

Business export coaching and gender for a CBI project in Benin's
shea sector

MAPPING OF ACTORS IN THE SHEA SECTOR IN BENIN

May 2025

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1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background and objectives

Shea plays a strategic role in the West African economy, particularly in Benin where it constitutes both an important source of income for rural communities and a major lever for the economic empowerment of women. Indeed, considered the third export product behind cotton and cashew nuts, shea employs more than 70,000 producers of shea kernels and butter, with more than 98% of rural women being the main actors in the sector and being found upstream and downstream of it. These women contribute, through the collection, production of shea kernels, artisanal processing into butter, etc. to the subsistence and improvement of their household incomes and the strengthening of social ties.

As part of optimizing the economic models of the shea butter sector in Benin, a better understanding of the existing ecosystem is essential. This mapping aims to identify and analyze the key players in the sector, with particular attention paid to their contribution to private sector development and gender inclusion.

1.2. Methodology

The approach used to develop this mapping of stakeholders in the shea sector is based primarily on a review of available documents on the subject. This allowed us to collect, synthesize, and analyze available information on the subsector and documents specific to organizations active in the shea sector in Benin. Our approach is based on a more or less complete and updated vision with the aim of providing a usable resource for future interventions.

The documentary review was supplemented by field data collected during participation in the international shea conference and during the mission to visit organizations active in shea in Benin.

2. TYPOLOGY OF ACTORS

The shea butter industry in Benin involves a variety of stakeholders, divided according to their roles in the subsector (production, processing, marketing, support/advice, regulation, financing) and their level of intervention (local, departmental, national, international). The following graph presents the categories of stakeholders working in the shea butter industry in Benin.

