



SHEA-RISE

Resilient Infrastructure For Shea Ecosystems

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This report is both a reflection and an invitation. A reflection of how far we have come since 2006 and an invitation to all who read it - partners, clients, communities, and consumers - to join us in building a blueprint that should have existed from the very beginning.

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SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

Our operations between January 2023 and December 2024, focused on our testing out community led infrastructure and innovations for making the shea value chain greener and more resilient : across Ghana, Mali, and Côte d’Ivoire. It reflects how we strengthened women’s cooperatives, expanded their production capacity, and introduced eco-friendly solutions to reduce physical and environmental impact. It also captures our work to create jobs, train women in financial literacy, and restore degraded parklands. Beyond operations, the report provides a clear account of how we continue to combine trade with impact , ensuring that growth is not only measured in output, but also in ownership at source, protection of ecosystems, and resilience of the communities who sustain this chain.

MANAGING DIRECTOR



Raphael Gonzalez
Managing Director & Co-Founder

POSITIONING RURAL WOMEN AS
ACTIVE STAKEHOLDERS

When Savannah Fruits Company began in 2006, we set out with a conviction that was as clear as it was uncompromising: **business and impact must co-exist**. We could not afford to replicate what the industry had normalized, that is, layers of middlemen, opacity at the first mile, and communities treated as labor pools with little voice in the value they sustained.

It would have been ironic - even dangerous - to claim to value shea as a commodity while disregarding the very people who had preserved its trees, protected its biodiversity, and passed down its uses for centuries before modern studies proved its importance to food systems.

HER ENDURING RIGHT TO SHEA

We started by going directly to women at source, launching a sourcing model built to ensure that shea remains in the hands of the women who have safeguarded it for centuries. When we launched, the approach was considered unconventional, even impractical. Communities had little governance, few organized cooperatives, almost no infrastructure, and no digital tools.

Everything about the context suggested it could not work. So we began by sitting with women, understanding their existing systems and realities , and investing in the formalization of cooperatives where none had existed. We channelled resources into basic infrastructure, into training, and into building trust at the first mile.

SINCE 2006

From manual tracking led by local teams, to premium payments and reinvestment programs that returned value directly to source . Over time, what was viewed as an experiment became the architecture of resilience: a model that placed women not at the margins, but at the center of our trade.

For us , If our approach was to be successful , it had to begin with HER - with her knowledge, her dignity, and her ownership. Nearly two decades later, this model continues to define our work, proving that **sustainability is not built in boardrooms or export warehouses, but at the source, with the women who are the access point.**

BUILT TO LAST - 18 YEARS LATER

Today, we work directly with more than 48,000 women in rural communities across the shea belt. We have invested continued to expand our investments in community-led projects, from post-harvest infrastructure to cooperative support and development , as well as environmental restoration programs. We are proud to have expanded into three additional natural value chains across four countries, while holding fast , with great success to the same foundation : people and communities remain at the heart of every decision.

SHEA-RISE

Building Resilient Infrastructure For Shea Ecosystems

Global demand for shea continues to rise, with the industry projected to double in value by 2050. While this is progress to celebrate, recognition for a long-overlooked ingredient and new opportunities for the women in shea, there is a reality we cannot ignore. Reports show that rising demand is colliding with declining participation at the source. Across the shea belt, youth are disengaging, with more than 60% showing little interest in the industry - migrating south in search of alternatives and leaving a widening gap in generational succession. At the same time, the women who remain in the chain are aging, and with little to no innovation to ease their burden, rising demand only intensifies the strain.

These dynamics are shrinking the producer base even as global demand accelerates, creating a vacuum that risks pushing people at source to the margins as they exit shea for other alternatives. The vacuum created, as seen in many other chains, risks getting by private capital and industrialization, which move fast to consolidate control : from acquiring or repurposing land (often seen as a “better trade-off”) to taking full ownership of collection and processing. The consequences are steep. Communities at source stand to be sidelined, along with their knowledge, their younger generations’ rightful place in the chain, and the parkland ecosystems that sustain biodiversity in the belt.

CONTEXT
2023 -2024

“Our impact this year captures a simple truth: modernization and business growth does not have to take away. Done right, it protects originality, builds resilience, and connects rural communities to global markets on their own terms.

