

CBI Gender transformative project in Benin shea sector

Pilot phase

Cooperative need assessment workshop

January 2026

Background	As part of the pilot phase of CBI gender-transformative project in Benin shea sector, a one-day workshop with the objective of identifying the real needs of the selected women's cooperatives was organized, in order to better guide and tailor future project interventions. The objectives of the session were to: - gain a clear understanding of how the cooperatives operate, including what works well, what does not, and potential areas for strengthening. - map the cooperatives' support partners and understand the scope and focus of their interventions. - assess women's decision-making power within household dynamics and gender relations. This report provides an overview of the activities implemented, keys takeaway participants' feedback and key lessons learned.
Date, place and participant	The cooperatives' needs assessment workshop was held on 18 December 2025 in Parakou, at the Soleil d'Afrique Hotel. The four invited cooperatives were each represented by three members, resulting in full cooperative attendance (4/4), with a total of 11 women out of the 12 expected. One participant from the Tchachou cooperative was unable to attend the workshop. On the institutional side, only the FNPk was able to join the session in order to validate the needs expressed by the cooperatives. The Ministry of Agriculture, specifically the Territorial Development Agency (ATDA 3), had also been invited but was not represented. In addition, the implementation of the activity benefited from external support provided by Hanath Ibrahima, particularly for translation into local languages, which helped ensure that all participants fully understood and actively engaged in the discussions.
Methods	Several actions were implemented to achieve the above-mentioned objectives. To ensure the effective representation of the four invited cooperatives, transportation support was provided in the form of a flat-rate allowance ranging from FCFA 10,000 to FCFA 13,000, depending on the distance from their place of origin. Tailored training materials were developed using simple and accessible language, considering the women's level of education and comprehension abilities. To support understanding and retention of key messages, visual materials based on color-coded symbols and icons were designed and printed (Annex 1). The facilitation approach was highly interactive and participatory, relying primarily on open-ended questions and discussions, without the slides. The needs assessment, which was the core objective of the session, was carried out in two stages and structured around four key questions: 1. How is the work organized? 2. What works well? 3. What does not work well? 4. What does it need to change ?