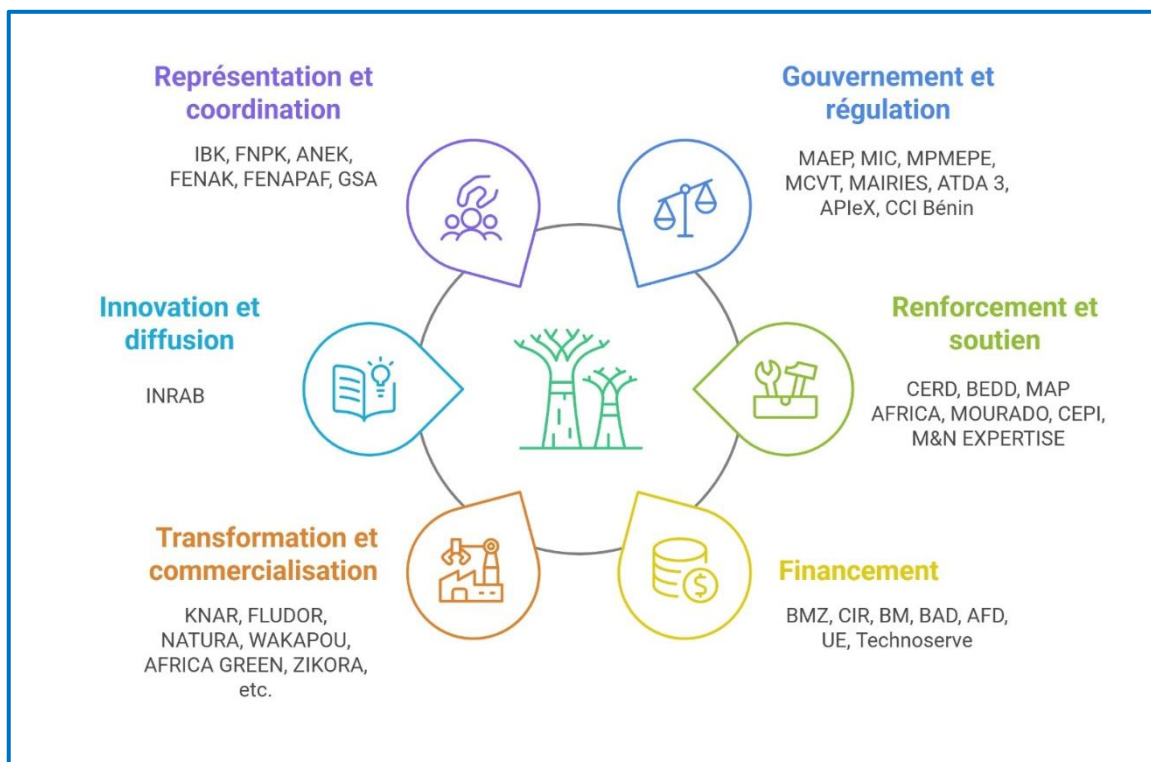


Figure1: Typology of actors in the shea sector in Benin

3. PRESENTATION OF THE ACTORS

3.1. State bodies

Although shea is not a priority sector in the Strategic Plan for the Development of the Agricultural Sector (PSDSA), it has been selected as one of the sectors to be promoted alongside the priority sectors, particularly because of its contribution to the food and nutritional security of the population, but also given the fact that it constitutes an additional source of income for women collectors and processors. The Government of Benin has elevated this sector to the status of an emerging sector and has provided it with a policy through the National Shea Sector Development Program (PNDF-Karité).

☞ **The ministries** concerned with the promotion and development of the shea sector in Benin are:

- Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries (MAEP);
- Ministry of Living Environment (given that shea is a forest product and therefore under the management of the forestry department);
- Ministry of Industry and Commerce; and
- Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises and Employment Promotion (MPMEPE)

Through these ministries and their decentralized structures, the State plays a central role in regulating the sector, in particular through:

- the launch of shea campaigns,
- fixing the floor price of shea almonds in consultation with stakeholders;
- the protection of shea parks;

- the establishment of mechanisms to combat the fraudulent export of almonds to neighboring countries;
- facilitating access to international markets for processing companies;
- support for the organization of actors;

☞ **The Territorial Agency for Agricultural Development, pole 3 (ATDA 3)** provides leadership in managing the sector. It is responsible for implementing the National Shea Sector Development Program (PNDF-Karité).

Furthermore, the State's intervention in the sector is marked by the implementation of initiatives such as the Regional Project to Support the Inclusive Commercial Development of the Shea Sector, piloted from 2020 to 2023 by the Ministry of Industry and Trade (MIC) with the support of technical and financial partners. It worked to strengthen local shea processing capacities, improve yields and raise the quality of locally produced butter, while supporting the economic empowerment of women in production areas. This project provided collectors and processors in the Atacora and Donga departments with production equipment and infrastructure (storage warehouse).

☞ **The Investment and Export Promotion Agency (APIEx)** and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Benin (CCI Benin) are working, among other things, to establish SMEs in the sector and support them in certification and access to international markets. For example, the company WAKAPOU benefited from APIEx support for the installation of its factory.

☞ **The Agency for the Development of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (ADPME)** has been implementing the Entrepreneurship Support Project in Benin (PAEB) since 2022 with the objective of supporting the coordination of public policies to support entrepreneurship in Benin, while enabling the structuring and strengthening of financial and non-financial services to Beninese businesses. More than 500 SMEs from all sectors, including shea, will be supported in structuring and financing (grants and loans). The project also includes better consideration of climate and gender issues at the company level (awareness raising, adapted training, targeting). The PAEB has a budget of 25,000,000 Euros financed by the European Union and AFD with technical assistance from Expertise France.

It should be noted that ADPME is working in collaboration with Technoserve and BeniBiz to implement a project to support the sustainable transformation of the poultry and shea sectors in Benin. The objective is to offer innovative technical and financial support mechanisms tailored to the needs of companies operating in these sectors.

