

Market orientation *CBI's Gender transformative project in Benin's Shea Sector*

Project and IUC reference: 202410190

Organisation: Centre for the promotion of Imports from developing countries (CBI),
The Netherlands Enterprise Agency, Ministry of Economic Affairs

About CBI

The Centre for the Promotion of Imports from Developing countries (CBI) is part of the Netherlands Enterprise Agency and is commissioned by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. CBI connects small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in developing countries to the European market and this way it contributes to sustainable and inclusive economic growth. CBI offers export coaching programmes for SMEs, involves the export enabling environment (e.g., business support organizations, governments) to improve their services for exporters and publishes every year over 250 market studies. Programmes are customized to the local situation, tackling those issues that impede export to Europe. CBI operates in over 30 countries and in 14 sectors.

The Netherlands Enterprise Agency (in Dutch: Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland, RVO) supports private and public organizations with funding, international business partners, knowledge, and regulations. More information about RVO can be found on: www.rvo.nl and <http://english.rvo.nl/>.

Purpose of the notification

To implement the below described deliverables for an inception phase, CBI is looking for a contractor with knowledge and experience in gender transformation, shea sector and systemic change in Benin. The purpose of the market consultation is: to select 3 to 5 qualified and experienced parties who are interested in submitting an offer for the inception phase of the CBI Gender Transformative program in the shea butter and end-product sector in Benin.

Extent and duration

The project will run from March 2025 until March 2026.

Budget indication

The maximum budget is € 100.000 excluding Dutch VAT and (if applicable) including local foreign VAT and all other costs and/or fees.

Purpose of the project

This project will identify and optimize business models in Benin's shea butter and end products industry that enhance the socio-economic status of women, by addressing the systemic barriers that limit their benefits from this industry. The focus will be on women groups that collect shea nuts and process shea butter and women working in (M)SME's that export shea butter (and other products) on domestic, regional and international markets.

The project will be gender transformative. The overall purpose is that women in Benin's shea butter and end products sector benefit equitably from production and export activities.

Goals and deliverables

The goal of this project is to achieve the deliverables mentioned below. It entails an inception phase.

Project approach and solution pathways

The project is structured around two solution pathways, each addressing different sets of the root causes identified that result in unequal benefits for women in the shea sector.

Pathway 1. Sustainable and inclusive business models

This pathway aims to address the root causes underpinning the fact that women receive low incomes and have poor working conditions, despite their significant contribution in shea collection and processing. These root causes are:

- Women work in this sector out of necessity and alongside other activities, and this is often exploited. The sector's informal and seasonal nature reinforces their marginalized status, hindering progress toward professionalization and improved working conditions.
- Opportunities for differentiation among shea butter exporters are scarce, limiting their access to higher-value markets. Consequently, even exporters with good intentions find it challenging to improve conditions for their female workers.
- The shea industry in Benin remains underdeveloped, with instability and unpredictability prevalent in the value chain. This creates a disincentive for investment and emphasis on quality.

In order to address these issues, this pathway focuses on supporting Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) in Benin's shea sector in developing sustainable and inclusive business models that provide more equitable benefits for women at the base of the chain. To do so, the project will:

- Provide tailor-made support to the various MSMEs in the sector. A distinction will be made between shea butter exporting SMEs that target the EU market, and MSMEs who make shea end products and target a variety of markets.
 - *Shea butter exporting SMEs* will:
 - Receive support to meet EU buyer requirements, focusing on high-value markets. Research will be conducted on the opportunities on high value markets, and support will be targeted accordingly: ensuring the SMEs have everything in place from traceability to certification.
 - Receive support to establish durable relationships with EU buyers.
 - *Shea butter end-product MSMEs* will:
 - Receive support to diversify and stabilize their markets. Research will be conducted to identify promising opportunities on the domestic and regional markets, and support will be targeted accordingly: providing MSMEs with the information and support needed to adjust their business models so that they are able to access the markets identified with their products. By stabilizing their market position, the aim is to enable these to engage in more stable sourcing relations with their female suppliers.
 - *In order to supply these markets consistently, these companies* will:
 - Receive support in order to have structured and well-functioning relationships with their female suppliers, and to invest in improving their capacities. This starts with raising awareness among these companies about the importance and benefits of improving the economic and working conditions of their female suppliers, followed by support in how to structure these relations.
- The aim is to test which business models are effective and enable the companies to improve their market position and thereby improve the position of their female suppliers. The objective, through these business models, is to achieve a situation in which women suppliers have stable agreements for the supply of their shea, covering price and occupational health and safety aspects.
 - Best practices will be documented and disseminated via the sector association IKB. The aim is not only to inspire others in the sector, but to also showcase best practices internationally (e.g. via the Global Shea Alliance), in order to also build a positive reputation of Benin as a shea supplier.
 - In addition, conversations will be initiated with IKB regarding the possible development of guiding principles regarding the relationship between female suppliers and their buyers. These could cover aspects such as the minimum requirements regarding working conditions, and the need to reach and mutually respect a formal agreement.
- Based on the findings regarding the different business models that will be tested, work on developing the necessary service provision will be initiated. This will include:

- A service needs assessment among companies implementing sustainable and inclusive business models.
- Support to public and private service providers to develop the needed services.

