

# LONGITUDINAL IMPACT STUDY OF UNION des GROUPEMENTS FEMININS CE DWANE NYEE(UGF/CDN) 2011- 2018



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- Madam Bayala Eli, Production Manager, UGF/CDN
- Madam Kansole, Accountant, UGF/CDN
- All Shea butter producers and Shea nut collectors who took part in the study
- The staff and members of UGF/CDN
- Shared Interest team members involved

## **Introduction**

Longitudinal studies are uniquely suited to help us understand social change. Unlike the annual reviews we undertake for customers, longitudinal studies follow the organisation over a period of time to give a more comprehensive story of the impact from our financial support.

This study explores the impact of Shared Interest financial services on a producer organisation in Burkina Faso, known as Union des Groupements Feminins Ce Dwane Nyee (UGF/CDN). The primary function of this organisation is the production of Shea butter for export. They work with over 7,000 women and provide a means of livelihood to thousands of households in the Sanguie and Koudougou provinces of the Central-West region of Burkina Faso. Over the years, UGF/CDN has played a lead role in promoting women's empowerment and contributing to the socio-economic development of the region. Their social programmes and community level interventions have been recognised by the development sector in Burkina Faso. Since 2013, Shared Interest has been working with UGF/CDN and the focus of this study is to understand how our services have contributed to the success of the organisation.

In gathering data for the study, we used both quantitative and qualitative methods, including mini-surveys, semi-structured interviews and group discussions. The target population for the mini-surveys included 50 Shea nut collectors, 20 Shea butter producers and 15 technical and administrative staff of UGF/CDN. The semi-structured interviews included 10 producers and 10 Shea nut collectors. We also interviewed the General Manager of UGF/CDN, the Production Manager, the Chairperson of the board, the Chief of Reo and the deputy Mayor of Reo municipality. In addition, we reviewed all available Shared Interest documentation on UGF/CDN from 2011 to 2018. This included proposals, annual reviews, field visits reports and financial reports. The quantitative data was analysed using a data analysis software known as the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and the qualitative information was analysed using both inductive and deductive content analysis methods.

Study results show that, with the support of Shared Interest, UGF/CDN has helped create several jobs and implement social intervention programmes that have led to the improvement in the living conditions of women in the Central-West region of Burkina Faso.

## **Overview of the Shea sector in Burkina Faso**

According to a report by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO, 2017) the Shea sector employs an estimated three million women across West Africa and generates between 90 million and 200 million US Dollars a year from exports.

The Shea sector in Burkina Faso was under Government control until early 1990s when it was placed in the hands of private organisations. The sector is currently being managed by producer organisations, traders and exporters with support from Non-Governmental Organisations. Despite Government withdrawal, they still regulate the sector and support the promotion of technological advancement, market expansion initiatives, and quality improvement.

Shea is one of the most important non-timber forest products in Burkina Faso because of its medicinal, nutritional and income generation potential. It contributes to the growth of the national economy through export earnings, with Shea being the third most exported product. In 2012, the Shea sector contributed 17 million US Dollars to the national economy through nut sales, and generated 1.5 million US Dollars in the value chain (Rousseau et.al 2015; Palmeri, 2012). Reports from the General Directorate of Customs of Burkina Faso indicate that the value of Shea exports increased threefold from 2000 to 2005 and sevenfold from 2005 to 2012.

The number of households in Burkina Faso, involved in Shea nut collection is estimated at 646,000. Over 1,069 professional organisations are involved in the collection, processing, and marketing of Shea kernels in the country. The main participants from the sector include groups of Shea nut collectors at the community level, unions, and private companies. The unions are structured to respond to market demands and their primary function is to promote market access and export the products for their members. The private companies focus solely on marketing of their products and maximising profit.

## **The Shea tree and butter production process**

The Shea tree (*Butyrospermum Parkii* or *Vitellaria Paradoxa*) is a large and majestic fruit tree, which grows wildly in the savannas of Central and West Africa, but mainly in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Sudan.

The 15m high tree produces fruit after 15 years, reaches full maturity at 50 years, and can live up to 200 years. At full maturity, it produces approximately 20kg of fruit per year.

The Shea nut tree grows in abundance and it is one of the few renewable resources in the semi-arid Sahel region of West Africa. The largest concentration is found in Burkina Faso, where it covers more than 80% of the country.

The Shea tree has many uses: the bark is used in many traditional medicines. The Shea nut shell serves as a mosquito repellent – vital in a region where malaria kills thousands of people every year. The tree also helps prevent wind erosion and adds organic matter back to the soil. The nuts are processed to obtain Shea butter, which is used as cooking oil, soap, medicine, and in cosmetics.



In Africa, Shea nut is called 'women's gold' as it is a very important source of income for women in rural communities.



There are three common methods of producing the Shea butter. These include the traditional manual process, semi-mechanised and fully mechanised methods.

The first step in all production processes is the collection of the Shea fruit, which takes place from April to August each year. During this period, the ripe fruit falls on the ground and women go into the forest to collect it by hand.

After gathering the fruit, the de-pulping process begins. The fruit is buried in pits to allow the pulp to ferment and disintegrate.

**Traditionally**, after de-pulping, the nuts are boiled and sun-dried to loosen the kernels before shell is removed. The dried nuts are cracked using a mortar and pestle - and in some cases stones - to remove the kernels. The kernels are washed with clean water and sun-dried to reduce the moisture content. They are then sorted. The women then grind the nuts on a stone to create a paste before extracting the butter through kneading.



**Semi-mechanised production**, Kernel washing machines and 'shellers' or separator machines are used for washing and de-shelling of the nuts. Specialised pieces of equipment referred to as 'jacketed kettles' are used to boil the nuts before they are dried with an air drying oven or microwave drying machine. The dried kernels are pounded in a mortar with a pestle. Kernel chopping machines or crushers can be used to crush the kernels into grit. The crushed kernels are roasted to aid in oil extraction. The roasted kernels are then turned into paste by the grinding machines and the butter is extracted using an automated kneader.