3.2. Professional associations

Much effort has been made in the last decade by both grassroots stakeholders, the state, and development partners to structure the sector and organize its stakeholders. Today, in terms of representation of stakeholders in the sector, we can distinguish:

▪ Benin Shea Association (AKB)

AKB is the very first organization bringing together shea butter stakeholders in Benin (cooperatives of nut collectors and shea butter manufacturers, buyers' organizations, exporters, SMEs manufacturing

shea derivatives, equipment manufacturers, transporters, etc.). It was set up in 2012 with the support of APIeX and AGS.

The AKB has worked hard to structure the sector, which has led to the establishment of various stakeholder groups and an interprofessional organization. It has supported women through training and advice on best practices for harvesting and processing nuts, and transforming almonds into butter. It has also helped them facilitate access to credit and organize group sales of shea almonds.

However, it should be noted that the AKB disappeared in 2020 to make way for the shea interprofessional organization.

▪ Benin Shea Interprofessional Organization (IKB)

Founded in 2020, IKB is the umbrella organization for all stakeholders in Benin's shea butter industry. It is based in Parakou in the Borgou department of northern Benin.

The IKB's mission is to correct existing imbalances in economic relations between the industry's business families in order to move towards greater fairness in trade, to improve the industry's performance through collective actions in terms of competitiveness, market share, innovation, etc., and to ensure collective representation with the State and third parties.

It brings together four (4) families of actors as shown in the diagram below:

