



PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF SHEA PRODUCTION AMONG RURAL HOUSEHOLDS IN GBAKO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF NIGER STATE.

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ABSTRACT

The study focuses on the problems and prospects of Shea production among rural households in Gbako Local Government Area of Niger state. Forty-five (45) respondents were purposively selected and administered questionnaires. Data were analyzed using mainly descriptive statistics. The results of the analysis revealed that shea business is mostly a household business carried out by the women folks who mostly lack modern education and having an average family size of 8 members. They mostly depend on their traditional mode of technology in shea business. Shea nut trading and processing, and shea butter trading and butter processing are the major shea businesses in the area. Problems associated with shea enterprises in the area include long gestation period of shea tree, snake/ scorpion bite, lack of credit support services, poor processing equipment, and lack of standard measures among others. It was recommended that shea nut collectors and processors should be sensitized to form cooperative societies to be able to pool resources together to adopt superior handling and processing methods.

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Shea (*Vitellaria paradoxa*) generally grows wild and has the shea fruit, when it is ripe, falls off the tree and it is then collected and either boiled or roasted to extract the nut from the fruit. Similarly, shea nut is a seed obtained from shea butter tree. One important agribusiness activity of the rural women is shea nut collection, processing and marketing.

Shea-nut has been exported from West Africa as well as East Africa to Europe since 18th century. According to FAO statistics (1999), Nigeria produced 372,000 metric tons of shea nuts representing 57.1% of the world total. However, the country's exports of shea nuts for that year amounted to only 880 metric tons, far below graduation capacity. Shea butter trees grow wild in the wet savanna area in the northern and southern guinea zones and the dry savanna of the sudan zone. In Nigeria today, the trees grow in an externally wide area of Niger, Nassarawa, Kebbi, Kwara, Kogi, Oyo, Ondo, Katsina, Kaduna, Adamawa, Taraba, Borno and Sokoto State. Niger state rank first in terms of density and distribution of shea butter trees (FAO, 1999).

Nuts collection over the last two (2) seasons in Niger state amounted to less than half of nut processing, suggesting that collectors do not fully utilize these resources for processing into shea butter. Shea butter is an edible oil for many rural women. It also has anti-microbial properties which gives it a place in herbal medicines. It is also used in the pharmaceutical and cosmetic industries as an important raw materials and/or a precursor for the manufacture of soap (saponification process), candles and cosmetics. Furthermore, shea butter oil is used as sedative or anodyne for the treatment of sprains, dislocation, pains, an anti-microbial agent for promotion of rapid healing of wounds, for lubricating pans used in making bread as well as a lubricant for donkey carts.

Shea plays an important role in local economies in West Africa and central sub-sahara Africa for centuries. Hall *et al.* (1996) reported that "the indigenous people trade it, they eat it and rub their body with the oil (butter), they also burn it (oil) to make light. Traditionally, shea trees is sacred to many ethnic group and play an important role in religion ceremonies (Millee, 1994).

Farmers extract a variety of non-timber products from forest to consume or to generate income, (including shea and its products) as they are important for food security, health, social and economic welfare of rural community (FAO, 1999). They provide a significant nutritional contribution especially during time of drought and famine and create more varied palatable and balance diets. A rural person also depends on forest for income and employment. More importantly, the collection, processing and marketing of shea nut is an important source of income to those engaged in it. However, shea collection and processing in the area is associated with the following problems: -

1. most of the nuts collected are left behind in the forest to decay due to inability to transport them to the village for either processing into butter or sales of the nut.
2. Due to non-availability of effective storage facilities, substantial percentage of nuts kept cannot be utilized for processing due to insect pest attack, and as a result of lack of information for effective storage.
3. Some of the nuts which are already infected by insect-pest are being utilized for processing by these women, which in turn leads to very low quality of the butter produced.

The above problems are attributed to several factors including low price of produce, inadequate processing equipment, small –scale operations of the entrepreneurs and lack of bargaining power. In addition, the low quality nature of Nigerian shea perhaps explains the relative low income generated by the shea

enterprise in Nigeria and Niger state in particular. So the questions that may emanate from this study are:

- i. What are the socio-economic characteristics of women engaged in the shea business?
- ii. What types of shea enterprises exist among women in the study area?
- iii. What problems are associated with the shea enterprises in the study area?