The fat obtained through the kneading process in either of the above methods is boiled until dehydrated and the butter skimmed off the top. The butter is then strained through a filter cloth. It is allowed to cool down and solidify before being packed in airtight containers.



**The fully mechanised industrial process** uses the state-of-art technology consisting of an extraction plant and a refinery.

## UGF/CDN formation and development

UGF/CDN is a second level co-operative founded in 2000 by 20 groups of women in the Reo Municipality, Sanguie Province, approximately 130km away from Ouagadougou the capital of Burkina Faso. The Union has grown to 64 groups with 6,914 individual members. They were certified organic by ECOCERT in 2001 and Fairtrade certified in 2011.

Bassolet Jacqueline conceived the idea of establishing an association of women as far back as 1978. She encouraged women to support one another during emotionally and financially life-changing events such as funerals, marriages and naming ceremonies. In addition, Jacqueline organised literacy classes and provided information on women's rights, domestic violence and family health issues. As a strong women's rights activist, she was determined to ensure the social and economic empowerment of women in the province.

In 1991, the group was officially registered as Association Ce Dwane Nyee, which means 'unity is strength' in Niele (the dialect of western Burkina Faso). Jacqueline's campaigning and advocacy work led to the creation of 19 additional women's groups across the province. The increase in the number of groups, membership, and geographical coverage compelled Jacqueline to form UGF/CDN.

Jacqueline believed that women's empowerment could be achieved through the creation of economic opportunities. Subsequently, in 1993, she introduced vegetable drying as the first income generating activity.

In 1998, the group was organised around two activities: drying of fruit or vegetables, and Shea butter production. The Shea butter production was done manually by women using their own materials as UGF/CDN did not have any production equipment. The women used their kitchen utensils, pestles, mortars and stones to process the Shea nuts into butter, which was sold locally to wholesalers in Ouagadougou.

In 2010, the Union managed to acquire some basic production equipment including mills and crushers but most of the work was done manually. Unfortunately the equipment was inadequate and had a low production capacity.

In 2012, UGF/CDN wanted to increase production and improve the quality of their Shea butter to attract more buyers and expand their market. In order to achieve this, they needed more efficient processing equipment and more Shea nuts but they needed access to finance to implement this business plan. They approached local banks for a credit facility but they were unsuccessful as they required collateral security and the interest rates were unaffordable. In their search for accessible and affordable finance, they met the Fairtrade Liaison Officer for Burkina Faso, who introduced them to Shared Interest. In 2014, they were granted their first credit facility to re-equip the Shea processing facility and to purchase a truck for the collection and supply of Shea nuts to the factory.

UGF/CDN General Manager, Bationon Bahiome said,

*"The access to Shared Interest's finance marked the beginning of the success story of the union. The loan facility has enabled us to lay a solid foundation for our Shea butter business to grow sustainably."*



With the loan, the co-operative acquired Shea nut washing machines, dryers, roasters, mixers, filters and milling machines; transforming Shea butter production from manual to semi-mechanised production. This reduced the production time for each metric ton of Shea butter from 10 hours to two hours. The quality of Shea butter also improved, leading to an increase in orders from buyers. In fact, UGF/CDN earned a quality premium from their buyer, l'Occitane for the first time.

The truck has helped to reduce UGF/CDN's running costs and increased the buyers' confidence in the ability of the union to deliver high quality products in the right quantity and at the right time. According to the General Manager, they used to spend up to 50% of their revenue on truck hire, increasing their production costs and reducing profit margins. To make savings, Shea nut collectors carried bags of nuts on their head for several miles to get to the production centre. To avoid this, some women chose to sell the nuts at their nearest local market at low prices.

The General Manager said, *"The truck has resolved our biggest challenge and increased our revenue, thanks to Shared Interest"*.

In addition to nut gathering, the truck is used to convey the butter produced to the port for shipment. During the off-peak season, the truck is hired by the community and this brings additional income to the union.



**The truck purchased in 2014 with Shared Interest loan to facilitate the supply of Shea nuts to the factory**

In 2016, the Global Shea Alliance (GSA) in partnership with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) launched a 13 million US Dollar sustainability initiative to promote and sustain the Shea value chain in seven West African countries, including Burkina Faso. USAID provided 6.5 million US Dollars, which was match funded by GSA. UGF/CDN was one of the beneficiaries of this project and they were expected to contribute XOF150 million (USD 241,266).

By 2017, the business had grown to a level where the union needed additional funds to meet their expansion needs and satisfy customer demand. Shared Interest approved two different credit facilities, one to enable them to purchase raw materials and the second to expand the Shea butter processing facility.

UGF/CDN saw this as an opportunity to further expand the production facility and transition to a semi-industrial butter processing. They contacted Shared Interest for support, and in 2018

were granted a new credit facility, which enabled them to construct two warehouses and an open air structure to house the Shea processing equipment. They also acquired a storage tank and an electric mill and used the remaining funds as working capital to increase the supply of Shea nuts to the factory. Reporting that this was a demonstration of good faith and commitment to transform the Shea value chain and to empower rural women, the project donated two Shea butter processing tanks, two butter storage tanks, a semi-industrial butter kneading machine and a boiler.