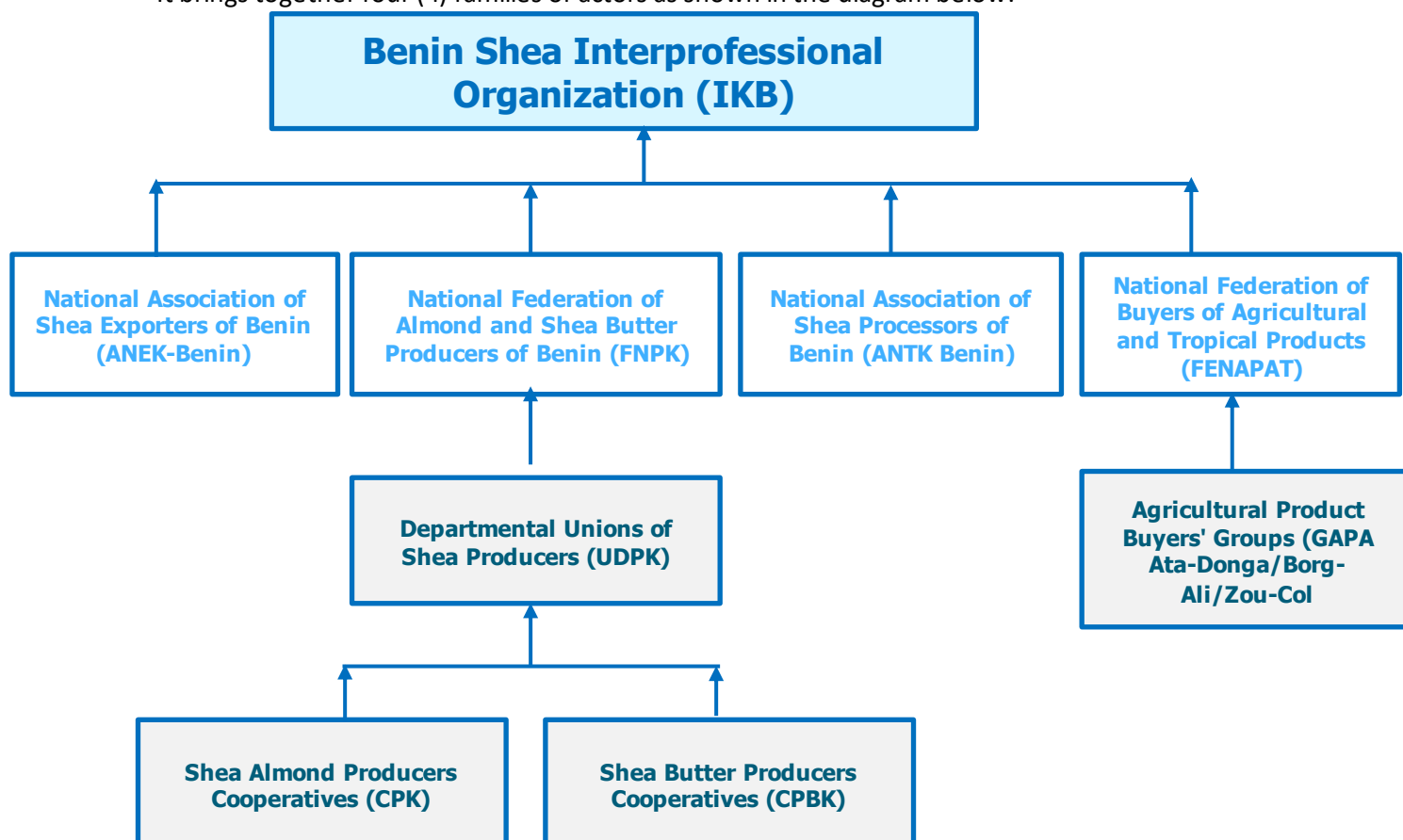


Figure2: The different families of actors in the shea sector in Benin

The establishment of these various representations of stakeholders in the shea value chains reflects a relatively advanced level of structuring of the sector. However, some member SMEs and cooperatives express reservations about the concrete benefits of their membership, reporting limited access to the expected services and benefits.

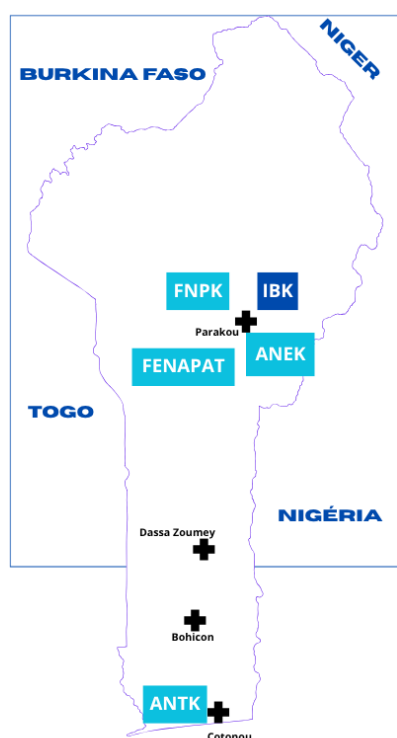
Furthermore, it should be noted that the National Federation of Almond and Butter Producers of Benin (FNPB-Benin) is one of the representations that makes improving the living conditions of women shea collectors and processors in Benin a priority. It includes seventy (70) women's groups/cooperatives, with a total of 70,000 women members.

From its position as a federation, it offers its members, particularly women, essential services, such as easier access to rural credit, skills development, and access to markets and infrastructure. FNPB-Benin is also committed to the sustainability of the sector through advocacy efforts for the empowerment and inclusion of women.

The FNPB manages a large cluster with a network of 256 groups which run small clusters at the local or municipal level to satisfy processing companies.

It should be noted that the IKB and the FNPB are the most active associations. The others are struggling to fully play their roles.

The following map locates the different associations.



Legend:

- Delimitation of the shea production area. 35 municipalities in total spread across the area from Bohicon to the upper north.

Figure3: Map showing the location of the families of actors and the shea production area

▪ Global Shea Alliance (GSA)

At the international level, the Global Shea Alliance (GSA), established in 2011, is a non-profit trade association for the shea industry based in Accra, Ghana. It has 849 members from 36 countries, including women's associations, brands, distributors, suppliers, and NGOs.

The GSA initiates regional programs and mobilizes partners, particularly for the benefit of women in the sector. Its sustainability program, launched in 2014, identifies the challenges facing the shea industry and addresses them with a multi-stakeholder approach, through collaborative projects focused on the resilience of women in the sector and the preservation of the shea ecosystem.