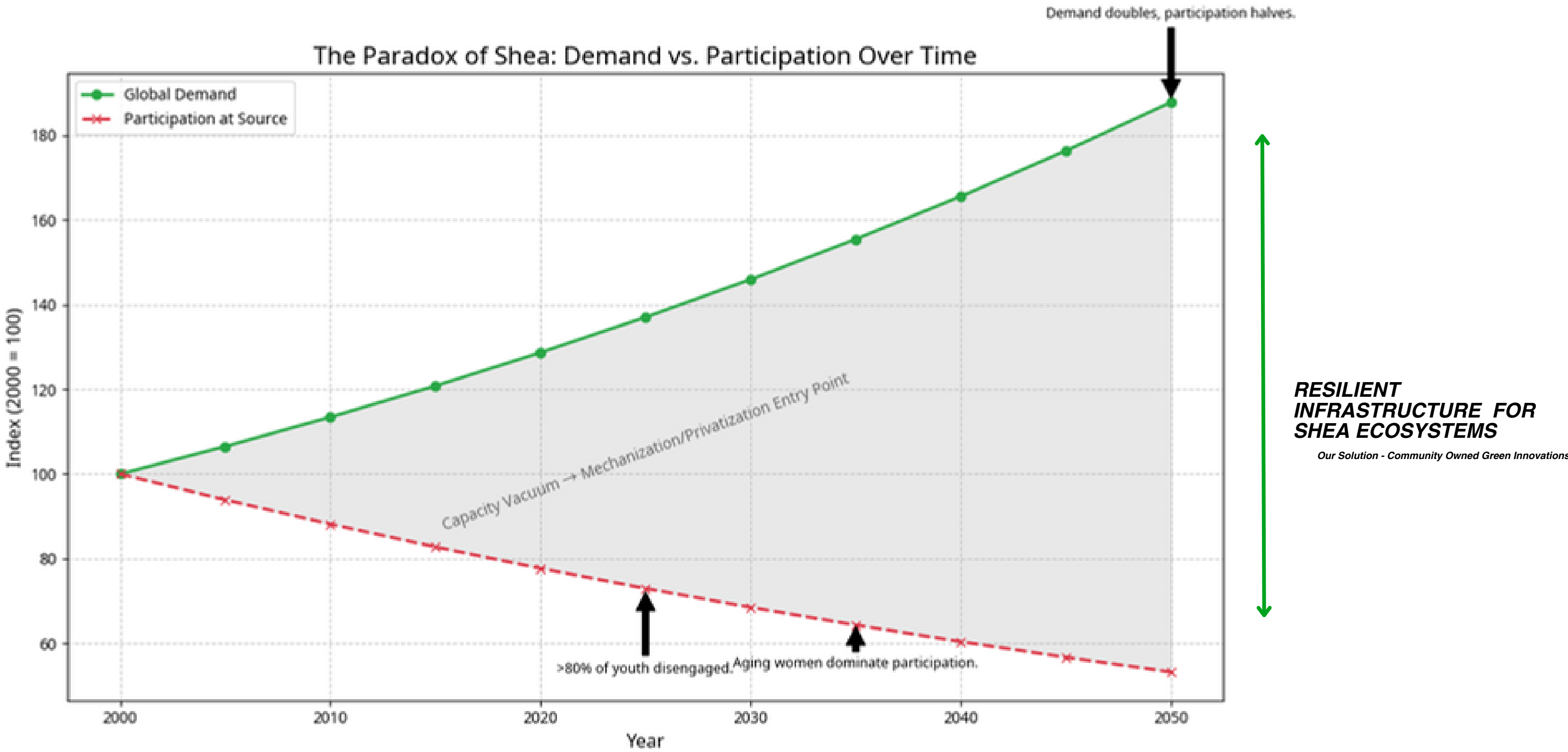
Our Journey, Our Proof, Our Invitation

The season, 2023–2024, has been one that brought together everything we have learned and everything we know must endure. This year has proved again that the future of shea is only possible when we commit to redistributing power across the chain, investing in sustainable infrastructure, and protecting its future at every level. In that vision, we all win - from women in the fields, to youth across the belt, to us as a company, and to the consumer holding the product in their hands.

As we look back on nearly two decades, I am reminded that growth gives scale, reach, and resources. But what sustains it is its purpose. At The Savannah Fruits Company, that purpose has always been protection: protection of women’s agency, of community dignity, and of landscapes that sustain life.