The General Manager of UGF/CDN said: *“We wouldn’t have been able to obtain all these machinery if Shared Interest had not provided us the funds to make our contribution to the project. We have transformed our processing plant to a semi-industrial one with a production capacity of 500 metric tons of Shea butter per year”.*

The Production Manager Bayala Eli noted: *“The entire UGF/CDN family is happy today because of this great achievement. Many of our workers consider it as an incredible dream and are yet to come into terms with the reality. They never thought we could get here.”*

*“We have many partners but Shared Interest is an exceptional one and we attribute our success to their financial support.”*



**Bayala Eli,  
Production  
Manager UGF/CDN**

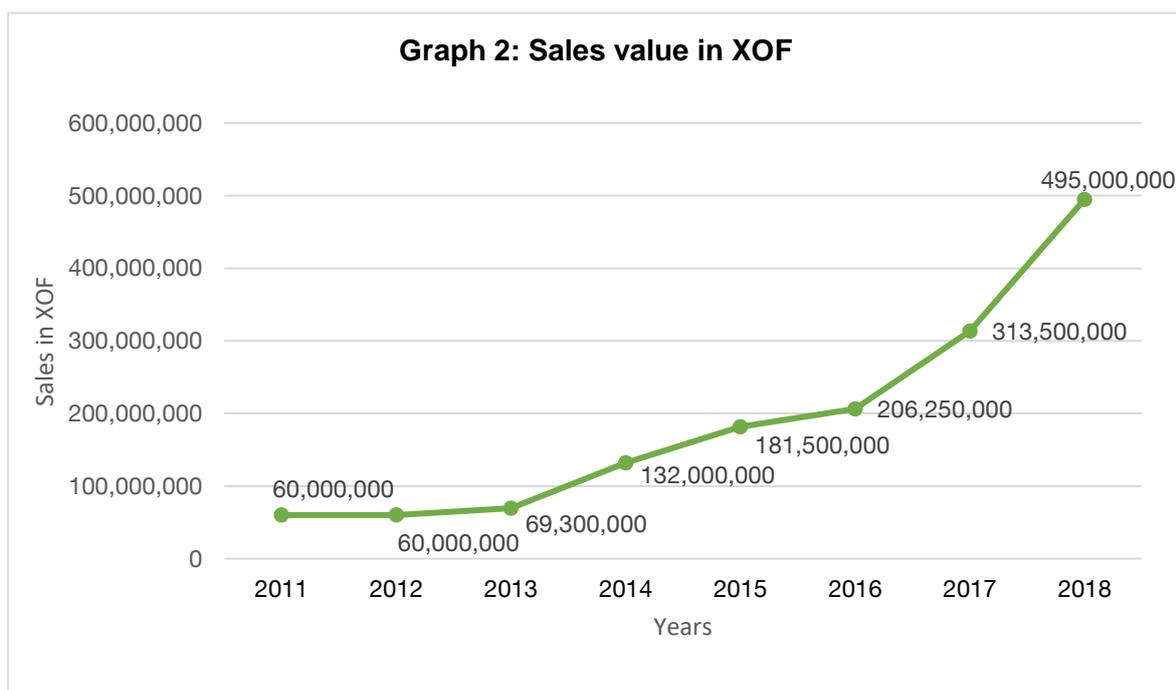
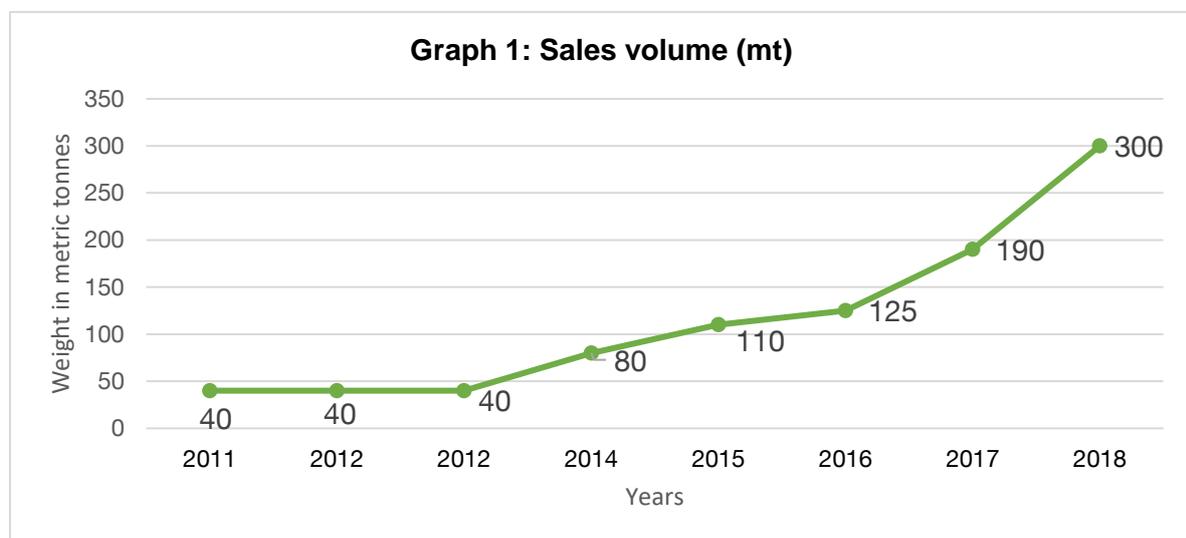
## The impact of Shared Interest's loans on UGF/CDN

### I. Business growth and sustainability

We believe that the equipment financed by Shared Interest improved the quality of the finished product and reduced the cost of production. The purchase of a truck has made raw material collection easier and the co-operative made good savings on delivery costs. Production volume consistently increased and generated more income for members.

Prior to 2014, UGF/CDN's total production did not exceed 40 metric tons per year, due to the basic equipment used. Almost all Shea nut processing was carried out manually - a slow and exhausting process. Following the introduction of semi-mechanised production equipment Shea butter production doubled.

The graph below shows the sales volume of UGF/CDN from 2011 to 2018.



Graph 1 shows the steady growth in sales volume since 2014. The General Manager said this was attributed to the improvement in quality, which led to increase in orders from buyers. The number of buyers has also increased from two in 2011 to five in 2018.

The increase in sales volume has equally impacted on the value of the sales as shown by Graph 2.

Between 2011 and 2013, UGF/CDN sales were relatively low and the marginal increase in 2013 was due to price changes.

Following our financial support in 2014, sales grew by 90% and resulted in an improvement in the cash flow for the business. The General Manager said this was the first time UGF/CDN had recorded such a high level of sales and with the improved revenue, UGF/CDN purchased additional equipment in 2015, including two roasters and an electric washer. This equipment improved the production process further.

The loan provided in 2018 made it possible for UGF/CDN to upgrade their processing plant, increasing Shea butter production and leading to their highest ever sales total of 82,000 US Dollars.