This study attempts to provide answer to these and other related questions by employing the following objectives:

- i. identify the socio-economic characteristic of women involved in shea enterprises;
- ii. examine the various shea enterprise that exists in the area; and
- iii. identify problems associated with shea enterprise.

METHODOLOGY

The study area consists mainly of some selected rural communities (localities) in Gbako Local Government Area of Niger State. Gbako Local Government Area has a population of One Hundred and twenty six thousand, eight hundred and forty five (126,845) people (N.P.C., 2006). The study used primary data collected by purposively sampling of forty five (45) women from 9 communities who are in shea enterprise. The information collected bordered on socio-economic profiles of respondents, types of shea enterprise, prices of inputs and output as well as problems associated with shea enterprises. Structured questionnaires were used to collect the Data. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data. These are presented explicitly as: descriptive statistics which include averages, percentages, tabulation and frequency distribution.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-economic Characteristics of shea Enterprise Respondents:

Socio-economic factors play key roles in shaping the level of agricultural production, productivity and agribusiness. Shea enterprises especially in the rural communities are meant to improve the standard of the entrepreneurs apart from serving as the main source of employment to the women folks. This can be achieved with availability of infrastructural facilities and proper planning by the relevant authorities. The socio-economic characteristics of the respondent considered include age, family size, educational standard, gender and marital status.

The gender distribution of the respondents is presented in Table 1. The result revealed that all the respondents (100%) were females. This is contrary to the belief that women are not to go out for any socio-economic/socio-cultural activities but are to remain at home especially women in purdah. This indicates that shea business is essentially an activity carried out by the women folk. When men go out to cultivate the soil for crop production/Animal domestication, women also go out to either pick or process shea

nut as their own economic activity. The age distribution of respondents is also presented in table 1. Age is particularly important considering the tedious nature of manual labour employed in shea enterprise especially processing. The result revealed that majority of the respondents (46.67%) were between the ages of 21 – 30years, while the classes of 31 – 40, 41 – 50 and above 50years of age were above 50 years. This indicates that most of the shea enterprises in the local government area (LGA) were in their active ages. Shea business (whether shea nut picking, shea processing or shea oil/nut trading) is very tedious and involves energy sapping activities hence the need for young, agile, able bodies and healthy women for its production. This finding corroborates with Mohammed (2010).

Table 1 also shows the distribution of respondents based on their family size. The result shows that majority of the respondents had family size of between 6 – 10 persons, which constituted 33.33% of the total respondents under study. The result also indicated that the family size of 1 – 5 persons account for 26.67% of the total respondents. Under the small scale and medium enterprises, much reliance is often placed on the strength of the family to supply the much needed farm/business labour in the absence of mechanical equipment. The larger the family size, the higher the supply of family labour, though this is contrary to the findings of Ndanitsa (2005) where he submitted that large family size drain most of the capital resources into consumption needs instead of going into savings and investments to earn higher future incomes.

Education is important amongst the entrepreneurs in the shea business because it enables them adopt improved processing, storage practices and innovation for improved productivity and an important tool for successful implementation of innovation (Roger and shoemaker, 1971; and Obubuaku, 1983). The level of education of the respondents is shown also in Table 1. It can be deduced that majority (88.89%) of the respondents had access to Qur'anic education, followed by adult and primary education with 4.44% each. Similarly 2.23% had secondary education and none had tertiary education.

Table1 again, gives the respondents distribution according to their marital status. It shows that 68.89% of respondents in the study area were married couples, and only 6.67% were single. Married couples with large family size may have large supply of labour to work on the farm and this may increase the size or scale of the business.

TYPES OF SHEA ENTERPRISE

Four main enterprises in shea business were discovered based on the findings in the study area, and these enterprises were as a result of the advantage of modern (motorized mills) processing methods over traditional methods of production; reducing the effort and saving time, and thereby increasing the yield.