This report is both a reflection and an invitation. A reflection of how far we have come since 2006. And an invitation to all who read it - partners, clients, communities, and consumers to join us in building a blueprint that should have existed from the very beginning. One where transparency is non-negotiable, where impact is inseparable from business, and where value is not just extracted but shared, extended, and still protected at source.

Raphael Gonzalez
Managing Director



SHEA GETS GREENER

A \$4 MILLION MULTI-NATIONAL INVESTMENT IN WOMEN - OWNED GREEN CENTERS



16 ECO-FRIENDLY BUTTER PROCESSING CENTERS

Across Ghana, Mali, and Côte d'Ivoire, we constructed 16 modern butter processing centers, formalizing what was once fragmented, often home-based production into cooperative-owned facilities. Women were organized into registered cooperative communities , giving them collective ownership and governance of the centers, along with systems and training for financial management, operations and accountability. This shift meant they could not only produce more butter at less strain but in facilities that enabled environmental protection, traceability, and a stronger leverage to meet international certification standards that unlock access to the premium markets..

Before implementation, one of the pressing problem at this stage was the scale of firewood consumption for fuel: each kilogram of butter consumed 0.6 kg of firewood and released nearly 0.5 kg of CO₂, alongside hours of heavy manual labor that carried significant health risks. The new centers directly responded to these baseline findings, introducing green solutions such as briquettes made from shea waste instead of firewood, cutting fuel use by 90% and emissions by 80%, while mechanized equipment replaced hand-kneading and crushing, making production faster, safer, and more consistent.



BEFORE

Improved roasters cut firewood use by 90% and reduced CO₂ emissions by ~80% compared to traditional open-fire methods

ESTABLISHED NEW COOPERATIVES IN

MALI | COTE D'IVOIRE | GHANA

110 IMPROVED ROASTERS

24 IMPROVED CRUSHERS & MILLERS

16 KNEADERS



AFTER



SHEA CAKE : CLOSING THE LOOP IN SHEA

When kernels are pressed into butter, the solid by-product left behind is known as shea cake. For years, this material was treated as waste: often discarded. Through our research into its potential, including its ability to reduce smoke emissions when used as fuel, we introduced Shea Cake Storage Pits to safely collect and prepare, and store this by-product for reuse across the value chain

By repurposing shea cake as fuel, we significantly reduce the need for firewood, cutting pressure on forests and lowering greenhouse gas emissions. In several cooperatives, women now substitute firewood with shea cake during roasting, lowering their costs while improving sustainability. Beyond fuel, shea cake also proves valuable as a soil amendment in farming and as a raw material for soap and industrial applications, extending its usefulness across sectors.



BUILD SOCIAL BONDS THROUGH COLLECTIVE PROCESSING

PRIORITIZES WOMEN'S HEALTH & WELLBEING

2,467 tons of shea cake recycled as fuel, directly substituting firewood and reducing deforestation pressure

36 ECO FRIENDLY- POST HARVEST NUT CENTERS

Nut processing has always been the most demanding and least visible stage of the shea value chain : the point where women walk long distances, carry heavy loads, and process kernels before ever being paid. This often falling into debt cycles or forced to sell early at unfavorable prices. With Shea Gets Greener, we became the first to transform this entry point of the chain into a greener, fairer system, piloting eco-friendly nut post-harvest centers that pay women for both nuts and processing, ensure year-round income, and replace the exhausting treks with cooperative-managed transport. Inside these centers, improved stoves and climate-resilient dryers promote efficiency and reduces emissions, while modern storage facilities give women the ability to hold nuts and sell on their own terms. For the first time, nut processing is no longer a source of strain and vulnerability, but a structured, climate-smart foundation that women own through cooperatives. Delivering income security, healthier working conditions, and sustainability at the very beginning of the shea chain.



BEFORE

172 IMPROVED
BOILING STOVES

48 CLIMATE
RESILIENT DRYERS

INTEGRATED RAINWATER
COLLECTION SYSTEMS

Rainwater is collected, filtered, and stored in onsite tanks, providing easy access to clean water for shea processing while reducing the strain on community water resources

20 MOTORKINGS- PUTTING WOMEN'S SAFETY FIRST , WHILE ELIMINATING HEAVY LOADS

Previously, women walked for miles with heavy loads on their backs, often along remote and unsafe routes to nut collection farms. We piloted the use of motorking by giving each of the 18 cooperatives 2. This allows the women to travel in groups: providing both safety in numbers and a dramatic increase in capacity. Each trip can now carry five times more volume, meaning fewer journeys, less strain, and more time available for other activities.