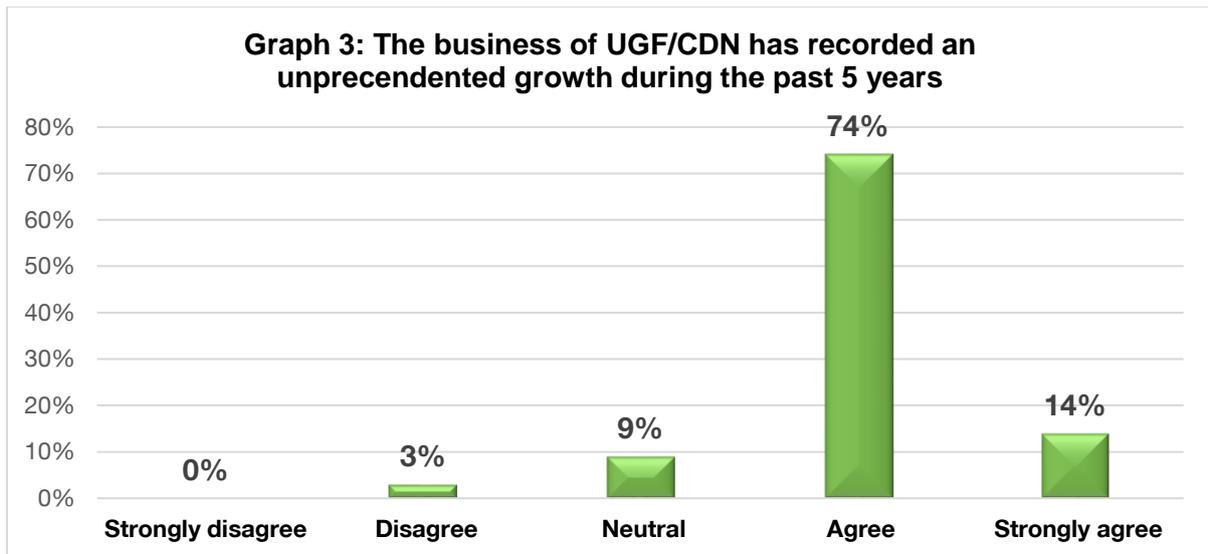
The Chairperson of UGF/CDN stated: *“We increased our sales significantly in 2018 because Shared Interest has supported us to acquire the infrastructure for high production. They also provided us with a working capital, which enabled us to supply a large amount of Shea to the factory.”*



**UGF/CDN fully mechanised Shea butter production factory**

As part of this study, we sampled the views of Shea nut collectors and Shea butter producers regarding the growth of UGF/CDN as a business. This was done in a mini-survey involving 101 respondents, including 60 Shea nut collectors and 41 butter producers.

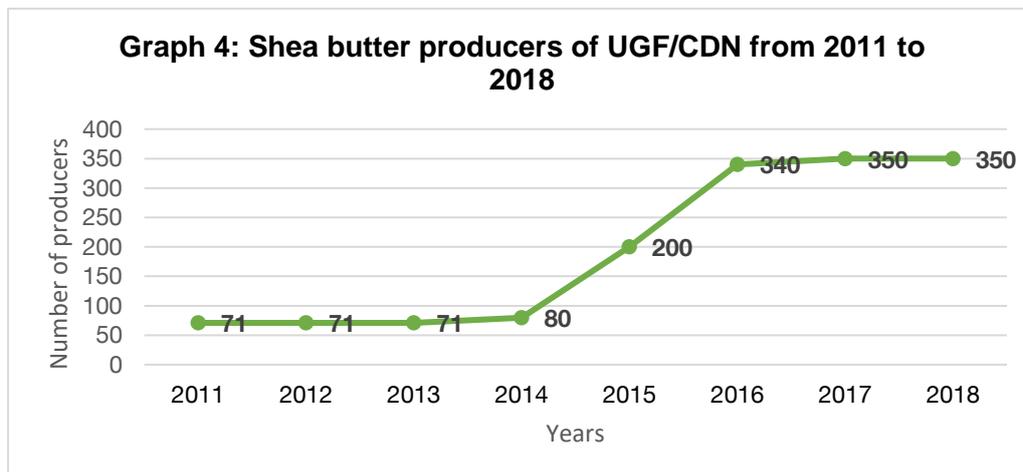
The survey participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with the following statement: “The business of UGF/CDN has recorded an unprecedented growth over the past five years”. The results are presented below.



The results in Graph 3 show that 88% of the producers and nut collectors agree or strongly agree that the business has seen unprecedented growth during the past five years. A small percentage of the respondents (3%) disagreed with the statement but we were unable to probe further into their responses as the survey was confidential and anonymous.

## II. Employment and livelihood impact of the loans

The General Manager of UGF/CDN reported that the greatest impact of Shared Interest finance has been the creation of several jobs. He explained that following the upgrade of the production centre, which resulted in improved quality, buyers increased their orders and as a result UGF/CDN needed additional workers. In addition, the supply of Shea nuts has also increased due to the availability of the truck. The number of producers increased from 71 in 2013, to 200 in 2015..



Graph 4 shows a progressive increase in the number of Shea butter producers following UGF/CDN's credit facility, which financed the mechanisation of the production centre. In all, 279 producers have been employed since 2014 (36 male and 243 female).

We carried out a mini-survey to understand the impact of our finance on working conditions, working environment, income and quality of life. A total of 41 producers were randomly selected to participate in the survey and the results are presented below.

**Table 1:** Working conditions at UGF/CDN

| <b>Statement</b>   | <b>% of respondents</b> |
|--|-------------------------|
| <i>My working conditions have worsened during the past five years</i>              | 0%                      |
| <i>My working conditions have remained the same during the past five years</i>     | 0%                      |
| <i>My working conditions have improved slightly during the past five years</i>     | 0%                      |
| <i>My working conditions have improved moderately during the past five years</i>   | 22%                     |
| <i>My working conditions have improved considerably during the past five years</i> | 78%                     |

The results in Table 1 indicate that all respondents have experienced some level of improvement in their working conditions during the past five years. These results were confirmed by the semi-structured interviews we held with a sample of producers. They stated that they used to work between 11 and 12 hours to achieve the daily production target as the majority of tasks were performed manually. However, for the past five years, the daily working hours have reduced to a maximum of eight due to the mechanisation. The payment of wages and salaries has become more regular and producers have benefitted from an end of season premium payment. In addition, the Shea butter producers have received regular training in occupational health and safety, hygiene, sanitation and processing techniques.

