Adwari sub-county. Pat Oali Market operates once in a week on Sunday attracts thousands of traders from Lira City, Otuke Town, and traders from other neighbouring districts such as Alebtong, Agago, Abim, among others. is Shea nuts trade is one of the undoubtd niches of Pat Oali Market's. "Whenever I need Shea nuts, there is only one place I go to – Pat Oali", said Amai, a buyer from Lira City Produce Lane. Amai, like hundreds of other Shea nuts buyers come to Pat Oali Market every Sunday to buy the nuts and take it to Lira City where they sell and remain with a feasible profit margin. During the time of data collection, for instance, a Kilogram of Shea nuts was being bought at UGX 1,800. It was then being resold in Lira City Produce Market at UGX 2,200 UGX. This means that the traders are able to make an extra UGX 400 from every Kilogram of Shea nuts bought from the farmers in Okere and other neighbouring villages.

Okere Shea Market Value

From interviews, data analysis and market visits, it was estimated that only about 10 tons of Shea nuts are collected by farmers in Okere per year. This volume equates to approximately 2 tons of shea butter. Given that the market value of the edible line of Okere Shea butter is approximately Ush 20,000/liter, this translates to a market value of UGX. 40,000,000, which is equivalent to about 11,000 USD. This figure does not take into account the amount of oil that is locally produced and does not enter the market place. Further studies would be required to determine this level.



The Pat Oali Market in Okere

The traders are able to make an extra UGX 400 from every Kilogram of Shea nuts bought from the farmers in Okere and other neighbouring villages.

The market value of the edible line of Okere Shea butter is approximately Ush

20,000/liter,

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Ush 40M

which is equivalent to about

11,000USD

Uganda Shea Butter Market: A Snippet

The chemical profile of the Nolitica Shea Butter is most comparable with that of olive oil. The oil has up to 60% of oleic acid compounds making a highly competitive product. Importantly, sales of Shea butter on national, regional and global markets crucially depend consumer preferences and how cleverly the product can be marketed. Analysis from local market dynamics demonstrate that there is a considerable and growing interest in value-added Shea cosmetic products among upscale Ugandan women in Kampala but from Western Uganda. For instance, a sales analysis of 100 randomly selected customers of Okere Shea Cosmetic products from June – Dec 2020 indicates that a staggering 83% of the clients were women from Western Uganda.

Penetrating the Northern Ugandan consumers/market for the cosmetic Shea butter is extremely difficult. This stems from many factors which are both economic and psychological in nature. Economically, many consumers from Northern Uganda complain that the price of cosmetic Shea butter is high. This is mostly they compare it with the prices of edible Shea butter which is usually cheaper and easily available in their local markets. Psychologically, for many Northern Ugandans, Shea butter has for a long time been known as an edible oil. Even as edible Shea butter is used for smearing babies, this practice is slowly dying with mothers preferring perfumed petroleum jellies. Thus, more efforts are required to sensitize the population in Northern Uganda about the cosmetic benefits of using Shea butter. Unless the people in Northern Uganda, where Shea trees are found begin appreciating the broad spectrum benefits of Shea butter, conservation and protection of Shea trees will remain an uphill task.

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Expanding Uganda's Shea Butter Market Domestically and Abroad

Uganda's Shea export still remain low below

USD 1M

for an industry whose global market value is estimated at

USD 1.2bn

Whilst Shea butter from the Nilotica Shea trees from Northern Uganda is one of the best raw materials in the production of personal care and cosmetics products in the world, Uganda's Shea export still remain low below USD. 1M for an industry whose global market value is estimated at USD. 1.2bn. Currently, the main international cosmetics buyers of Shea butter are in the EU and the US. However, a Shea Butter Market Analysis Report by Global Research View show that Middle East and Africa will be the largest market in the coming years owing to rapid urbanization and increasing disposable income levels especially among the middle class segment of the population. For the Ugandan Shea butter industry to benefit from the increasing global demand of Shea butter, many efforts should be undertaken by all stakeholders from the ground-up. .

Shea producers in Uganda should have linkages with specialist cosmetics companies abroad.

•**Firstly**, Shea producers in Uganda should have linkages with specialist cosmetics companies abroad. This requires a considerable amount of market support, standardization and other essential information pertaining to exports. Organizations like Uganda Exports Promotion Board and Uganda National Bureau of Standards have been some attempts in this direction but a lot more efforts should be done.

Shea producers in Uganda should have a platform where they can speak up and advocate as a significant and united front.

•**Secondly**, Shea producers in Uganda should have a platform where they can speak up and advocate as a significant and united front. While informal networks of different stakeholders involved in the Shea value chain exist, they are disorganized and most entities are mostly interested in pursuing their own interests. That such platforms exist is a step in the right direction that needs to be bolstered.