MEETING INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS OF QUALITY

The nut centers position women and their cooperatives to compete on a global stage. With centralized steaming, drying, and storage, nuts are now processed in clean, controlled environments that reduce contamination, standardize quality, and deliver full traceability. This shift ensures that production meets the strict international standards demanded by global buyers, from food safety to organic certification enabling women to also benefit from the premiums that it offers. No longer limited by fragmented household processing, women's cooperatives can now present their product with confidence in its consistency and credibility, unlocking access to higher-value markets and securing stronger returns for their work.

AFTER

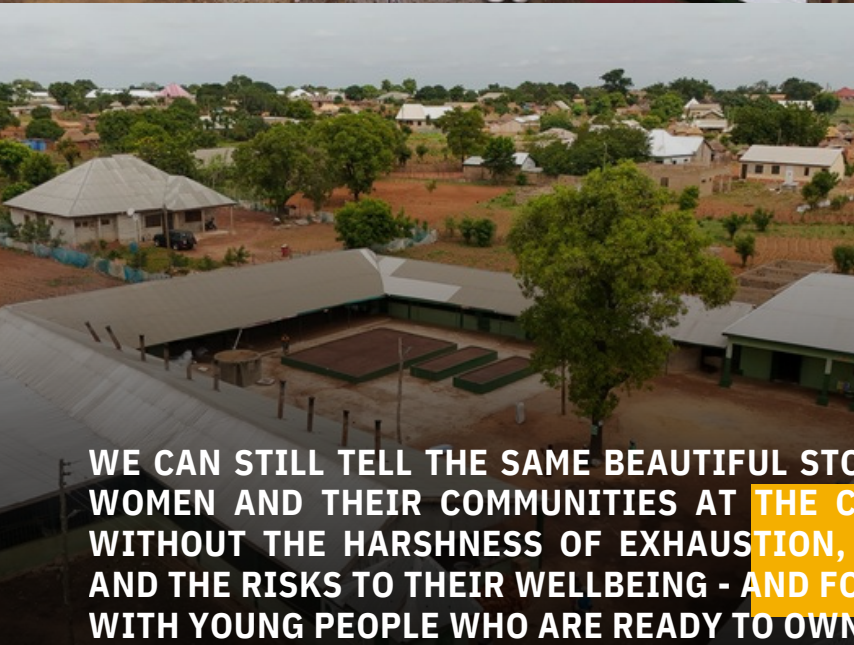


Women now transport 100 kg of nuts per trip compared to 20 kg before a 5x increase.



They no longer walk long distances - sometimes over 60 minutes each way to collect nuts.

Dedicated storage reduces the possibility of post-harvest losses from spoilage, pests, or contamination.



WE CAN STILL TELL THE SAME BEAUTIFUL STORY OF SHEA WITH WOMEN AND THEIR COMMUNITIES AT THE CENTER. BUT NOW, WITHOUT THE HARSHNESS OF EXHAUSTION, THE LONG TREKS, AND THE RISKS TO THEIR WELLBEING - AND FOR THE FIRST TIME, WITH YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE READY TO OWN ITS FUTURE.

ELIMINATING POVERTY AND DEBT CYCLES IN SHEA

Shea income is highly seasonal: cash arrives in short harvest windows and then dries up for months. To cover school fees, food, and farm inputs during the lean season, many women take advances from agents or informal loans and later repay in kernels/butter at below-market prices, locking in losses before the peak season even begins. Two structural gaps reinforce this trap: (1) irregular, seasonal cash flow (harvest concentrated May–August), and (2) limited tools for saving, budgeting, and accessing formal banking. Storage constraints make it worse - because without clean, safe places to hold kernels, women must sell early even when prices are weak.

To tackle the dual challenge of cash-flow gaps and limited financial skills, **we partnered with BSR and the Estée Lauder Companies Charitable Foundation (ELCCF)** to bring the Financial Resilience in Shea program to our cooperatives in northern Ghana. The program, which was first piloted in Janshegu and Mole CREMA in 2022, scaled to reach over 8,000 women, equipping them with practical skills in goal setting, budgeting, savings, formal banking, and income diversification. Women who once relied heavily on seasonal loans and unfair advance agreements are now reporting stronger financial literacy, better savings habits, and more control over their income.