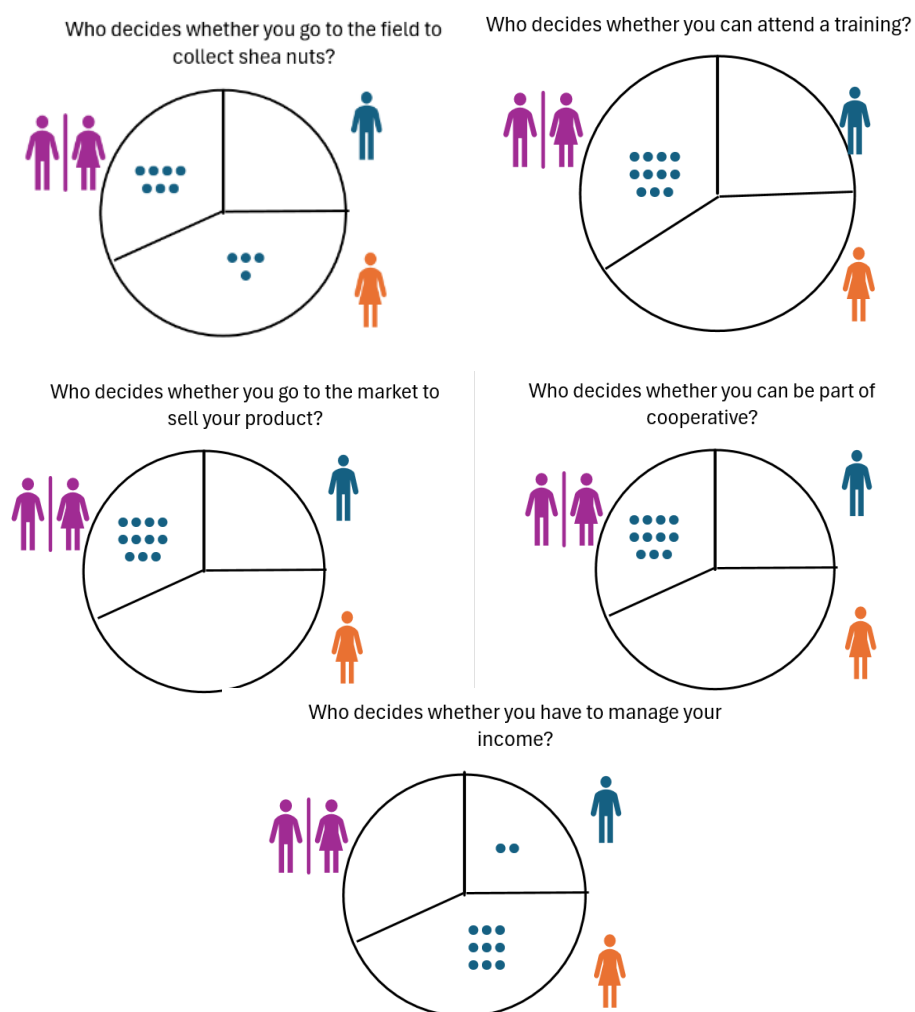
	In the first stage, the analysis was led by the women themselves through open discussions covering the entire value chain, from nut collection to marketing, including processing activities and cooperative management. The second stage consisted of validating the expressed needs with the National Shea Producers' Federation (FNPk). To ensure free and open expression by the women, the FNPk was invited to join the session only in the afternoon, from 3:00 p.m. onwards, so that its presence would not inhibit discussion or influence the initial analysis conducted by the participants. The full detail of the women cooperative need is appended in Annex 1 of this report.
Key takeaways	Women cooperative need <i>Organisation and gouvernance</i> Overall, women-led cooperatives have established formal governance structures (management committees and savings groups), but these structures remain largely ineffective in practice due to limited management capacities. Roles and responsibilities of the management team are clearly defined but not effectively put into practice. The core management tasks such as updating records, tracking production data, and holding regular quarterly meetings, well participative decision making are inconsistently carried out. The cooperative activities along the value chain from nut collection and processing to marketing are largely individual rather than collective. There is no effective collective work organization during campaign periods within the cooperatives, except in cases where the FNPk facilitates market access, temporarily stimulating collective organization and coordination. For example, although all cooperatives have storage facilities, but most women continue to store shea nuts at home. The main strength of the cooperatives lies in the savings groups (tontines). These enable women to access loans easily to engage in income-generating activities. It should also be noted that savings groups constitute the primary motivation for weekly meetings. While women have already received substantial training on cooperative management and governance, practical application remains limited. This highlights the need for coaching support based on a learning-by-doing approach, to effectively guide women in translating acquired knowledge into concrete management practices. <i>Collecte and proccessing</i> Women's cooperatives operating in the shea value chain possess strong know-how across all stages of the chain, from nut collection to the processing and storage of shea butter. However, activities remain largely organized on an individual basis, with limited collective structuring, which constrains the ability to ensure consistent volumes, stable quality, and sustainable access to markets. Practices are mainly based on traditional methods, resulting in labor-intensive working conditions, health and safety risks for women, and variability in product quality, particularly for kernels and butter. Storage-related constraints, including