Pathway 2. Empowering women in higher-value chain segments

This pathway aims to address the root causes underpinning the fact that women are underrepresented in the lucrative parts of the shea value chain in Benin. These root causes are:

- Women who engage in shea collection and processing often possess minimal formal education, which can be a barrier to advancement. Women's groups and cooperatives in the sector have weak capacities and have limited influence. Trainings on production practices/quality need to be repeated annually. This cycle limits opportunities for these women to progress and directly market their products.
- Advancing to more profitable parts of the value chain requires access to capital, market knowledge, and business connections. Systemic obstacles such as difficult access to financing for women and a lack of female business role models make it challenging for aspiring women entrepreneurs to break into these areas, and once there, limits their ability to scale and grow.

In order to address these issues, this pathway focuses on facilitating the advancement of women in the shea value chain. To do so the project will:

- Provide support to *women-led (M)SMEs in the shea sector*, addressing their specific needs.
 - Research will be conducted to get clear insight into the obstacles they encounter as female entrepreneurs in this sector, and support will be tailored accordingly, wherever possible working through existing organizations and service providers in Benin.
 - The women-led (M)SMEs will furthermore receive the same support as the broader group of shea end product (M)SMEs (pathway 1), in diversifying and solidifying their market position, while also improving the position of their female suppliers.
 - The aim will be to assess to what extent empowering women-led (M)SMEs to grow enables them to also lead in best practices for more equitable benefits for women at the base of the chain.
 - Best practices will be documented and disseminated via IKB, in order to showcase role models for female advancement in the sector, and inspire other women.
- Facilitate *exchange and on the job learning opportunities for women producers and artisanal processors* at MSMEs.
 - The aim is to create exposure among women producers and artisanal processors to the activities in the subsequent nodes of the shea value chain. By facilitating exchange and on the job learning opportunities for these women, the aim is to inspire them and enable them to use the inspiration and insights gained to work towards diversifying their own activities and improving their position in the chain.
 - Best practices will be documented and disseminated via IKB, in order to showcase role models for female advancement in the sector, and inspire other women.
- Based on the findings regarding the opportunities for female advancement in the chain, work on developing the necessary service provision will be initiated. An assessment will be conducted to identify the service and support needed to sustain female empowerment in the sector, and support will be provided to enable public and private service providers to develop the needed services.

Key project partners

In order to achieve sustainable results, we have at this stage identified the following project partners:

- **IKB:** as the sector association, they will play a key role in the project. IKB is the foreseen partner who will aid in the collection and dissemination of best practices. They will likely also play a role in ensuring the services needed in the sector are available.
- **FNPK:** as representative of the female producers in the shea sector, their role will also be crucial for the project. We will support them in their advocacy efforts to improve the position of female producers in the sector. We aim to also engage both IKB and FNPK in

the development of guiding principles governing the relationship between female suppliers and their buyers.

- **APIEx:** as the export promotion agency of Benin, they will be a partner in the project in all export-related activities. The project seeks to support MSMEs targeting a variety of markets, and will seek partnership with APIEx in the efforts to guide and inform the companies regarding the right opportunities.

During the inception phase the involvement of these partners and possible others will be further evaluated.

Deliverables

A) The following results need to be achieved during the assignment:

Provide an overview of the lessons learned of (value chain) analyses, studies and previous donor projects that focused on improving the position of women in the shea sector of Benin. **Based on a desk study:**

- be brief on the set up of former studies or donor funded projects.
- focus on the failures, successes and lessons learned.
- advise what CBI should do differently.
- period between 2018-2024.

Deadline before 31 May, 2025

B) Identify a minimum of 15-20 SMEs for a mini business export coaching trajectory (time frame for activities and training: Q2/4 2025). Focus on SMEs that have the potential to prepare for export.

A distinction will be made between (1) shea butter exporting SMEs that target the EU market, and (2) MSMEs who make shea end products and target local and regional markets and (3) women-led MSMEs in the shea sector. In all 3 categories at least 5 MSMEs should be identified and selected for training.

1. Shea butter exporting SMEs (pathway 1):

- Design and implement a training program on how to meet EU buyer requirements, focusing on high-value markets. Ensuring the SMEs have everything in place from quality, traceability to certification.
- Do research on the opportunities on high value markets, and support will be targeted accordingly.
- Provide support in order for the SMEs to have structured and well-functioning relationships with their female suppliers, and to invest in improving their capacities.