Combined with the warehouses and post-harvest centers established under Shea Gets Greener, women can now store kernels securely and decide when to sell, taking advantage of better market prices. At the same time, the financial literacy and group savings tools they’ve gained reduce the need for risky advances from agents. The result is a break in the lean-season debt cycle: instead of starting each harvest in deficit, women are building reserves, negotiating from a stronger position, and holding onto more of the income their work generates.



1,875 women trained
across 12 organic shea
cooperatives in our
network

A 5 PART TRAINING MODEL

The Financial Resilience in Shea program was built around five core training models designed to respond to the realities of women in Shea communities. These included: goal setting and household planning, which helped women move from reactive to intentional financial decisions; budgeting and record keeping, which introduced simple tools for tracking income and expenses; savings and group savings culture, which strengthened collective safety nets and reduced dependence on exploitative loans; access to formal banking and financial services, which connected women to rural banks, mobile money, and credit unions for safer transactions; and income diversification, which encouraged households to explore alternative livelihoods beyond shea. Together, these models provided a practical pathway out of seasonal debt cycles, equipping women not only to earn more but to manage, save, and grow their income in ways that benefit both families and cooperatives.

AT SFC, OUR WORK BEGINS WITH INTRODUCTION, BUT RESILIENCE BEGINS WHEN COMMUNITIES MAKE IT THEIR OWN

To ensure financial literacy training was not just delivered but absorbed, we intentionally introduced a rotation and training structure built on peer-led systems. Each Field Officer oversaw five communities, appointing at least four Community Training Coordinators (CTCs) in each to act as peer educators. Training modules circulated on a rolling basis — one community received Module 1 while another moved on to Module 2, with CTCs leading peer-to-peer sessions in between officer visits. This approach ensured that women revisited the content multiple times, practiced it with their peers, and built confidence through repetition. The impact was twofold: first, it created ownership at the community level, where women became teachers as well as learners; and second, it stretched resources efficiently, allowing SFC to scale high-quality training across 12 cooperatives without compromising depth.



INCOME BEYOND SHEA - ELIMINATING POVERTY AND DEBT CYCLES



SHEKEEPER - ALTERNATIVE INCOME STREAM FOR OUR COOPERATIVES



Building resilient infrastructure goes beyond solutions in shea alone — it extends to creating opportunities beyond shea, so women are not limited to a single income stream or forced into reactive strategies during lean seasons. This principle has been central to our financial literacy trainings, where we taught that while budgeting and savings are vital, long-term resilience depends on diversifying income sources. After highlighting the impact of these skills at the individual level, it was time to demonstrate what diversification could look like collectively, through cooperatives and to inform individual implementation as well . That opportunity came through the SheKeeper Project, in partnership with USAID Trade Hub and A Rocha Ghana. In 2023, five cooperatives were trained in sustainable beekeeping and provided with hives and tools. **The first season produced 902.5 kilograms of wax and honeycomb for sale**, generating income precisely during the lean months when shea earnings disappear. For the women, this was more than additional income it was proof that resilience, when built beyond shea, can break debt cycles, strengthen household finances, and secure stability across the year.

POSITIONING WOMEN COOPERATIVES AS ACTIVE STAKHOLDERS THAN PASSIVE BENEFICIARIES

“Our project with BSR and ELCCF exposed financial resilience as a vital component for achieving this goal , as it builds the confidence of women at source to negotiate without desperation, free from the influence of debt cycles and constant financial burden. Our objective is continue and enhance the impact of this training to further reinforce our commitment to building ethical sourcing relationships.”

SUSTAINABILITY DEPARTMENT





“

The ethics of trade cannot be measured in isolation from the worker's lived socio-economic realities, it must include value-based thinking with local context application : reflect the true value they bring, the risk they carry, and the imbalance of power they may face.

