

Finding hope in SHEA Production - A Community Transformation in Northern Uganda



Image 1: Above: Shea butter products produced by Sarah Achieng were showcased during the exhibition organized by the RUFORUM Secretariat during the visit by the Mastercard Foundation team.

Poor family background, early marriage, and gender-driven violence are some of the barriers women face in their pursuit of attaining higher education in Africa. After a two-decade Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) war that left many families homeless and besieged, Northern Uganda presents an opportunity in rebuilding its human development and infrastructure by skilling its youth and providing a better life for its farming communities. Amidst its many challenges, the region provides a geographical advantage for growing shea butter tree (*Vitellaria paradoxa*), an important oil-producing tree species that grows in the drier areas of Northern and North-Eastern Uganda.

Meet Achieng – from vulnerability to leading a cosmetics Agribusiness

Raised by a single parent – her mother, Achieng's story is that of resilience. Forced to drop out of school to support her family, Achieng volunteered at the community youth club to make ends meet. Her faith would later provide an opportunity to resume school when a good Samaritan in the community offered to support the completion of her undergraduate degree. Upon completion of her undergraduate studies in development studies and in hopes of better employment, Achieng still found herself with no job. Her zeal for a better life prompted her to apply for a RUFORUM scholarship under the Mastercard Foundation-TAGDev



Image 2: Sarah Achieng (Right) attending a TAGDev / Mastercard Foundation organized meeting on Sharing Lessons and opportunities at RUFORUM Secretariat last week.

program. Achieng was the only female student to secure a MasterCard Scholar opportunity from Northern Uganda in cohort three (3) recruitment. An opportunity she takes great pride in. Pursuing a master's degree in Agriculture Enterprises development at Gulu University, Achieng hopes to increase access to Organic Shea butter products both countrywide and for export. She believes that for transformation to happen and immensely benefit communities in Northern Uganda, shea butter production should be geographically positioned right from the tree growing to production. Achieng employs a group of women from production to processing and packaging which has greatly improved the livelihood of not just her family but also the families of the women she employs.

Addressing Climate Change Challenges

After the war with the LRA ended in 2006, people who had, for years, relied on food donations from the government and other charities entered the charcoal business. As a result, the demand for undisturbed forest land began to grow notes Caroline Ayugi in her [recent article](#) on increasing deforestation in Uganda. The Shea tree has enormous socio-cultural and economic importance to people living in its geographic area. Its leaves, stems, and roots bark are used in various traditional medicine to treat a variety of diseases and injuries including stomach aches, headaches, and fever among others. Besides providing employment and increasing awareness of the Shea butter benefits, Achieng hopes that her business working with the community will address the issue of climate by increasing shea tree planting and thereby reducing deforestation.

Value Addition

The butter extracted from the fruit is used locally as food and as a cosmetic product for the skin and hair. Working with women in her community, Achieng has produced organic shea butter for hair and body use. Taking care to ensure her products are certified and above quality standards, Achieng doesn't overlook the value of packaging which plays a critical role in exportation. Some of her products have accessed markets in Namibia, Sweden, Israel, and Somalia. Recent times have witnessed an increasingly commercial and industrial demand for shea products and Achieng hopes to expand her Shea butter production to ensure it is accessible both in Uganda and globally.

Note to Editors

About RUFORUM:

The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) is a consortium of 150 African universities operating in 38 countries on the continent with a mission to ‘strengthen the capacities of Universities to foster innovations responsive to demands of smallholder farmers through the training of high quality researchers, the output of impact oriented research and the maintenance of collaborative working relations among researchers, farmers, national agricultural research institutions’. RUFORUM was established by Vice Chancellors in 2004 with a Secretariat hosted at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda. In 2014 RUFORUM signed a MoU with the African Union Commission to support implementation of the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA 2024) Priority One on reducing poverty and ensuring food and nutrition security. RUFORUM has supported the training of 2053 MSc, 627 PhD graduates and 229 BSc, of whom 98% work in their countries or region, the generation of over 300 agricultural technologies and mobilized over US\$236.3 million for strengthening postgraduate education in Africa. Please visit www.ruforum.org for more information

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