The working environment has also undergone development, with producers reporting a considerable infrastructure improvement.

Bationon Nebie Eli, the Chairperson of UGF/CDN stated, *“Our Shea butter producers used to work under trees with very rudimentary tools but today, they work in a well-equipped and fully mechanised production facility.”* Access to the Shared Interest loan facility in 2018 has enabled UGF/CDN to build two warehouses and fully mechanise the production process.

*“We are happy and we are grateful to Shared Interest for supporting us to provide a safer and conducive working environment to our Shea butter producers. The new space has made work more meaningful to them and they feel relax and happy to work here every day.”*



**Bationon Nebie Eli,  
UGF/CDN's Board  
Chairperson**



**A group of Shea butter producers of UGF/CDN**

Table 2 summarises the views of producers on the working environment as expressed in the mini- survey.

| <i>Statement</i>   | <i>% of respondents</i> |
|--|-------------------------|
| <i>The working environment has deteriorated during the past 5 years</i>          | 0%                      |
| <i>The working environment has remained the same during the past 5 years</i>     | 0%                      |
| <i>The working environment has improved slightly during the past 5 years</i>     | 2%                      |
| <i>The working environment has improved moderately during the past 5 years</i>   | 63%                     |
| <i>The working environment has improved considerably during the past 5 years</i> | 35%                     |

Furthermore, the mini-survey explored the impact of the mechanised production process on the work of Shea butter producers. Prior to this, the entire production was carried manually and it was a slow and laborious process. The producers used to roast the kernels in pots over a fire and then pound the roasted kernels in a mortar with a pestle and grind them between two stones to produce the smooth paste. The producers interviewed stated that the manual method was time consuming, physically exhausting and extremely labour intensive. They also indicated that the process required large quantities of water and wood for fuel, which they often had to carry long distances.

Batiobe Alice, one of the producers, said, “As women producers, we used to spend long hours and energy pounding and roasting kernels and kneading the paste to produce butter, but today butter production is more relax and has become a complete fun.”

She further stated that the manual process was risky and exposed them to health hazards as they usually had muscle and joint pains after each day’s work and spent money buying pain

relief medication. She was happy that they no longer work late into the night. She revealed that previously some women refused to work at UGF/CDN because of the long hours and stress involved in the job, but now many of these women wish to join the workforce due to the improved method of production.

It is evident from responses that the production process has seen a great transformation during the past five years. Ninety-six percent of respondents said they had seen a great improvement in the production process. This change has not only impacted the work of producers but also their income and quality of life. The income of producers has increased by 150% since 2014.

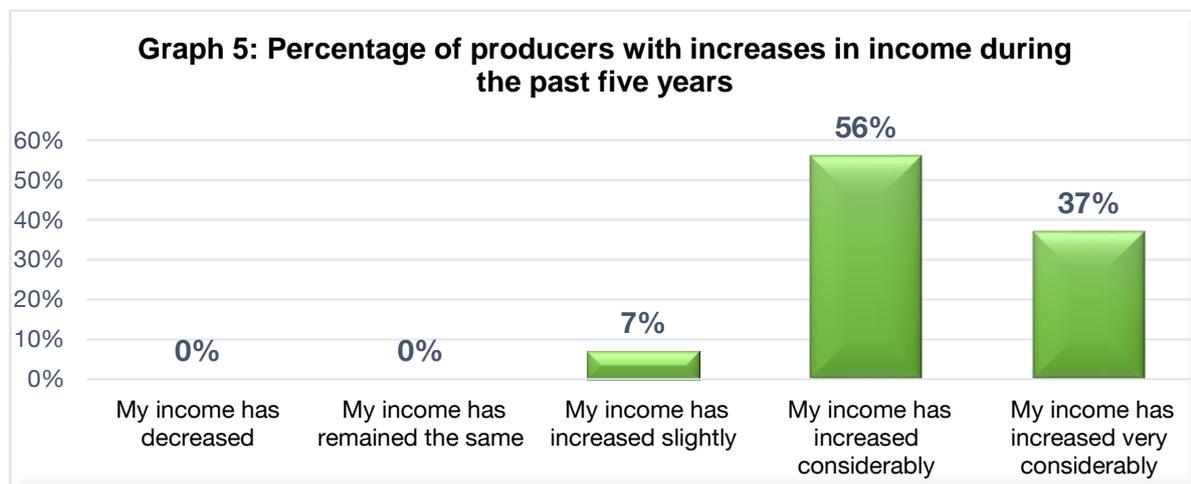
The General Manager explained that the increase has become necessary following the growth in sales and improvement in cash flow and income stream of the union. He stated: *“The Shea butter producers and Shea nut collectors are the heart of what we do and the improvement in the organisation’s income usually trickles down to them.”*

All the producers interviewed reported an increased income and improvement in their quality of life.

Kansole Eli, a 51 year old Shea butter producer at UGF/CDN had this to say: *“I used to depend on relatives’ help to feed my family but with the improvement in my income I was able to provide food for my children throughout the period without any external help.”*

Kando Epilbie, another female producer said: *“I always incurred debts to provide for my family and pay my children’s school fees but for the past few years, I was able to meet all the basic needs of my family without incurring debts due to the increase in my income. I now enjoy a relative peace of mind.”*

The graph below shows the percentage of respondents with various income.



Kantiono Eli Irene, a Shea butter producer agreed to share her story with us. She is 56 years old and has been working at UGF/CDN for the past 13 years. She is a single mother with six children. She lost her husband 20 years ago and since then she has been single-handedly responsible for her household. Her previous income from growing crops was not enough to feed her children. Irene sold her livestock to raise money but it was still not enough to finance

her children’s education. Subsequently, three of her daughters left education, two of them got married and one left the country.