Whilemina Kamasa
Operations Manager

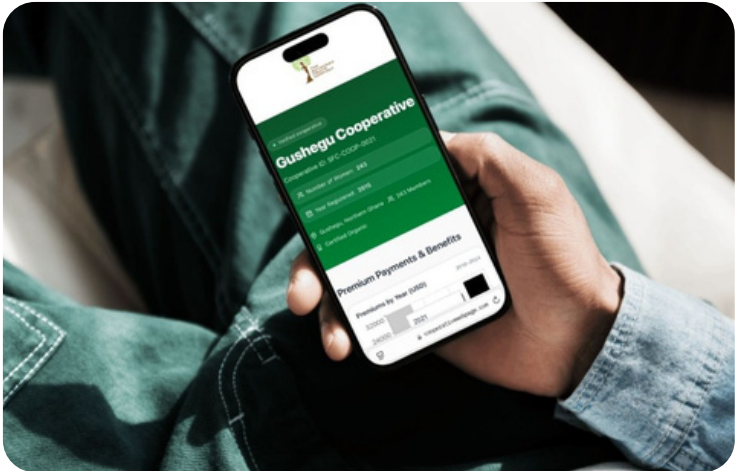
INVESTING IN A SYSTEM
BUILT ON SHARED VOICE ,
SHARED VALUE & SHARED
RESPONSIBILITY

We have long held the belief that the story of impact and how it is made should neither be decided, managed nor controlled by a single actor. When one party holds all the power to either tell the story or suggest how change is made, the imbalance again risks eroding the very agency that makes it ethical. This is why we committed to building an ecosystem where every actor, from farmer to consumer, has a visible role in shaping the system.



In 2022, Savannah Fruits Company (SFC), with support from Sundial Brands, secured grant funding from TRANSFORM a joint initiative between Unilever UK, the UK’s Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), and Ernst & Young (EY). The project’s objective was to conduct in-depth research to understand better the shea value chain quantifying its impact on the people at source, its contribution to and effect on the environment, and identifying practical pathways to modernize and measure sustainability within the sector. Under this programme, we commissioned Nitidæ to carry out comprehensive multi-country baseline and endline studies between 2021 and 2024 across Ghana, Côte d’Ivoire, and Mali.

The findings of this research directly informed the design of our Digital Traceability System, a technological infrastructure that translates years of scientific data into live, verifiable ESG metrics and blockchain-linked supply chain records. This system now enables full traceability of social and environmental impact of trade in the shea value chain, turning field-level measurements into measurable climate, gender, and economic indicators accessible to consumers to not only inform their purchasing decisions but also hold players within the chain accountable.



By embedding verified field data into the Digital Traceability System, we established an evidence-based framework that connects every kilogram of shea produced to its origin, environmental footprint, and the women behind it. The system integrates live data on energy efficiency, income distribution, and cooperative participation, providing partners and buyers with transparent, real-time insights into impact performance. Beyond compliance, it redefines how modernization is achieved in traditional value chains, anchoring progress in data integrity, local ownership, and community-defined priorities. Today, Shea Innovates stands as the operational bridge between impact measurement and market confidence, demonstrating how rigorous science, digital infrastructure, and inclusive partnerships can work together to secure the future of sustainable shea.

Through TRANSFORM, we also expanded our infrastructure and capacity-building efforts under the Shea Gets Greener (SGG) programme, constructing 10 additional post-harvest processing centers across key sourcing communities and equipping them with improved, energy-efficient technologies. Alongside this, more than 39,000 women were trained in quality enhancement, equipment operation, traceability systems, and cooperative management, strengthening both technical skills and local governance.



A \$1 MILLION COMMITMENT TO THE ENVIRONMENT

Ghana Shea Landscape Emission Reduction Project (GSLERP)