2. Shea butter end-product MSMEs (pathway 1):

- Design and implement a training program for MSMEs on how to diversify and stabilize their markets.
- Do research on promising opportunities on the domestic and regional markets, and support will be targeted accordingly: providing MSMEs with the information and support needed to adjust their business models.
- Training on awareness raising of the MSMEs to understand the importance and benefits of improving economic and working conditions of their female suppliers.
- Provide support in order to have structured and well-functioning relationships with their female suppliers, and to invest in improving their capacities. By stabilizing their market position, the aim is to enable these to engage in more stable sourcing relations with their female suppliers.

3. Women-led MSMEs in the shea sector (pathway 2)

- Design and implement a training program for MSMEs on how to diversify and stabilize their markets. Do research on promising opportunities on the domestic and regional markets,

and support will be targeted accordingly: providing MSMEs with the information and support needed to adjust their business models. Diversifying and solidifying their market position, while also improving the position of their female suppliers.

- Based on the training do additional research in understanding obstacles this group encounters as female entrepreneurs in the sector, and support will be tailored accordingly, wherever possible working through existing organizations and service providers in Benin. This should be based on how the women do business, based on observation of these women during the training, how they absorb training material, based on the challenges they experience doing business on a daily base.

The aim is to test which business models are effective and enable the companies to improve their market position and thereby improve the position of their female suppliers. The objective, through these business models, is to achieve a situation in which women suppliers have stable agreements for the supply of their shea, covering price and occupational health and safety aspects.

Requirements

- Design and implement a business export coaching program for a period of 6 to 7 months (Q2-4 2025)
- If relevant, involve institutional partners that are key for the project.

Deadline before 30 November, 2025

- C) Analyze the participating SMEs (an institutional partners) during training, advice regarding the lessons learned, failures and what worked well.** This should be done according to 'learn by doing'. Not just an advise, but according to these trainings, how were participants able to absorb the training material, what challenges do they face on a daily base, and based on that what are root causes for the position of women in the MSMEs and the women groups that collect the shea nuts or produce shea butter.

Requirements

- Report on the activities of deliverable B.
- Identify and select 4-5 SMEs (that represent all 3 categories) and create a blue print of their operations. Precise description of who is doing what (what roles and activities both men and women do in their organization). Positions, roles, contract forms (formal or informal) and so on in practice. Identify opportunities of gender issues in relations to (1) productivity of the SME / shea butter production, (2) or commercial interest of the SME. In any case, improvements that help an SME in their ambitions in selling their Shea products or improve production.
- Provide input for **the root cause analysis for pathway 1 and 2** and the addendum.
- Experience in analyzing a sector using methodologies aligned with systems change, such as Market Systems Development (MSD) approaches. **(Please include this experience in the "Relevant Experience" in your application).**
- **advise on an intervention strategy for the implementation** of the project (4 years).

Deadline before 5 January, 2026

- D) Make a stakeholder analysis of the export enabling environment.** Which government entities, sector associations, export promotion bodies, donor funded projects contribute to the shea sector. Central question is why these institutions are not able to solve the issues faced in terms of working conditions, business opportunities or working in more profitable parts of the shea value chain for women.

In other words, issues that lead to that women in Benin's shea sector not fully benefit from shea production and exports and are confronted with risks related to working conditions

Deadline before 5 February, 2026

In case you possess demonstrable experience in similar projects you are invited to express your interest to the contact person mentioned below.

Application

You can show your interest in this procurement procedure by sending an email to Michael Thoen, michael.thoen@rvo.nl, with your company details, confirmation of interest, and a response to the requested relevant experience and CV(s) of the proposed team member(s) who shall execute this assignment. The purpose of this market orientation is to identify interest of experts available and to assess their ability to carry out this assignment within the maximum budget.

Based on the market orientation, CBI can decide to start a procurement procedure. Interested companies/consultants can be invited to this procedure. Your response to this market orientation does not mean you have the right to be invited to this procurement procedure.

In case of a procurement procedure, no distinction will be made between parties that have or have not participated in the market orientation.

Name interested party:	
Name contact person and function:	
Phone number contact person:	
E-mail contact person:	
Visiting address:	
Mailing address:	
Can the party carry out the assignment within the maximum budget?	Yes / No
Relevant Experience	Please describe, based on your previous experiences, how your company is suitable to fulfill this assignment. (max 3A4*)
CV(s)	Please add the CV(s) of the proposed team member(s) including working location (max 3A4*)

* Please keep the maximum amount of A4 pages in mind. If your answer contains more than the indicated maximum, the excess will not be read.

Deadline

The deadline for responding to this market orientation is set at 19 December 2024.

Michael Thoen
Sr. Procurement Consultant

Procurement Office
Ministry of Economic Affairs
Netherlands Enterprise Agency