*“This was not the kind of future I envisaged for my children.”*

Kationo said the daily struggle to meet the survival needs of the other three children was a tough challenge. In 2006, Irene was employed at UGF/CDN as a Shea butter producer and she hoped to make an extra income to provide the basic needs of her household. At that time, Irene and her colleagues were paid based on the volume of Shea butter produced but unfortunately UGF/CDN did not have the equipment for the production of high volume of butter. The orders were low and the majority of the production was sold locally at very low prices. However, with the mechanisation of the production unit from 2014 and subsequent increase in orders, Irene has seen a rise in her income and her living conditions have improved within a relatively short time. She was able to finance the education of her three other children, who are all in secondary school.

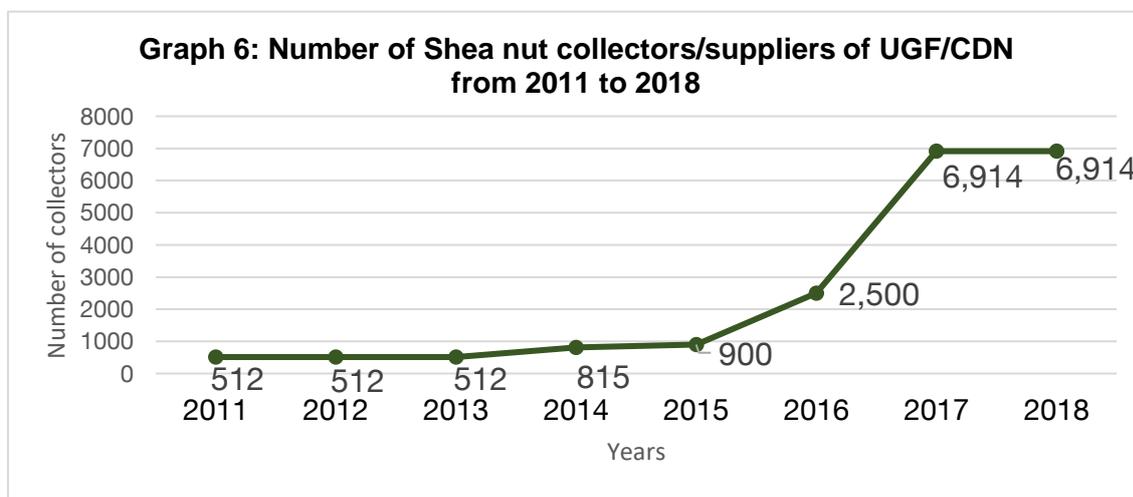


*“Unlike previous years, they no longer send my children out of school for non-payment of fees. I provide adequate food for the household without going out to borrow money”.*

Since 2014, when Shared Interest financed UGF/CDN, Irene has built a new house to replace the old and dilapidated one. She has a shop where she sells assorted products and a bicycle she rides to work.

*“With my current level of income and I will continue to finance the education of my children to the university level. I am thankful to UGF/CDN and their partner Shared Interest for giving hope to me and my children.”*

All the Shea butter producers who responded to the survey questionnaires indicated that there has been some level of improvement in their quality of life since Shared Interest intervention. Ninety percentsaid their quality of life had improved considerably or very considerably. Shared Interest finance did not only impact Shea butter producers but also nut collectors and suppliers. The number of nut collectors has increased from 815 in 2014 to the current 6,914, due to the increased demand for ingredients into the production process following mechanisation and the increases in orders as the quality improved.



The majority of women in the province of Sanguie make their income from the sale of Shea nuts which are collected between June and August. Unfortunately, despite this activity being one of their major sources of income, they received very little due to the low prices offered at the local market. However, by improving the organisations processing capacity, UGF/CDN has provided market access to thousands of nut collectors and better prices for their nuts. The price of a kilogram of Shea nut was XOF 80 (0.13 US Dollars) on the local market but UGF/CDN pays collectors XOF 300 (0.5 US Dollars) per kilogram. In addition, UGF/CDN has been buying increasingly higher volumes of Shea nuts from the collectors, which has resulted in an increased income. The establishment of the nut collection centres and availability of a truck have also made it easier for the collectors to sell their nuts to UGF/CDN rather than the local markets.

Kanzie Helen said: *“I have been selling my nuts at the local market at a very low prices. Sometimes I carry the nuts to the market and bring them back if there are no buyers. However, since 2015 I have been supplying my nuts to UGF/CDN through the collection centres and at very good prices. UGF/CDN buys all my nuts and this gives me more money to take care of the basic needs of my household.”*

In a mini-survey involving 60 Shea nuts collectors/suppliers of UGF/CDN, all said volumes had increased; 65% said the volume of nuts they have been supplying to UGF/CDN for the past five years had increased very considerably and a further 28% said they had increased considerably.

The respondents were also asked to indicate how their income has improved over the past five years. Thirty percent said they had increased slightly, 38% said they increased considerably, and 32% said they had increased very considerably. This was attributed to the increase in the volume of nuts supplied and the price per kg paid by UGF/CDN.

When respondents were asked to describe their quality of life over the past five years all said it had improved; 28% said slightly, 55% said considerably and the remaining 17% said very considerably.

We interviewed a number of Shea nut collectors to further understand how our finance has impacted their income levels and quality of life. One of these nut collectors is Zongo Giwo, a 47 year-old lady, who has been supplying Shea nuts to UGF/CDN for the past eight years and confirmed her income from Shea nut sales had increased by 250% since 2014.

She said, *“Previously I was only able to feed my family once a day due to low income. I used to prepare meals in the evenings for my children as I could not afford to provide three meals per day. The children normally ate the left-over food from the previous evening as breakfast before going to school and they live on that till evening. This was affecting their health and their performance at school. The situation has, however, changed when I started supplying higher volumes of nuts to UGF/CDN and my income went up. I am now able to provide food for my children three times a day. I afford their medical bills and supply all their school needs.”* As part of this study, we visited Dwi-Nyee one of the Shea nut collectors’ group located in the village of Po in the Sanguie province. The group has 60 individual members and they have been supplying Shea nuts to UGF/CDN since 2014.