	insufficient appropriate infrastructure and weak collective organization, further exacerbate quality losses and limit medium-term preservation capacity. Despite the strong mobilization of women and their solid mastery of traditional skills, these factors highlight key needs for improving working conditions, strengthening collective organization, upgrading equipment, standardizing practices, and securing storage systems. <i>Marketing of shea kernels and butter</i> The marketing of shea kernels and butter remains largely individual, despite strong local demand (Annex 1). Kernel sales are generally quick and easy, allowing women to access liquidity rapidly through well-established relationships with local intermediaries. However, this market is characterized by price instability, low remuneration, weak bargaining power of women, and the absence of formal contracts. Women expressed a strong need for real-time market price information, support in accessing adapted contractual arrangements, and capacity building to strengthen price negotiation. Similarly, shea butter is mainly sold individually, with occasional collective sales when advance orders are secured at cooperative level. Although local demand and informal client networks exist, sales volumes remain limited and transactions are largely based on informal agreements. Key needs include encouraging collective marketing of butter, strengthening capacities in contract management and compliance with quality requirements, improving product presentation, supporting market search activities, and facilitating access to more stable and remunerative contractual markets. <i>Working conditions</i> Working conditions along the shea value chain remain challenging and expose women to significant health and safety risks. Collection activities start very early in the morning, often before daylight, with women walking long distances on foot and carrying heavy loads, which increases exposure to physical fatigue and security risks. Across the different stages of the value chain, work is largely based on traditional practices and rudimentary equipment, resulting in highly labor-intensive and physically demanding tasks. Limited access to personal protective equipment (PPE) further exacerbates these constraints, leading women to adopt inadequate working postures that contribute to chronic pain, fatigue, and musculoskeletal disorders. Women therefore identified priority needs related to the provision of appropriate PPE, including gloves and protective footwear, as well as targeted capacity building on ergonomics, safe working postures, and load management. Addressing these needs would contribute to improving occupational safety, reducing physical strain, and enhancing overall productivity and well-being. Cooperative partnership contribution analysis FNPK stands out as the central and most structuring stakeholder, playing a pivotal role in the governance and functioning of the cooperatives. It has provided comprehensive support, including cooperative management, financial literacy, savings group management, and conflict resolution. FNPK's interventions also
--	---

	encompass facilitation of access to finance, capacity building on good collection and processing practices, market research, and linking cooperatives to buyers in the shea butter market. These interventions have generated tangible outcomes, notably the official recognition of cooperatives, the construction of storage facilities, improvements in product quality, and increased incomes for cooperative members. All four cooperatives selected under the project have benefited from FNPk's support. The Ministry of Agriculture, through the Territorial Development Agency (ATDA 3), has also supported cooperatives, notably by providing drying areas, tarpaulins, equipment, and access to shea processing complexes. However, this support has not been uniformly distributed: only two out of the four selected cooperatives benefited from these interventions, limiting their overall reach and impact within the project sample. GIZ, through its ProfiNA project, provided complementary and targeted support aimed at strengthening the economic and social empowerment of women. Its interventions focused on the establishment of clusters, financial literacy, improved access to financial services, and the promotion of positive masculinity. In addition, GIZ facilitated study visits for selected cooperatives, contributing to peer learning and exposure. However, these interventions have yielded limited results in terms of improved market access. Notably, some of the equipment provided remains non-operational to date, thereby constraining its intended impact. Nonetheless, according to the women, GIZ's support generated strong interest and high participation in training activities. It should also be noted that, across the four cooperatives selected, only one to two benefited from these interventions, depending on the specific type of support provided. Other stakeholders including APEFE, the Ubi-Vincial Foundation, private sector actors, local NGOs, local authorities, and private individuals have also contributed through sporadic and sector-specific support. Their interventions primarily address cooperative governance, equipment provision, dissemination of good processing practices, environmental awareness, and access to land. In parallel, cooperatives engage informally with intermediaries and market women operating in local and regional markets, particularly with regard to the marketing of shea nuts and shea butter. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that additional actors are active within the shea sector. However, they are not reflected in this analysis, as they have not directly engaged with the four cooperatives assessed.
--	--

Women decision making power and household dynamic

The results of women's decision-making power analysis show that the shea nut collection decision is jointly taken together with their husband (7). However, nine out of eleven women are in control and monthly decide whether they have to manage their income from shea activities. As share by one lady, "*Mon mari ne connait pas mon revenu*". However, the results reflect a gradual shift in norms, **where cooperation and mutual agreement are increasingly accepted** and support women outside activities including their active participation in cooperatives, markets, and trainings. Nevertheless, access to formal finance remains constrained by prevailing norms, as financial institutions often contact husbands to seek their approval before granting loans to women.



As one woman explained: "*When I want to apply for a bank loan, I agree with the loan officer not to disclose the full amount, otherwise my husband would refuse to give his approval.*" In the Beninese cultural context, social norms and beliefs place strong value on family harmony and shared responsibility between spouses, which partly explains the prevalence of joint decision-making.