Generally, Table 2 reveals that four major enterprises are common in the study area, namely sheanuts trading, shea nuts processing, shea butter trading and shea butter processing. The most important enterprise is shea nuts processing which accounts for 35.56% and this followed by shea butter processing. More often than not, 22.22% and 11.11% of the respondents are engaged in shea butter trading and shea nuts trading respectively. The preference for sheanuts processing according to the entrepreneurs was because it has a high returns than other enterprises and is also less laborious.

Shea nut/shear butter enterprise marketing channels

The shea nut and shea butter traders would be treated as one because the channels of marketing are the same i.e. a typical trader engages in both commodities. However, the shea nut and shea butter traders can be grouped into two main categories: The Rural Bulking Agents

and large/major Bulking Agents. Rural bulking agents are the local traders that obtain their supplies directly from the shea seed pickers/processors and the local butter processors and also buy the processed butter in large quantities. These enterprises are located within the same localities as the shea nut processors and the traditional shea butter extractors.

The large/major bulking agents on the other hand are enterprises fed by the local bulking agents. They are generally operated by men with large capital outlays (usually above N5,000,000). Each agent operates independently. These enterprises are the major suppliers of shea nuts to the mechanical extractors and exporting companies and shea butter to the exporting and cosmetic industries. The mechanical processors buy nuts from the major bulking agents for as high as N40,000.00 per tonne when demand is high. The price may fall to N16,000 per tonne when demand is low.

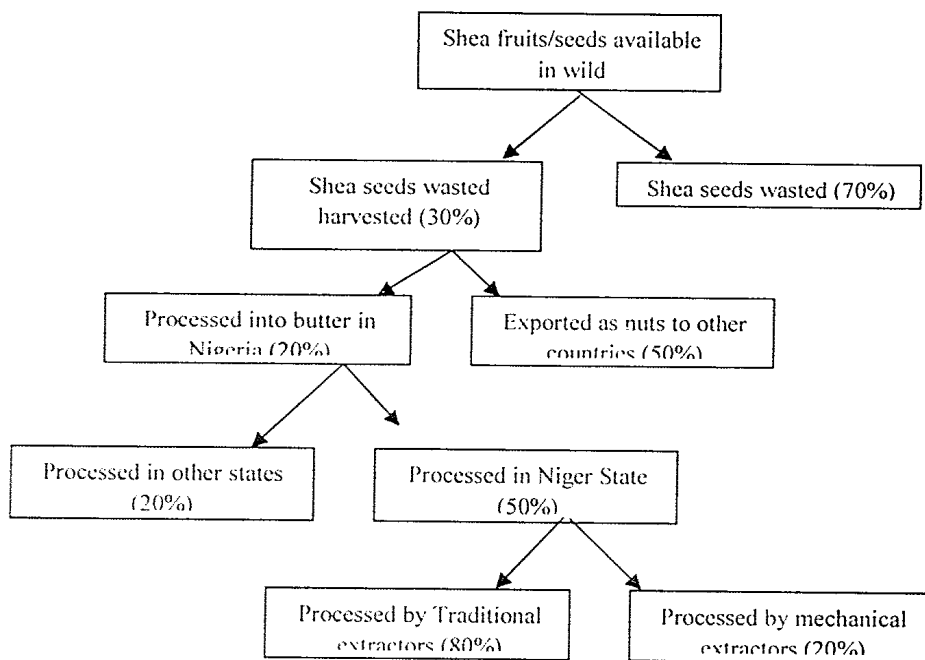


Figure 1: Estimated picture of shea market chain/channel.

Figure 1 shows the estimated picture of shea marketing chain/channel in the study area. The major importing countries of shea nuts/shear butter include Vietnam, Singapore and India.

Problems of Shea Production/Enterprises

The development of shea industry in Niger State and Nigeria is constrained with a magnitude of problems. These include:

1. **The long gestation period of the tree:-** Shea trees are known to fruit in the wild after 16 – 20 years of vegetative growth. This affects efforts of domesticating the tree for systematic cultivation as the long period is very unattractive to farmers. Shea exhibits a cyclical yield pattern that spans over 3 to 5 years and thereby makes the supply base of shea nut unstable.

2. **Problem of Snake bite:-** Many shea nut collectors in the area have died of snake/scorpion poison. The hazard of shea nut collection include scorpion and snake bite especially beyond the cultivated area.