.More efforts should be done to promote the consumption of Shea butter in Uganda. There is already progress being made and many Ugandans, especially the middle class segments of the population are starting to adopt the use of Shea butter in their cosmetic regimen. But then, many consumers of Shea butter in Uganda also complain about the nutty smell usually found in natural, organic and unrefined Shea butter. Whilst it is unknown to most clients, the nutty smell in Shea butter disappears almost instantaneously and/or shortly after application. The important question for local manufacturers here is whether to create a pleasant-smelling Shea butter product which could adulterate the organic and natural components of the product in the process. Additionally, quality packaging is also essential and a high profile, well-targeted marketing campaign that communicates the emotional and physical product benefits is very essential.

•Lastly and most importantly, there must be efforts to support Shea farmers who are the most important stakeholders in the Shea value chain. They are important stakeholders because the degree to which Shea trees are conserved and protected singlehandedly depends on their level of appreciation of the value of the tree. Arguably, the current destruction of Shea trees can be attributed to the fact that Shea do not see the trees are a valuable resource to enable them get out of the poverty trap they are enmeshed in. Therefore, farmers should be supported to directly add value to their Shea nuts and in the process working with them to sell their Shea butter products to the best buyers – both within Uganda and abroad. To support the Shea farmers in Okere to benefit from Shea trees, we championed the formation of Okere Shea Cooperative Society in 2020.

More efforts should be done to promote the consumption of Shea butter in Uganda.



Lastly and most importantly, there must be efforts to support Shea farmers who are the most important stakeholders in the Shea value chain.

Okere Shea Cooperative Society



One of the most significant role played by cooperative societies is value-chain development of various agricultural enterprises.

500

Okere Shea Cooperative Society aims to bring together 500 community members

80%

of whom will be women as a collective effort to build a movement around the protection of shea trees

Cooperative societies have traditionally been used as vehicle for facilitating rural reforms and agrarian transformations world over. In Uganda, cooperative movements brought together different stakeholders to pursue their own interest and work together as a collective force to be responsible for shaping their own destinies. However, with coming into force of the Washington Consensus' Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) of the World Bank in the 1980s, Cooperatives were weakened and to date, they remain a relic of the past economic glories - albeit some initiatives by the government to resuscitate them.

One of the most significant role played by cooperative societies is value-chain development of various agricultural enterprises. It is on this basis, that the farmers in Okere village have come together to cooperate to build a shea movement through Okere Shea Cooperative Society.

Okere Shea Cooperative Society aims to bring together 500 community members (80% of whom will be women) as a collective effort to build a movement around the protection of shea trees and enabling the rural community in Okere to harness the socio-economic benefits of the natural resource. The Coop will thus incentivize and empower the people of Okere, especially the women to not only become better custodians of shea trees be also be strategically positioned to tap into the multiple benefits of shea butter. Okere Shea Cooperative Society was started in 2020 to bring together the people of Okere as a collective to tap into the benefits of Shea trees for the collective betterment of the community. The Coop shall provide unique opportunities to enable the people of Okere to conserve their Shea trees and gain economic wealth from the trees at the same time”.

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The work of Okere Shea Cooperative will;

- Be a voluntary and open membership organization open to all people of Okere and neighbouring village regardless of gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination as long as they are willing to accept the responsibilities of membership.
- Be a democratic and member controlled organization by having its members actively participate in setting its policies and making decisions. At the Coop, the leaders serving as elected representatives will be mandated to be accountable to the membership. Similarly, Okere Shea Coop members shall have equal voting rights (one member, one vote).
- Ensure that the economic participation of each of all members of Okere Shea Cooperative Society remains supreme. Members of the cooperative shall contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their cooperative. At least part of that capital will usually be the common property of the cooperative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing Okere Shea Coop, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the cooperative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.
- Remain autonomous and continuously remain a self-help organization controlled by their members and shareholders. If coop enters into agreements with other organizations, including governments, NGOs, venture capitalists or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their cooperative's autonomy.



Okere Shea Coop members shall have equal voting rights (one member, one vote).



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They inform the general public - particularly young people and opinion leaders - about the nature and benefits of co-operation.

- Invest in capacity building and prioritize the education and training while at the same addressing Information needs of the members. The Cooperative shall provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public - particularly young people and opinion leaders - about the nature and benefits of co-operation. The training and educational needs shall cover crucial aspects such as nature conservation and environmental protection, gender, human and women's rights among others.

- Work towards ensuring sustainable community development in Okere and beyond.

- Provided storage facilities for Shea nuts collected by members.