According to the President, Kanzie Hellen, before 2014, all the members of the group were selling their nuts via the local market at very low prices. She said, *“Today, all the 60 women and their households can feed well and access primary health care. School dropout rate has*

*declined drastically as all members can now finance conveniently the education of their children.”*

Kanzie further pointed out that they used to sell a bag of 80kg of Shea nuts at XOF 6,400 (10.64 USD) on the local market but UGF/CDN buys the same weight bag for XOF 24,000 (40 USD), representing a 275% increase. She added that some members collect up to 15 bags per season depending on yield.

We interviewed some of the individual nut collectors to understand the change in their livelihood since Shared Interest’s provision of finance.

Perpetue Kantiono is a 50 year-old Shea nut collector for UGF/CDN.

Perpetue lives with her five children in the village of Po. Her husband died in 2004 and she has been farming to feed her children. However, the crops were not enough to provide food for the family all year round. Perpetue has been collecting Shea nuts to sell at the local market to make an income to supplement the food crops from her farm and meet other basic family needs.



She had been commuting over 14km on foot to send the nuts to the local market and sometimes brought the nuts back home because there were no buyers. She would then wait for the next market day, three days later. At times, the supply of nuts far outweighed the demand and Perpetue said she was forced to sell at very low prices because she needed money for food. When she wasn’t able to sell her nuts, she fed her children with edible boiled leaves from trees. The children sometimes lived on these leaves for several days until she was able to get some money to provide a nutritional balanced food. The children were malnourished and developed health problems but she did not have money to send them to hospital. She treated them with herbal medicine and the recovery was very slow. Sometimes, she went into the forest to fetch firewood, which she sold to local drink brewers for a little extra income. She could not afford to send her children to school and one of them got married because she wasn’t able to provide for her basic needs.

Perpetue has now enrolled four of her children in schools and provides all their basic needs.

She said, *“I am happy my children are now in school. I provide them with adequate and well balanced diet and they no longer feed on boiled leaves from trees”.*

Perpetue has built a new house to replace the old structure she previously lived in. She also bought bicycles for her children to ride to school.

It is worth noting that, apart from providing market access and paying fair prices, UGF/CDN provides regular training to the Shea nut collectors on maintenance of Shea trees, quality management, and organic farming practices. The Shea nut collectors said that the training has expanded their knowledge about the handling of Shea trees, improving quality and yield.

### **III. Social, gender and environmental impact of the loans**

With improved cash flow and a strengthened financial position UGF/CDN implemented several social and environmental programmes to enhance the livelihoods of people in the provinces of Sanguie and Koudougou, and also to protect the environment.

The General Manager explained that they have had an agreement with their main buyer l'Occitane since 2010, where they receive a premium of 2.9% on the total volume of Shea butter supplied and this was used to finance various development initiatives. He noted that from 2010 to 2013, due to low production and sales, the premium earned was too small to carry out any significant projects.

However, following the mechanisation of the production unit and subsequent increases in orders, they have been earning a higher premium, which enabled them to improve facilities focussed on education, health, food, enterprise development, gender and environment.

**Education:** UGF/CDN believes in education as a tool for development. According to the General Manager, 90% of the women they work with are illiterate and for this reason, they have introduced an adult literacy programme. The aim is to provide access to education for Shea butter producers and nut collectors as well as other members of the community. They have now established 15 literacy centres across the province and UGF/CDN has recruited and trained facilitators for each centre. People take part in a three-year programme with classes taking place between November and January, after the Shea nut collection and processing season. They pay the facilitators between XOF 25,000 (42 US Dollars) and XOF 50,000 (84 USD) per month depending on their qualifications and experience. They provide food daily to the women who attend the classes, with lessons starting at 8am and ending at 2pm. They also support each literacy group with an amount of XOF 250,000 (416 USD) per year for three years to develop other income generating activities.



The General Manager told us that the programme was introduced in 2010 but on a very small scale due to financial constraints.

He stated, *“As the cash flow of the organisation began to improve, we established more literacy centres and thereby increasing the number of beneficiaries.”*

Coupled with the literacy programme, UGF/CDN undertake regular awareness campaigns about female education to address the low school enrolment rate of girls across the Province. They have also supported 150 girls to obtain their birth certificates, which are vital documents when accessing education. In addition, UGF/CDN pays for the tuition, books and school supplies for 60 orphaned children. They also provide food, clothing and look after their health needs.

UGF/CDN provides meals to candidates and invigilators at the examination centres during external examination periods to ensure the children have at least a meal before attending their exams. They spend up to XOF 3,000,000 (5000 US Dollars) each year to provide this service and the General Manager observed that it has contributed to improved performance of children during examinations. According to the General Manager, children used to collapse and miss

examinations due to hunger but since the start of this intervention, they have very few of such cases.

During the rainy season, the organisation helps repair damaged school roofs. In some cases, they also provides furniture and teaching resources, and make cash donations to support school projects.

**Health:** UGF/CDN supports community health initiatives. As malaria is one of the leading causes of child mortality in the region, they work in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, to run malaria prevention campaigns by delivering mosquito nets to households. They also organise community groups to provide expectant mothers with advice and support on matters such as breastfeeding and preparation of healthy nutritionally balanced diet to reduce the high rate of child malnutrition. They mobilise community members for vaccination campaigns and other community health education programmes including hygiene and sanitation, family planning, HIV/AIDS awareness and voluntary testing and counselling. They have 25 facilitators, who assist the Ministry of Health to run the various campaigns. The Ministry of Health considers UGF/CDN as a key partner in the promotion of community health care in the region.

**Food supply:** There is a perennial food shortage in Burkina Faso during the months of August and September. During this period, households run out of food and UGF/CDN distributes food to households, ensuring they have at least one meal per day. This intervention currently covers the Municipalities of Reo and Kyon but UGF/CDN has plans to cover all 10 Municipalities in the Province of Sanguie.