3. **Lack of Credit Support:-** Credit institutions are lacking in the study area and even where they exists, hardly extends credits to shea enterprises. Recent observation shows that there is always considerable delay in nuts picking, resulting in collection of sprouted nuts. These sprouted nuts when processed produced poor quality butter which fetches poor returns. The processors spend a lot of time in visiting credit institutions at expense of working on their farm(s), hence jeopardizing the confidence of the

processors in applying for credits (Lumbwama, 2004).

4. **Poor processing equipment** (use of traditional technology)

Methods of butter processing differ from community to community. This affects the quality of butter and processed nuts, as some communities have poor storage facilities resulting in processing badly stored (geminating) nuts which when processed produced butter of high free fatty acid unsuitable for industrial use. Similarly, more widespread of the post harvest technology seem to be hampered by its energy requirement. Most available shea nut processing machines are driven by petrol, diesel or electrical energy and for most of the rural households in the study area, these are scarce and expensive energy source (Ugwu, 1996).

5. **Lack of standardized measurements:** This makes the assessment of efficiency of the market system extremely difficult if not impossible

6. **Absence of reliable data base for planning programmes of support:** The planned support by some agencies known as Business Support Development Project (BSDPs) in the state such as the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), One Local Government One Product (OLOP) has had some set back as a result of poor data base on production/marketing activities in the area.

7. **Frequent Cutting of branches of trees for charcoal production and fire wood:** Charcoal produced from shea tree wood is of high quality and in great demand. Cooking with fire wood of shea is also a delight to women as the wood burns longer and perfectly with little or no smoke (Okolo and Okolo, 2008).

8. **Transportation difficulties:** Typically, processors transport shea butter as head loads, on bicycles and lorries. This always becomes difficult because of bulky nature, especially unprocessed nuts and more importantly during rainy season.

9. **Annual Bush Fires:** Being a savannah plant, it is common to have bush fires during the dry season. Although, the tree naturally has adapted to this ecological rhythm through the development of thick deeply fissured trunk bark, its coppicing ability is relatively poor

CONCLUSION

Shea nut collection, processing and trading in Niger state of Nigeria is presently more or less a marginal economic activity. Infact, a good proportion of the nuts (75%) are not even collected but left in the wild because of disappointing returns associated with the activity. Similarly, its cultivation through land as well as through artificial propagation like Biotechnology is also uncommon. Nevertheless, there are good international market opportunities for shea products. What is required is appropriate handling and processing of the product and a more efficient marketing system. These can be achieved through sensitization and mobilization of collectors and processors towards adapting

superior handling and processing methods, and to organize them into cooperative societies to enable them pool their resources together for better performance. Organizing the collectors and processors into cooperatives has the potential of turning this economic activity of shea enterprises into a major strategy for poverty alleviation and youth employment/empowerment, which could contribute significantly towards the achievement of the present state administration vision 2020

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**Table 1: socio- Economic Characteristics of respondent.**

S/No.	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
	Gender Distribution of respondent		
	Female	45	100.00
	Male	0	0.00
	Total	45	100.00
	Age distribution of respondents age group		
	10 – 20 years	3	6.67
	21 – 30 years	21	46.67
	31 – 40 years	12	26.66
	41 – 50 years	8	17.78
	Above 50 years	1	2.22
	Total	45	100.00
	Educational status of respondents educational level		
	Quranic education	40	88.79
	Adult education	2	4.44
	Primary education	2	4.44
	Secondary education 1	2,23	
	Total	45	100.00
	Marital status of respondent		
	Single	3	6.67
	Married	31	68.89
	Divorced	1	2.22
	Widower	10	22.22
	Total	45	100.00
	Family size of respondents		
	Family size		
	1 – 5	12	26.67
	6 – 10	15	33.33
	11 – 15	11	24.44
	16 – 20	4	8.89
	21 – 25	3	6.67
	Total	45	100.00
	Average family size	8	
	Standard deviation	4.7	
	Source: field swage		

Table 2: Types of shea enterprise in the area

	Shea nuts trading	5	11.11
	Shea nuts processing	16	35.65
	Shea butter trading	10	22.22
	Shea butter processing	14	31.11
	Total	45	100.00

Source: Field survey, 2010.