For example, the GSA, in partnership with the Reinforced Integrated Framework (CIR), implemented the Regional Support Program for the Inclusive Commercial Development of the Shea Sector (PRADCIFK) from 2020 to 2023, with a total budget of \$3.6 million. This program covered four countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Togo.

Every year, the GSA organizes the World Shea Conference, a flagship event that brings together stakeholders in the sector to discuss sustainability, fair trade, and innovation, rotating in one of the shea-producing countries. The next edition, scheduled for May 19-21, 2025, in Cotonou, focuses on the theme "The Future of Shea: Creating a Win-Win Trade." This initiative provides an opportunity for dialogue and exchange of opportunities for stakeholders in the sector, including women and SMEs.

3.3. Projects/programs and international NGOs/TFPs

Over the past two decades, development partners such as GIZ, AFD, CIR, Enabel, USDA, etc. have strongly supported the shea sector through numerous projects/programs that have financed initiatives for structuring, economic empowerment of women, training, strengthening of production capacities (through equipment and infrastructure), facilitating access to national and international markets (trade fairs, certification, labeling), etc.

The table below presents some initiatives that have supported the development of the sector

Initiative	Mandate	Gender actions	Actions to support the private sector
Regional Support Program for Inclusive Commercial Development of the Shea Sector (PRADCIFK) Duration: 2020–2023 Lessor: Reinforced Integrated Framework (CIR) Budget: USD 3.6 million	Develop an inclusive and sustainable shea trade in West Africa, by strengthening the capacities of stakeholders in the sector and facilitating access to international markets.	Empowerment of women in the shea sector through access to suitable equipment, training and targeted support.	Support for SMEs for participation in trade fairs, access to regional and international markets, logistical support.
Communal Forest Management Support Project – Phase II (PAGEFCOM II) Duration: 2019–2024 Donors: AfDB, GEF	Strengthen the sustainable management of communal forest resources, including shea parks.	Inclusion of women in forest co-management, capacity building and support for women's economic activities.	Support for rural economic groups, promotion of sustainable forestry value chains, technical and organizational support.
Private Sector Actors Development Support Project (PARASEP) Duration: 2014–2020	Support the structuring and development of the private sector, particularly SMEs and	Investment financing aimed at better integrating women into production processes.	Capacity building for VSEs/SMEs/SCOOPs through non-financial technical services.

Initiative	Mandate	Gender actions	Actions to support the private sector
Lessor: AFD and EU Budget: 1,040,000 euros	cooperatives in productive sectors including shea.	Taking gender into account (integration of women and youth employment) in financed business plans, promotion of female entrepreneurship.	Subsidies for 5 companies for infrastructure and equipment. Strengthening production standards and supporting product certification.
Agricultural Promotion Project (ProAgri 1 to 4) Duration: 2011 to 2023 Lessor: BMZ	Promote sustainable natural resource management practices	To work towards sustainability and improving the living conditions of women involved in the collection and processing of shea nuts. Training of umbrella organizations in female leadership	Development of clusters around SMEs, thus facilitating their access to raw materials. Facilitating access to financing for agribusiness cluster aggregators

Regarding ongoing projects/programs, apart from the National Shea Sector Development Program (PNDF-Karité) implemented by ATDA 7, few initiatives have been identified. The few identified are:

- **Benin Classified Forests Project (since 2019) - USD 60 million**

The Benin Classified Forests Project, funded by the World Bank, aims to improve the integrated management of targeted Classified Forests and to promote value chains for Non-Timber Forest Products such as shea, thereby improving the incomes of forest-dependent communities.

This project uses a participatory approach, allowing communities to be the true actors of reforestation. As such, it ensures the active integration of women in reforestation and maintenance actions of classified forests (29% of the jobs generated are held by women). The project has provided paid employment opportunities to many young people without formal qualifications, helping to curb rural exodus.