- Invest in value addition technologies to add value to Okere Shea butter products.

- Mobilize resources to position the Cooperative as one of the leading Shea Cooperatives in the world.

- Form partnership and business relationships meant to boost the profitability and productivity of the coop.



A baseline blueprint for Okere Shea Cooperative Society

In September 2020, just a month when we had started holding community meetings to introduce the idea of the cooperative society, we asked 208 community members some questions regarding their perspectives and views on the cooperative.

At the time of the data collection, the majority of the respondents (i.e. 80%) had not yet registered with Okere Shea Co-operative because - 68% had not yet gotten to know about the Co-operative; 12% were not interested and 20% said they would register if they got to know more information about the cooperative.

For the 20% of the members that had registered, over 80% joined to tap into more co-operative opportunities, 68% wanted to work together with other farmers and 66% wanted to get more exclusive benefits.

Table 1: Reasons for joining or not joining the Okere Shea Co-operative

Aspect	Category	Percentage
Reasons for joining Okere Shea cooperative Society	To collectively work together with other Shea farmers to tap more benefits	85%
	To actively partake in the conservation of Shea trees	15%
Reasons for NOT Okere Shea Cooperative Society	Not interested	12%
	Not yet understood about the co-operative	88%



85% of the adult population are desirous to become a member of Okere Shea Cooperative. 70% of the respondents that had registered with the Co-operative had fully understood its goal, about 90% the training by the district commercial officer had enabled them to understand more about the Co-operative business, 93% believed that the Co-operative will live up to its goals and objectives. Over 95% agreed that the community had been involved in the design and implementation of the Co-operative. All the registered members wanted the community members to be involved in the major activities of the Co-operative and 88% wanted Okere Shea co-operative society to position women central pillar of focus.



Table 2: Perspectives of Community members about Okere Shea Co-operative

Statement	Yes (%)	No (%)
I have fully understood the goal of the Co-op	71	19
The training by the district commercial officer has enabled to understand more about the co-op business	90	10
I believe the co-operative will live up to its goals and objectives	93	7
The community have been involved in the design and implementation of the co-op	95	5
The community members must be involved in the major activities of the co-op	100	0.0
Okere shea co-operative society must position women central pillar of her focus	88	12

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE STUDY

Shea Trees in Okere

- The study found out that while the appreciation of Shea trees had significantly reduced due to the factors associated with conflict in Northern Uganda, there is now a recent surge in interest in Shea trees and local community members are slowly reigniting their passion to protect and conserve the trees.



- The UNDP funded Kidepo Critical Landscape Project is making some attempts, especially towards the grafting Shea trees in Okere. Whilst this effort is appreciated, more work should be done to encourage farmers to plant Shea trees taking into cognizance their indigenous and local knowledge systems. The local community should also be given the opportunity to actively participate in the design and implementation of such projects.
- For dietary and food security importance, Shea fruits continue to be highly prized as a fruit during harvest season. The fruits are an important source of vitamins, especially to children who enjoy eating the fruits

One of the most significant role played by cooperative societies is value-chain development of various agricultural enterprises.

The local community should also be given the opportunity to actively participate in the design and implementation of such projects.

45%

of Shea nuts in Okere are collected during harvest season.

30%

of the harvested Shea nuts are locally processed to make edible Shea butter for household consumption.

The survey confirmed that Shea products, especially Shea nuts and edible Shea butter are a major source of income for the people of Okere.

Shea Butter in Okere

•From our statistical estimates, only about 45% of Shea nuts in Okere are collected during harvest season. About 30% of the harvested Shea nuts are locally processed to make edible Shea butter for household consumption. Most of the Shea nuts collected (about 70%) are sold off.

•The survey confirmed that Shea products, especially Shea nuts and edible Shea butter are a major source of income for the people of Okere.

•In terms of gender, women are the most important stakeholders many aspects of Shea butter. Shea nuts are exclusively gathered by women and children, the oil is produced by women, and most of it is sold by women. Shea is enshrined in the domestic culture of women and is used as source of fruit, oil, Vaseline, and medicine. Men are mainly involved in wholesaling and storage of Shea nuts.

•Results from the surveys found that for women involved in Shea nut and oil sales, this commercial activity was likely to be the most lucrative commercial activity of their financial year. Therefore, any increase in demand for Shea nuts or oil would have a considerable positive economic impact on their livelihoods.





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Ojok Okello



CONTACT US

Tel. +256(0) 774 547023,
Mob. +256(0) 759 756018

✉ okerecityproject@gmail.com
info@okerecity.org

📍 Ayiloi 'A' Village, Okere Parish
Adwari Sub-County, Otuke District

Follow us on social media via

