



A Dream Come True

Shea nut production in West Africa is more than a cash crop—it is an opportunity for women to cash in on their dreams and gain a sense of empowerment.

Gladys Sala Petey is an aspiring chef and entrepreneur. She dreams of one day opening her own restaurant. Unfortunately, Gladys lacks the money and resources needed to open even a one-room diner. As an Administrative Assistant for a women’s cooperative that harvests and processes shea nuts in Damongo, Ghana, she earns less than one dollar a day—hardly enough to support herself and her four children, let alone save any money to start a small business.

But what Petey lacks in financial wealth, she makes up for in ambition.



Women from the CMA gather for a training funded by the USADF grant.

In 2009, Petey and the 1,500-plus shea nut harvesters cooperative, called the Christian Mothers Association (CMA), applied for a USADF grant (No. 2043). The grant would provide funds to renovate their office, improve production quality and capacity, and improve the safety of their operations.

Harvesting and processing shea nuts is a long, labor intensive activity. Once processed and refined the shea nut is used for a variety of purposes; most commonly, a vitamin-enriched, butter-like substance is extracted from the nuts to use as cooking oil or lotion. The extraction process that produces shea butter involves a number of steps from cracking the nut, to grinding, roasting and “cooking” a shea paste to separate the oil that eventually becomes shea butter. The USADF grant helped CMA get the training and organizational structures needed to produce a higher quality, more profitable and consistent grade of shea butter.

Currently the international demand for shea-butter based cosmetics is growing. Although CMA does not refine the extracted shea butter to a cosmetic grade it is able to sell its products to local value-add producers that in turn market to international distributors. Naaskle Limited is a Ghanaian company that buys product from CMA. Naaskle Limited was also a recipient of a USADF grant (No. 1971) used to increase its marketing and raise its production capabilities to make and distribute African-produced shea products that are competitive with global standards.

This improved African supply chain brings women, like Petey, one step closer to making their dreams a reality. Petey has more than doubled her income, now making over 70 dollars a month. She is now on her way to opening a restaurant—one nut at a time. For more information on the production of shea butter, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-dl1617h7I>.

USADF is an independent United States Government Agency dedicated to helping Africa's most marginalized and underserved populations. USADF partners with African led and managed groups to address social issues and increase economic growth. To learn more about this grant and other USADF projects, visit www.usadf.gov.