- **Agricultural Financing Project, ProFinA (2016-2026) – 7 million euros**

Funded by German cooperation, ProFinA's mandate is to improve access for rural farms and agro-industrial businesses to financial services tailored to their business models. To this end, the project supports various umbrella organizations, including the FNPK, on the issue of access to finance. It has carried out the following actions, among others:

- Implementation of financial education programs for women active in the shea sector.
- Creation of savings groups within women's cooperatives.
- Training on economic analysis and planning of agricultural investments.
- Grant to FNPK for the hiring of agricultural advisors responsible for facilitating access to credit and supporting women's initiatives in the sector.

ProFinA also plans to donate equipment to women in the shea butter industry, as part of funding from the Regional Fund for Stabilization and Development in fragile regions of ECOWAS member states.

- **BeniBiz (since 2017) - 7 million euros for phase 1 and 10 million euros for phase 2.**

Technoserve has been implementing the BeniBiz project since 2017. This project is now in its second phase, with the first one closing in 2022. BeniBiz 2.0 is a five-year program funded by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (EKN), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and the Delegation of the European Union (DEU). BeniBiz 2.0 expands on the approach followed by BeniBiz 1.0, supporting more entrepreneurs, particularly youth and women, to increase economic opportunities, employment, and food security, while contributing to green economic growth. The project supports several sectors, including shea, with capacity building actions and facilitating access to finance and markets for MSMEs in the sector.

Critical analysis of interventions

Initiatives to support the shea subsector have undeniably contributed to the gradual structuring of the sector. They have particularly strengthened the capacities of local stakeholders through financial and non-financial support.

However, despite the progress noted, significant challenges remain. Access to financing remains a major constraint for many stakeholders, particularly SMEs and cooperatives, as the conditions required by banks and MFIs are often not adapted to the realities of the sector. Furthermore, access to both national and international markets remains limited for a large proportion of processors, who continue to face logistical, standards, and regulatory constraints.

Finally, although several programs have aimed to strengthen the capacities of women, the majority of them, often with little or no education, struggle to fully capitalize on these achievements in the long term, which limits the lasting impact of these interventions.

These challenges are further exacerbated by insecurity linked to violent extremism in northern Benin, the main shea production area. This situation compromises the livelihoods of women involved in collecting and processing shea nuts, and weakens the regular supply of processing companies, jeopardizing the entire value chain.

3.4. Local NGOs and private support structures

The shea sub-sector in Benin benefits from the commitment of a number of local actors, including NGOs and private consultancy structures, which operate at different levels of the value chain.

Structure	Status	Location	Service offers
CERD Benin	Non-Governmental Organization	Boukoubé and Natitingou	CERD implements environmental conservation initiatives, with a particular focus on the regeneration and protection of shea parks. It involves young people in its ecological initiatives through awareness-raising, reforestation, and community monitoring. It partners with Autre Terre to promote youth entrepreneurship through, among other things, value chain development initiatives for non-timber forest products such as shea butter and Néré mustard.
BEDD (Well-being)	Non-Governmental Organization	Abomey-Calavi	BEDD carries out concrete actions to benefit women and young people in northern Benin. It is implementing the project "Prevention and fight against violence against

Structure	Status	Location	Service offers
Sustainable Development)		Active in northern Benin (Nikki, Banikoara)	women and girls in the commune of Nikki" with funding from the OIF. In this capacity, it supports the economic empowerment of women through training and donations of production equipment. However, it does not focus on a specific value chain.
MAP AFRICA	Non-Governmental Organization	Parakou	MAP AFRIQUE is a humanitarian and development NGO focused on empowering women and young people, primarily. It supports women in the shea industry in improving product quality and marketing. It has set up a showroom in Parakou that showcases these women's products.
MONRADO	Consulting firm	Parakou	Provides technical and commercial support to the sector. Its interventions include: implementing local agreements to protect shea parks, training groups of processors in business relationships with companies (such as ITRAK and ZIKORA) with a view to standardizing their production, coaching agribusiness clusters, and facilitating butter orders for companies. Has French and Moroccan partners for the marketing of shea products.
CEPI Development	Consulting firm	Natitingou	CEPI focuses on strengthening businesses in business management areas. It supports stakeholders in establishing and managing shea clusters. It facilitates access to financing for aggregators (developing business plans, preparing and monitoring credit applications). Its support is financed by donors.
M&N Expertise SARL	Consulting firm	Natitingou with an annex in Cotonou	Provides capacity building for women's groups organized by MAP Afrique on technical routes for manufacturing shea derivatives, entrepreneurship, and business management.