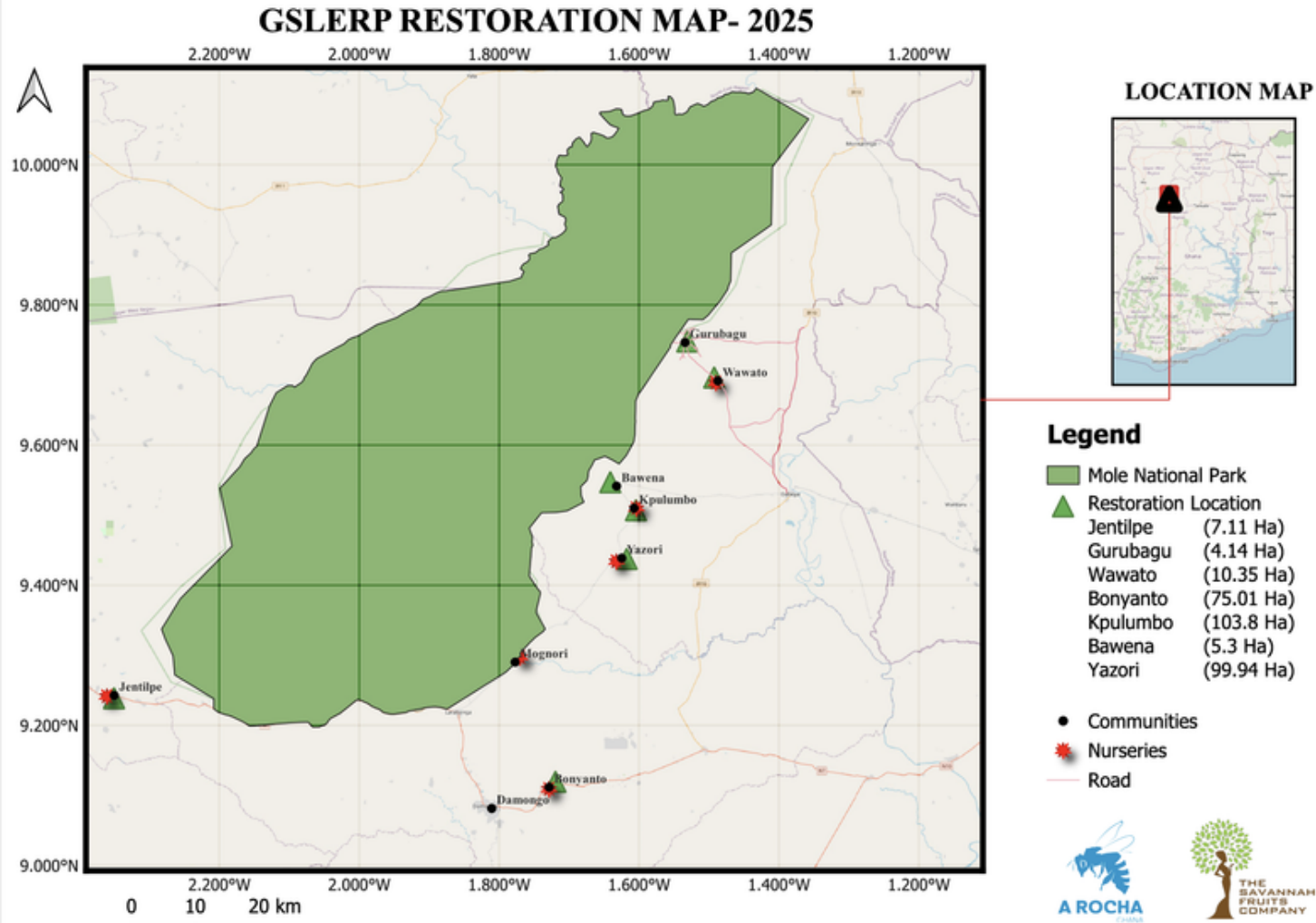
Ghana Shea Landscape Emission Reduction Project (GSLERP) BY A ROCHA

When most people think of shea, they think only of butter, oil, food, and cosmetics. But the shea tree is much more than an ingredient - it is a pillar of food security, biodiversity, and rural economies across the 21-country shea belt, home to more than 16 million women collectors and processors. Beyond the global market, shea trees provide food, fodder, and income, forming a safety net for some of the most climate-vulnerable communities in West Africa. Each year, however, an estimated 8 million shea trees are cut down for fuelwood, land clearing, and charcoal production. This widespread deforestation, combined with a lack of innovation in the sector, is reducing nut yields, which in turn reduces incomes for the women and communities who depend on shea. Without urgent intervention, the mounting pressure on the shea risks undermining both ecosystems and livelihoods across the belt.



The Ghana Shea Landscape Emission Reductions Project (GSLERP) is a large-scale conservation and climate initiative designed to protect shea parklands, restore degraded lands, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions across northern Ghana. It is part of Ghana’s wider commitment to climate action under the REDD+ framework (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation), which links forest conservation directly to climate finance and sustainable development.

- GSLERP focuses on:
- Restoring degraded shea parklands through nurseries, seed planting, and assisted natural regeneration.
 - Reducing deforestation and emissions by promoting alternative fuels (like recycled shea cake) and efficient processing technologies.
 - Conserving biodiversity in fragile savannah ecosystems where shea trees play a central role in maintaining food systems and habitats.
 - Improving rural livelihoods by creating jobs in restoration, training communities in sustainable land management, and securing more reliable nut yields for women producers.



