

Shea is not cultivated; it grows wild in Africa



“The Shea Belt”

Vitellaria paradoxa, commonly known as the shea or shi tree, is indigenous to the West African savanna belt, which extends from Senegal to Uganda. It was created by bats.

Agroforestry system

- No plantations; Shea trees grow naturally in parkland or mixed farming systems.
- No active use of fertilizers or pesticides
- No deforestation or land conversion.
- The trees combat desertification and the spread of the Sahara.



It is a traditional African food plant

The tree

- It starts bearing fruit after 15-20 years.
- It takes 40-50 years to reach maximum fruit production.
- Can live up to 300 years.



The fruit

- The fruit is edible, about 4 cm long.
- It comprises a thin, tart, nutritious pulp surrounding a relatively large, oil-rich kernel.
- Each tree produces around 20 kg of fruit.
- It takes about 5 months for the fruit to ripen, and they fall from the tree when they are ripe.



The kernel

- Each tree yields 10-15 kg of kernels.
- The kernels contain approximately 50% oil, known as Shea butter
- About 55% of the crop is exported
- The personal care segment represents 10-15% of shea exports, whereas the confectionary industry drives the majority (approximately 85%) of the shea market.

Shea empowers women and local communities

The collection

- Women gather kernels in the bush and parklands.
- They are collected, not picked.
- The farmland is owned by men, and women collect kernels on their fields
- Manual collection methods have minimal impacts on soil and biodiversity.
- An estimated 50-75% of kernels may not be collected.



The “Green Gold”

- Shea is providing a source of oil for local communities
- About 16 million rural women rely on the seasonal collection and sale of shea kernels
- Shea income supports family expenses (other farming activities, health, and education) and gender equality

The unique Kolo Nafaso program has become the biggest smallholder program of its kind