It should be noted that none of these identified structures focuses on defending women's rights or women's economic empowerment through the shea butter sector. The FNPk partially assumes this role, but its influence remains limited.

3.5. Local authorities

The town halls of shea-producing municipalities play an important role in the local governance of the sector. As local authorities, they are involved in the protection and sustainable management of shea resources through several levers of action. In particular, they oversee the development of local agreements for the protection of shea parks, in collaboration with rural communities and the state's decentralized technical services. Furthermore, they actively participate in the restoration and enrichment of low-density parks to preserve the ecosystem.

3.6. Research

Research remains under-resourced to support the development of shea value chains. The sector is the subject of very few research and outreach projects to address issues related to post-harvest losses and the quality of derivatives.

However, the National Institute of Agricultural Research of Benin (INRAB) is the research structure that has carried out some identified actions. It has worked to develop methods regarding sexual reproduction, grafting and Assisted Natural Regeneration of shea plants. It therefore appears that progress needs to be made so that research serves shea SMEs.

3.7. Companies in the sector

The shea sector is mainly driven by two (2) major operators, namely: KNAR Benin and Fludor.

The company Fludor Benin is currently practically the only industrialist active in the shea sector in Benin.

The following table provides an overview of the companies in the sector:

Company size	Denomination	Activities	Location
Large companies	KNAR BENIN	Export of shea nuts	Cotobou
	FLUDOR	Processing industry	Zogbodomey
Medium-sized businesses	WAKAPOU	Production of organic shea butter	Cotonou, with units in the Atacora
	NATURA	Manufacture of cosmetic products	Cotonou
	KARETHIC BENIN	Manufacture of cosmetic products	Cotonou
	AFRICA GREEN CORPORATION	Production of eco-responsible shea butter	Cotonou with factory in N'Dali
Micro and small businesses	ITRAK Benin	Production and marketing of shea-based products	Parakou
	ZIKORA	Butter and soap making	Parakou
	BENOTEC		
	KARI VIRTUE	Distribution of shea butter, production of cosmetic derivatives	Parakou
	Monrado	Protection of shea resources, development of shea CVAs, technical support and marketing, production of butter and soap	Parakou
	LCB	Production of raw and edible shea butter	Cotonou
	KALA KARITE	Production of organic shea butter (Ecocert certification)	Djougou
	ISAB COMMERCE	Marketing of almonds	Perere
	ABD SARL	Marketing of almonds	Parakou
	BIOCOS	Sale of cosmetic products	Cotonou
	ATHALIE-OTHNIEL SARL COMPANY	Butter exporter	Cotonou

Company size	Denomination	Activities	Location
	VKC	Transformation into butter by-products	Parakou
	YADO	Transforming butter into soap	Parakou
	ARMANI	Processing and trading of organic almonds and butter	Parakou
	Koto	Cosmetic products	Cotonou
	Kaza shea	Cosmetic products	Cotonou

It's worth noting that KNAR, a member of AAK (a Danish importer), dominates the market and holds a monopoly position. They determine the price of shea butter in Benin each season. Their decisions therefore have a significant impact on other players in the sector.

Most companies organize women's groups to secure their raw material supplies. With this in mind, some provide them with various types of support, primarily technical or material. Recently, FLUDOR has stepped up its efforts by developing training (on group work) and subsidizing equipment for several groups in Djougou and Bassila. These groups bring together more than 3,000 women.