3 Climate Resilient Warehouses Constructed

138,929 Shea Seedlings raised and planted

19,994 Non-shea seedlings raised and planted

6 Community Nurseries

HLO – Henry Lamotte Green Roaster Project

Traditional shea roasting in northern Ghana has always been one of the most difficult and polluting steps in production. Women stand for hours over open fires, exposed to heavy smoke, consuming large amounts of firewood, and producing uneven results that can affect the quality of butter for export. The problem was never invisible; it was clear in every cooperative we worked with. The real challenge was finding a solution that matched the context: technology that reduced emissions and strain without being too complex, or disconnected from realities at source.

The result was the installation of four new-generation roasters and a motor at the Jakpahi cooperative. Traditionally, roasting shea kernels meant hours of standing over open fires, consuming large amounts of firewood, and inhaling thick smoke that damaged health while producing uneven batches. The new Burn Design Lab roasters change that reality. They reduce firewood use by up to 90%, cut harmful smoke emissions (PM_{2.5}) by about 70%, and deliver more than double the thermal efficiency of traditional rotating roasters. What once took hours can now be completed in a fraction of the time, with roasts that are cleaner, more uniform, and consistently export-grade. For women processors, this means no more standing in smoke-filled huts and far less physical strain; for the cooperative, it means higher throughput, lower fuel costs, and a stronger, more reliable position in the supply chain.



90% REDUCTION IN
FIREWOOD
CONSUMPTION



Econobio II Project – Jomoro Coconut Center Launch

In 2024, we completed and launched the Jomoro Community-Managed Virgin Organic Coconut Oil Processing Center in Edobo, Western Ghana. With the capacity to process 192,000 coconuts per month and produce 100 metric tons of organic oil annually, this facility anchors a new economic opportunity in the Western Region: one where value creation stays in communities, and every coconut harvested strengthens both livelihoods and conservation.

The center is embedded in the Ankasa-Tano CREMA (Community Resource Management Area), which unites 12 local communities around a shared vision: protecting the Ankasa-Tano forest and its endangered species - including the critically threatened Roloway monkey - while promoting sustainable development. CREMAs are unique in Ghana because they give communities legal recognition to manage natural resources collectively. For families in Jomoro, this means that the same communities producing coconut oil are also the ones patrolling forests, planting trees, and defending their biodiversity. Their economies and their ecosystems are bound together.

This project makes that link visible and financial. For every coconut processed at the center, SFC pays 5 pesewas into a Conservation Fund managed by the CREMA. That fund now supports forest patrols, reforestation, camera trapping, and biodiversity monitoring, ensuring that the trade of coconuts directly finances conservation. The €112,000 construction, financed by the Sofi Tucker Foundation with AFD support, provided not just warehouses, processing units, and packaging facilities, but also offices, conference rooms, water supply, and sanitation for the workers, reinforcing dignity and stability at the workplace.

For the communities, the impact is immediate: women and youth now have reliable jobs year-round, cooperative members see predictable incomes, and the CREMA has resources to scale its conservation work.



When communities lead, conservation is not a cost , it becomes the engine that sustains livelihoods and opens global markets

The Jomoro Coconut Center is not an isolated investment. It is part of our vision to expand innovations tested in shea into more communities across the continent: community-managed infrastructure, cooperative ownership, conservation-linked value chains, and verified sustainability that global buyers can trust. In a world where demand for natural products is rising, we are showing that African communities do not have to lose their resources to participate – they can lead, protect, and benefit from them while shaping the story told on the global stage.



A \$15 MILLION SCALE UP : BUILDING A BLUEPRINT THAT PROTECTS 16 MILLION WOMEN & 8 MILLION TREES

We need to continue our work with communities at source so they are not left behind tomorrow, but fully prepared to own, lead, and benefit from the future of the shea industry — ensuring it does not follow other commodities that have been stripped from their custodians and pushed to the brink of extinction

This report is both a reflection and an invitation. A reflection of how far we have come since 2006. And an invitation to all who read it - partners, clients, communities, and consumers - to join us in building a not a different model, but a blueprint that should have existed from the very beginning.

THANK YOU

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