	To further improve household dynamics and support women's economic empowerment in the shea sector, women expressed the need for capacity-building on strengthening relations between men and women, particularly to enhance cooperation for the success of women's economic activities. They also highlighted the importance of raising awareness among men in the community, especially those who cut down shea trees for other agricultural activities, to protect this vital resource and support women's livelihoods.
Evaluation	The end-of-session evaluation, conducted with 11 participants from the four women's cooperatives, indicates a high level of satisfaction and achievement of expected outcomes. Across all evaluation criteria, responses were overwhelmingly rated as "Agree" or "Strongly agree," demonstrating strong participant engagement and relevance of the session content. Participants reported feeling comfortable expressing their views, reflecting the effectiveness of the participatory and inclusive facilitation approach. The workshop contributed to increased understanding of cooperative-level needs and strengthened participants' awareness of their role in work-related decision-making processes, pointing to early outcomes related to empowerment and agency. Furthermore, participants confirmed the acquisition of new knowledge, suggesting positive learning outcomes and good alignment with the workshop objectives. Overall, the evaluation results provide evidence that the session was effective in generating short-term learning and behavioral intention outcomes, and that the methodology applied was appropriate for the target group and context.
Lesson learned	Overall, women demonstrated a high level of engagement and openly shared their lived experiences, both in relation to their economic activities and household dynamics. Discussions revealed that the women have participated in numerous training sessions delivered by different stakeholders, often covering similar themes. However, the translation of this knowledge into practice remains limited, as learning is quickly forgotten and not sufficiently internalized. This significantly constrains effective uptake. As expressed by Madame Madelaine, President of the Bori N'Dali Cooperative: <i>"It is true that we have received several trainings. We lack ownership of the trainings; we are negligent and lack seriousness."</i> These findings underscore the need to shift from predominantly theoretical training approaches toward more practical, "learning-by-doing" models, centered on hands-on practice, continuous coaching, and close accompaniment by local technical advisors. Another key lesson learned is that women often have limited awareness of the intermediaries involved, or of the companies and organizations behind the interventions targeting them. Regarding the household dynamics, women's engagement in income-generating activities and their participation in cooperatives are generally subject to joint decision-making with their husbands. This highlights that, to be effective and sustainable, project interventions must also address the underlying social norms and beliefs that influence women's participation in public and economic life

Annexe 1: Cooperative need assessment details

	How is the work organized?? 	What works well 	What does not work 	What needs improvement 
Cooperative Management	Existence of a management committee Existence of savings groups	Strong mobilization of women Formalized cooperative Well-established and documented governance structure	Non-compliance with quarterly meetings Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined on paper but not applied in practice Management record books are not regularly updated; Late submission of financing requests before production seasons Strong predominance of individual activities to the detriment of collective action, contrary to cooperative principles Lack of discipline and commitment from some members	Refresher training on cooperative management and work organization Coaching on governance, work organization, and management record-keeping Awareness-raising among members on compliance with internal regulations Strengthening leadership and proactiveness of women leaders

Shea Nut Collection	Mainly individual activity Each woman collects according to her availability and usual areas Little or no collective planning;	Good knowledge of shea trees and harvesting periods Strong experience of women in nut collection and handling Strong mobilization of women Rapid mobilization during peak production periods General compliance with good harvesting practices	Use of traditional working methods Risk of aggression due to early-morning collection (around 5 a.m.) Uneven quality of collected nuts Destruction of shea parks by men Lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) Poor working posture during collection, leading to pain and ergonomic issues Difficulty in building homogeneous and sufficient stocks	Raise awareness among women on professionalizing their economic activity, with a focus on acquiring PPE Support access to PPE and appropriate tools Training on good ergonomic practices and postures during collection Sensitization of men on the prohibition of cutting shea trees and the importance of resource preservation.
Processing of Nuts into Kernels	Individual activity Group purchase of kernels when there is demand	Good mastery of best practices for producing quality shea kernels	Uneven quality of produced kernels Poor mastery of drying techniques by some women Labor-intensive work due to traditional equipment Traditional methods used to control kernel moisture content	Refresher training on best practices for producing quality kernels in each cooperative to reach all members