Small and medium-sized enterprises often face challenges in accessing markets (certification, marketing) and accessing financing to provide services to the clusters they manage.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Conclusion

The shea sector in Benin has high growth potential, both in regional and international markets.

The mapping of stakeholders in the shea butter sector in Benin highlights a rapidly evolving ecosystem, with various public, private, associative, and international stakeholders operating at different levels of the sector. The IBK and FNPk play a crucial role in representing stakeholders and promoting inclusive models, although efforts still need to be made to ensure equitable outcomes, particularly for women.

As part of a project aimed at optimizing business models in the shea butter and shea butter products industry while improving the socio-economic status of women, the following points of attention deserve more targeted actions.

- Women, key players in harvesting and primary processing, face specific challenges (precariousness, limited access to resources, excessive domestic workload, lack of representation). These constraints limit the sector's overall competitiveness.
- A systemic and transformative approach, integrating actions at the level of companies, support services and the institutional environment, is essential to improve the performance of the sector while promoting equity.
- The high-potential business models identified must be supported by companies ready to engage in a dynamic of change, particularly with regard to improving working conditions for women.

- The success of the action plan depends on ownership by local stakeholders (businesses, sectoral organizations, authorities), capitalization of good practices from previous projects, and the implementation of sustainable inclusive policies.

4.2. Recommendations

In view of the above, the following recommendations are made:

A. For SMEs exporting raw shea butter

1) Improving the social and economic integration of women in supply chains

- Organize focus groups with collectors and processors to identify their constraints and priority needs.
- Provide these diagnoses to SME managers in order to promote better consideration of the role of women in supply contracts.
- Establish a system for monitoring women's working conditions (working hours, safety, access to water, sanitation infrastructure).

2) Creating economic incentives for a more inclusive supply chain

- Train companies to measure the positive economic impact of better working conditions: reduced turnover, increased quality, improved yields.
- Integrate tools into training to project these benefits onto export competitiveness.

3) Facilitate access to premium certifications and markets

- Support the obtaining of quality and fair trade certifications (Organic, Fairtrade).
- Support SMEs in accessing high-potential regional markets such as Nigeria, and premium outlets in Europe and North America.

B. For SMEs producing finished shea-based products

1) Structuring inclusive models of local production

- Encourage these companies to structure local clusters integrating women's groups as production partners.
- Develop fair contracts with producers of butter or derivatives, incorporating quality bonuses, pre-financing or multi-year commitments.

2) Promoting social marketing and impact stories

- Highlight the social impact of products (empowerment of women, preservation of traditional knowledge) in marketing strategy, packaging and digital communication.
- Support the creation of brands with high local added value, driven by credible and traceable community stories.

3) Strengthening access to distribution networks

- Support SMEs in prospecting specific niches: organic stores, e-commerce platforms, tourist or ethnic circuits.
- Facilitate their integration into regional business networks (West Africa) sharing the same ethical and quality standards.

B. For SMEs led by women

1) Strengthening entrepreneurial capacities

- Provide targeted training in financial management, business negotiation, market strategy, while taking into account the specific constraints of women (time, mobility).
- Establish mentoring and coaching schemes between female peers to strengthen learning between female entrepreneurs.

2) Improving access to markets

- Supporting women entrepreneurs to integrate into profitable business models, including differentiation strategies and community storytelling.
- Facilitate their participation in trade fairs, exhibitions and digital platforms, particularly via e-commerce or group export solutions.

3) Strengthening representation and advocacy

- Promote the systematic integration of women into sectoral governance bodies (IKB, FNPK), with quota objectives.
- Codify gender recommendations in the form of sectoral guidelines with measurable objectives (share of women in committees, inclusion indicators, etc.).

D. Cross-cutting recommendations

- **Institutionalize gender training:** sustainably integrate inclusive training modules into the capacity building programs of IKB, FNPK, APIEx.
- **Propose a development fund or incentive mechanism** to support businesses that adopt inclusive practices.
- **Select companies** having shown a clear desire to improve their economic model with better gender integration.

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