



SHEA SHE(A) IS A HERO! HERO!

In the ever-evolving cosmetic landscape, one ingredient has steadily gained prominence for its nourishing benefits and naturalness: shea butter. However, ethical sourcing of shea remains a challenge as millions of African women and their families depend on the industry for a living. A new project by Bremen-based oil supplier Henry Lamotte Oils focuses on ethical shea sourcing – improving the lives of African women while helping cosmetic companies achieve their sustainability goals.

Media, influencers, beauticians: Shea is on everyone's lips – as well as hands, hair and other parts of the body – as it is turning into a beauty must-have. With approximately 800.000 tonnes collected each year, the global demand for shea has significantly grown.¹ Shea butter's popularity in cosmetics can be attributed to its exceptional moisturising, nourishing and healing properties. It is rich in vitamin A, E, F comes with a high proportion of unsaponifiable matter and contains anti-inflammatory triterpene alcohols.

Incorporating shea butter into cosmetic formulations can give brands a competitive edge, as it aligns with consumer preferences for authentic and natural products. At the same time production of shea butter – as with any other ingre-

dient – does not come without an impact on people and the environment. Therefore, sourcing should involve more than just buying traceable products. It should be about working towards social and environmental good.

THE CHALLENGE: MEET THE SHEA DEMAND WHILE PRESERVING PEOPLE AND NATURE

Nearly two billion shea trees grow naturally across 21 African countries, from Senegal to South Sudan.¹ But only 7 countries produce shea commercially.

At the heart of the industry: 16 million African women who provide a livelihood and future for their families.¹ They collect shea nuts in the wild for processing. When it



These new shea nut roasters can primarily use shea cake for fuel, reducing the reliance on firewood.



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comes to handcrafted shea butter, roasting the shea nut is part of the process. However, roasting shea nuts over an open fire releases particulate matter and CO₂, which does not only harm the environment but also the women's health. To reduce the environmental impact of shea roasting and improve the women's lives, Henry Lamotte Oils has initiated a new project in partnership with The Savannah Fruits Company. The Ghana-based company focuses on the sustainable production and export of high quality, community processed natural products.

THE SOLUTION: NEW ROASTERS

At the heart of the project, the Jakpahi Cooperative in Ghana was equipped with four closed roasters for shea nuts – replacing conventional roasters that operate with open fire. The new roasters are designed to use shea cake as an energy source – an environmental friendlier option than firewood. Additionally, women no longer inhale smoke when roasting as the new roasters use a closed system. For optimal use, the women had to get used to the new machines and adjust their roasting habits accordingly. In order to facilitate this process, The Savannah Fruits Company is supporting the cooperative with regular trainings. The machines have been in use since July 2023 and so far have significantly improved health, safety and ecological conditions in shea butter production:

- Less health and safety risks for women: Up to 70% fine dust reduction
- Better protection of the environment: Up to 80% reduction in CO₂ emissions
- Less deforestation: Up to 90% less wood required
- Faster working: 50% increase in efficiency compared to traditional roasters



- ✓ moisturising, nourishing & healing properties
- ✓ rich in vitamins A, E, F
- ✓ rich in essential fatty acids
- ✓ offers deep hydration
- ✓ helps improve skin elasticity
- ✓ soothes irritation

Shea butter's popularity in cosmetics can be attributed to its moisturising, nourishing and healing properties.

photos: Henry Lamotte Oils

The women of the Jakpahi Cooperative are thrilled by the project. According to the 25-year-old worker, Fatima Mumuni, the new roasters are much easier to use. They require less effort and the workers don't suffer from smoke and heat exposure and it takes much less time roasting a batch of nuts.

Arishe Mushei, a founding member of the Malbigahinda Shea Processing Association, amends that the new roasters use less firewood. When they have shea cake, they usually don't even bother to get firewood. This saves them some cost and a lot of stress and risk. They used to go foraging in the bush for wood and were exposed to all kinds of dangers from poisonous reptiles, scorpions and snakes. Another part of the project: The cooperative was also equipped with a motorised tricycle, locally called a motorking, that provides women with fast and safe transportation on remote routes that would otherwise require them to walk. The peak shea nut collection season occurs during the rainy season in West Africa so having a motorking available makes these women's lives much easier so they can avoid muddy or flooded roads.

THE IMPACT: ECOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL BENEFITS FOR ALL STAKEHOLDERS

Projects like Henry Lamotte Oils' initiative demonstrate that sustainability goes beyond establishing provenance. The aim is to contribute to social and environmental good. This creates a win-win situation for local working women and cosmetics companies.

Local women work in safer and healthier conditions with fewer CO₂ emissions, while cosmetics companies can meet the growing consumer demand for sustainable and socially responsible products. By actively promoting sustainable sourcing and the advancement of women's living conditions, cosmetic brands can furthermore strengthen their brand reputation by gaining the trust of consumers.

But how do companies get involved in projects in the countries of origin of the raw materials they use? In the case of the Henry Lamotte Oils project, participation is simple. Companies are automatically involved when they purchase the "handcrafted shea" products, as ten cents per kilo purchased is invested in projects. Companies can also purchase their shea butter directly from the Jakpahi cooperative in Ghana to further support local value creation. Another option is to implement individual sustainability projects within the Jakpahi cooperative. These projects may include purchasing additional roasters, kneading machines, boiling stoves, storage rooms or toilets.

References:

- 1 Global Shea Alliance, <https://globalshea.com/>



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