

Strengthen women producers of shea butter and think long-term in Chad

By Manuel Gautschi and Vèrène Morisod



Shea Butter production is the most easily sold in packs of 1 liter on local markets. ©Fabian Biasio

Chad is a fragile and extremely poor country. The inhabitants regularly suffer from food insecurity. Agriculture accounts for 80% of the working population.

The programs of Caritas Switzerland are therefore aimed at the fair development of the agricultural sector and the sustainable management of natural resources. An effective example: the *peanut and shea sectors* are professionalized and modernized, with particular support for women's cooperatives. The project is supported by the

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). It is implemented in collaboration with Swissaid. In this brief report, we would like to show how simple locally developed machines are an immense facilitator for women in the production of shea butter.

Until last year, women in the *Sarh region (southern Chad)* harvested nuts from shea trees growing on their small plots and made shea butter, all by hand... A hard job. This traditional activity represents a big potential. The project has therefore developed shea processing platforms equipped with four machines, specially designed by a local engineer in cooperation with the University of N'Djamena. The women were trained in the use of these machines, and they passed on their knowledge to the other women on the Balimba platform near Sarh. The shea processing platform is equipped with four machines: a crusher, a roaster, a mill and a churn. The crusher grinds the almonds, which are then heated in the roaster. The roasted particles are then milled, resulting in a thick paste. This paste is mixed with water and the whole is stirred in the churn until it turns to a thin paste. The oil obtained must rest for several days before being packaged...

As a result of this mechanization, production jumped: it took twelve hours of effective work for 20 women to process a single bag of shea nuts. Today, four women transform six bags in three hours. A bag can produce 36 liters of oil. It has therefore quickly become necessary to professionalize the marketing of shea butter. The platform opened a store in Sarh and regularly delivers its shea butter to N'Djamena, the capital, some 700 km to the north. Interest in this natural product continues to grow - a great opportunity for cooperatives to establish themselves in



Different machineries to improve the shea butter production. ©Fabian Biasio

the local market over the long term. In Chad, it is used as a precious oil in the kitchen. Shea butter is gaining more and more importance as a skin cream in cosmetics around the world.

It is now a question of ensuring the production of shea butter in the long term. But with the considerable growth of activities, the pressure on the trees is very real. The shea tree is delicate and requires a lot of patience: it is necessary to wait ten to fifteen years before it gives fruit. Six shea parks have been developed in the project area. Two varieties of trees, those producing the most oil, were selected. At the other end of the chain, the increase in production has awakened the interest of manufacturers of European cosmetics. Contacts are established, negotiations are in progress. But shea butter manufactured under the project still needs to be certified by ECOCERT, the European body that validates the quality and safety of products. Once this certification is obtained, export to the European market will be possible.



Think long term! Minimum a dozen years are required for the shea trees to produced fruits. ©Fabian Biasio