**Security:** UGF/CDN supports the local police administration for the maintenance of law and order in the Provinces of Sanguie and Koudougou. They contribute financially to the organisation of meetings by local authorities to discuss security issues in the communities. They make donations to the Provincial Police Departments, contributing to operational costs to ensure the security of community members. This year they made a cash donation of XOF 1 million (1664 USD) to each of the police departments in Reo and Koudougou.

**Environment:** Over the past five years, UGF/CDN has supported the protection and maintenance of 20 Shea tree parklands by developing tree nurseries for distribution to Shea butter producers, nut collectors and the wider members of the communities. These included wild trees such as Moringa, Baobab and Shea, which are planted for biodiversity conservation. Every year, they distribute on the average 13,000 of these tree plants to community members and in 2018 they distributed nearly 25,000 tree plants. They also encourage community members to undertake tree planting activity and carry out follow-ups to ensure that the trees are properly maintained.

To prevent the felling of forest trees for domestic use, the UGF/CDN has established 19 hectares of forest to use for firewood. The organisation has also provided credit facilities for women in the community to purchase solar energy products such torchlights, lamps, and phone chargers. UGF/CDN, in collaboration with SNV, a Netherlands not-for-profit international development organisation, have trained 186 women in bio-gas technology. The trainees were provided with bio-digesters to produce gas from animal faeces and waste for domestic use. As a result, the beneficiaries no longer cut down trees for firewood. In addition, they have given out 350 energy saving stoves locally known as “Foyer Nafa” to community members.

UGF/CDN recycles the shells and other by-products from Shea nut processing to avoid environmental pollution. The Shea pulps are used as fuel for the boiler at the processing plant.

Other residues go into compost for organic production. Tanks were also constructed to retain waste water from the processing plant to prevent them from polluting the environment.

**Enterprise development:** Apart from the Shea activities, UGF/CDN has supported the development of other enterprises. They have established 32 vegetable gardens for their members by purchasing pieces of land and dividing it with fences. They also provided the necessary planting materials and agricultural products for the gardens. UGF/CDN provides training and refresher courses to the groups on vegetable farming techniques, organic production and good agricultural practices to ensure high yields.

In 2018, UGF/CDN launched a pilot project in partnership with l'Occitane known as 'Etincelle'. As part of the project, 10 women were given apprenticeships with local businesses. These women will be trained in various vocations over three years and, on graduation, they will be provided with start-up kits and a seed fund to establish their own businesses, enabling them to employ other members of the community. UGF/CDN is contributing XOF 10 million (16,630 USD) to the programme.

**Gender:** UGF/CDN is a women-focussed organisation. All 6,914 Shea nut collectors, impacted by Shared Interest's interventions are women and over 88% of Shea butter producers are female. All beneficiaries of adult literacy classes and other income generation projects initiated by UGF/CDN were women. According to the General Manager, women are the most vulnerable to the effects poverty, hence all their interventions are directed towards women's empowerment.

In our mini-survey, we asked respondents to indicate the extent to which UGF/CDN has contributed to community development in the province. The majority of respondents (97%) were of the view that UGF/CDN had contributed very significantly or significantly to community development.

These results were qualified by Bassolet Aime, the Chief of Reo community.

He said, *"These women were at the heart of the economic growth of the municipality. They invest their income from Shea into small businesses which contribute to the development of their communities. More importantly, they provide for the basic needs of their households and invest in the education of their children. School dropout rates are on the decline because of these women and I am very proud to be part of this change."*

*"Without the support of UGF/CDN, many households in the municipality would have been struggling to meet their basic needs."*

*"The development partners should not relent in their efforts to support UGF/CDN as supporting them means promoting the development of the entire province, it means feeding thousands of households."*

We also had the opportunity to meet Mr Bationon Epilbie Longa, the Deputy Mayor of Reo.



**Bassolet Aime,  
Chief of Reo**

He said, “UGF/CDN are a strong and reliable partner when it comes to community mobilisation and the promotion of development in the Municipality. Their contribution to poverty reduction in the Municipality over the past five years has been unprecedented.

“We call on UGF/CDN whenever we needed support and they never hesitate to offer help.”



**Bationon Epilbie  
Longa, Deputy Mayor  
of Reo Municipality**

### **Other support**

UGF/CDN benefited from a number of other projects.

- The Drylands Development Project was funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. The project, which ran from 2013 to 2018, was designed to provide relevant and contextually appropriate support to smallholder farmers in selected dryland areas of Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Ethiopia, and Kenya. Through this project, UGF/CDN has acquired and maintained 400 hectares of farmlands for community members. They provided planting materials and inputs to increase yield and to promote food security in the province.
- The Equity Project, financed by the French Development Agency (AFD), was implemented from 2016 to 2017. UGF/CDN acquired Shea nut pressers, which they have been using for the recycling of the Shea pulps and they also purchased Shea butter packaging materials. The project further supported the maintenance of Shea parklands and established the vegetable gardens.
- Since 2018, Tree Aid has been supporting UGF/CDN through their Women Forest Livelihood project. They provide basic Shea processing equipment for some of their smaller co-ops to enable them to process the nuts before supplying UGF/CDN. They also supported the tree planting activity.

## Conclusion

It is evident from this study that the loan finance from Shared Interest has played a role in the development of UGF/CDN as a business.

The loans have moved the Shea processing business from manual activity to a semi-industrial operation.

Employment has increased by 393% and 7,264 people including 350 butter producers and 6,914 shea nut collectors have been positively impacted. We believe this demonstrates that access to finance can transform businesses, and subsequently change lives.



**Shea UGF / CDN leadership sit together at headquarters in Réo Department, Burkina Faso. Left to right are Accountability Manager Kansole Marie Margarite, Quality Host Idobo Fati, Vice-President Nebie Elestine, and QC Production Head Kanzule Ellie.**

*“Thanks to Shared Interest, my dream of empowering rural women through Shea butter production has become a living reality”.*

General Manager