Kernel Storage	Individual storage Group storage when there is an order or contract	Ability to store kernels for a short period	Appearance of mold, broken kernels, etc. Limited appropriate storage infrastructure Weak organization of members' product storage in warehouses	Encourage collective storage Disseminate simple quality rules and techniques Promote collective processing
Butter Processing	Mainly individual activity Occasional collective activity within the cooperative during projects or contracts	Well-mastered traditional know-how Good understanding of the butter processing process Recognized artisanal quality of the butter Full-time production	Variable yields Non-homogeneous quality Labor-intensive work	Disseminate good practices to reach all members, including new ones Support access to improved equipment
Butter Storage	Individual storage	Traditional storage techniques are known	Occasional deterioration of butter quality Inadequate storage conditions Lack of appropriate packaging Short shelf life when butter quality is poor;	Improve storage conditions Introduce appropriate packaging

Kernel Marketing	Predominantly individual sales	Strong demand for kernels Fast and easy sales at household level Quick access to cash Good knowledge of local buyers (intermediaries)	Low bargaining power Price instability Low profitability of the market Absence of formal contracts	Provide real-time market price information Support access to appropriate contracts Strengthen price negotiation power
Butter Marketing	Predominantly individual sales Collective sales when there is prior demand with advance payment	Good local demand Informal customer networks	Low volumes Local market without formal contracts	Encourage collective butter sales Training on contract management and compliance with specifications Training on market research Support access to contractual markets Improve butter presentation Support access to more profitable markets;

Annex 2: Cooperative Partnership contribution analysis

	What organization	What kind of support	Changes observed	What do you like in their way to work with them
Cooperative management	FNPK	Co-op Registration Intermediary between partners (GIZ etc.) and cooperatives Training on cooperative management Support for the construction of stores Intermediary between cooperatives and SFDs Support for access to financing Training in financial education and management of savings groups	Official recognition of cooperatives Reduction of hardship Improved prices and higher profits Product quality assurance Expertise in conflict management	Involvement of cooperatives in FNPK actions Flexible and understandable Good cooperation with the FNPK Happy to be working with FNPK

	GIZ	Savings group management Access to financing through microfinance institutions Financial education Facilitating the process of obtaining identity documents Positive Masculinity Training	It generated enthusiasm for training programs. Reduction in the prices of identity document obtaining services	Enjoys working with GIZ
	Ubi-Vincial Foundation	Cooperative Management		
	APEFE	Cooperative management		
	Marie, local elected officials and private individual	Deed of gift of land for the construction of stores		
Collection Transformation	FNPK	Training on best practices for harvesting and processing		
	Zinkora Company	Forward march training (1 Coop/4		
	GIZ	Provision of equipment (2 coop/4		
	Shea Association Benin	Raising awareness among men about not cutting down shea trees		
	Ministry of Agriculture (ATDA3)	Provision of tarpaulins		
Market access	FNPK	Search for almonds on Tuesday Connecting with shea butter customers		
	GIZ (Profina Project)	Cluster setup and training (1 coop/4)		
Working conditions	GIZ and others through the FNPK	Gloves and Boot		
Dynamics of relationships between men, women and children	GIZ (Profina Project)	Positive Masculinity Training		
	LONG FOOT	Training on parent-child dialogue and gender-based violence (1 coop/4)		

Annex 4 : Evaluation score

	Tout à fait en Désaccord	Plûtôt D'accord	D'accord	Tout à fait D'accord
1- Je Suis heureuse d'avoir participé à cette Session			☒	☒
2- Je me suis senti à l'aise pour m'exprimer et partager mes opinions			☒	☐
Ce que nous avons fait m'a aidé à mieux Comprendre les Besoins de ma Coopérative			☒	☒
Grâce à cette Session, j'ai fait de nouvelles Connaissances			☒	☐
Je Comprends que je participe aux prises de décisions liées à mon travail			☒	☒