

CBI gender transformative project in Benin Shea sector

Report of the pilot training on access to market gender and working conditions for the benefit of Selected SMES

December 2025

Background	As part of CBI gender-transformative project in the shea sector, pilot training was provided to strengthen benefits SMES on access to market and working conditions. The training took place in Parakou at Koubou city hotel from 1 to 3 December 2025. The objective of the training was to: - Assess their business performance against the four stages of the sales funnel. Identify weak points. - Understand the buyer's perspective, including their checklist and supplier selection criteria. - Strengthen listening and questioning techniques to improve negotiation and sales outcomes. - Develop a persuasive sales story or pitch that aligns with buyer needs. - Evaluate the alignment between company's words, actions, and verifiable evidence in marketing and sales communication. - Understand the local supply chain through FNPK - Understanding how decent working conditions contribute to the growth and success of your company - Collect evidence about some of the learning question related to the systemic barrier in the shea sector - Creating a network among beneficiaries
--------------------------	--

	This report presents an overview of the activities implemented, participants' feedback, key lessons learned, and next steps.
Participant	The session brought together 16 companies out of 18, including 17 participants with 10 women and 7 men. Most of the participants were the business owners.
Facilitators	The training was facilitated by: - Unnamed Expert Access to market - Unnamed Expert: Gender, working conditions - Unnamed Expert Logistic - Unnamed Expert Supervision
Workshop approach	The session was conducted in an interactive, participatory way combining short presentations with practical exercises. Participants engaged in one-to-one, group work and plenary discussions, during which businesses shared real-life examples from their own cases. These exchanges helped deepen the discussions, foster peer learning, and connect the content directly to practical challenges faced by the companies. We also ensured that all components of the training including access, market access, gender, and working conditions were addressed in an integrated way rather than separately, to engage participant on the value of each of them. To be sure that all invited SMEs will attend the session, we have provided them accommodation including transport and hotel
Keys take away	Access to market The sales funnel, from both the buyer's and seller's perspectives, was covered during the first two days of the training, with specific attention given to gender sensitivity. Practical exercises, including simulations and role plays, were used to demonstrate the application of the sales funnel in real business contexts, particularly in engaging with importers and clients. Participants also conducted a self-assessment across the different stages of the sales funnel to identify areas where further improvement is needed from their side. All participants delivered a pitch on how to present their company to a client of their choice. The exercise was conducted in turns, following a structured canvas, with a strong focus on aligning messaging with concrete evidence to build client trust. Each presentation was followed by feedback, and participants also conducted a self-assessment. Peer feedback was actively encouraged, and facilitators provided targeted input to strengthen the clarity and effectiveness of the key messages to make the client confident. Furthermore, participants also realized that certification is not the key requirement for selling to clients. As one participant said, <i>"We were obsessed with certification."</i> Supply chain management A presentation was delivered on how supply chain management in terms of selection of suppliers, how to assess suppliers, and the key aspects to pay attention to when sourcing raw materials. This presentation was tailored to Benin context by the presentation of the coordinator of the FNPK, who presented the cooperative-based supply system. His intervention provides an opportunity for companies that do not yet source from cooperatives. In

	fact, A short survey conducted among participant showed that sourcing from cooperatives allows companies to obtain better-quality products due to regular monitoring, while also benefiting from more competitive prices. Productivity and working conditions The session focused on the link between productivity and working conditions, highlighting the importance of providing decent and adequate working conditions for their workers to enable them to perform at their full potential. Business owners were invited to design the daily clock tools of one of the workers from waking up to going to sleep. Plenary discussions on the rest of the time, workload, household responsibilities, and sleep of their workers. helped them to realize that their workers are underperforming potential improvements to current practices. Good practices of decent working condition identified in Benin agribusiness sector within the CBI dried pineapple project were shared. This enabled companies to reflect on their own practices and identify eared for improvement and technical support required. Based on their expressed need we provided some teasers based on CBI dried pineapple. Some of the need expressed are attached in the annex (Annex 1) The training ended with an overview of the stakeholders involved along the value chain (Annex 2). Some pictures of the workshop are provided in Annex 3
Feedback from participants	At the end of the three days of training, participants were invited to complete an evaluation form. Overall, participants found the training to be highly relevant. Indeed, 100% of them stated that the training objectives were clearly defined and tailored to their needs. Similarly, all participants reported that the session was worth attending and that the trainers were well prepared, reflecting a high level of satisfaction. As stated by the business owner of Nature Cosmetic Company, <i>"I found the training very interesting." This was echoed by one of the participants, who said that this was the first time they had attended training of this kind that truly reflects our realities.</i> As said by most of them: <i>"We did not lose our time by joining this training"</i> The training was perceived as highly interactive and engaging by 91.7% of the participants. They reported that the session helps them in identifying concrete strategies to improve employees' working conditions, underscoring the strong relevance of linking business development with working conditions. The technical content of the training was highly appreciated, with 100% of participants reporting increased knowledge on shea butter sourcing methods. In addition, all participants indicated that the session prompted them to reflect on their current practices and consider concrete improvements within their companies. Several participants highlighted the importance of the sales funnel, the SPIN method, structured prospecting, and negotiation strategies. . As one participant noted, <i>"We make many mistakes that we are not aware of."</i>

	This shows that although there has been considerable support for the shea sector at the regional level in the past, this does not seem to be the case at the local level. Most participants reported that the training was generally clear and easy to follow. However, some participants found specific topics more challenging, particularly sourcing strategies, productivity in the absence of permanent staff, export requirements related to volumes, and sales negotiation, which require experience and practical skills. The discovery phase of the sales funnel and understanding buyers' perspectives were also mentioned as difficult areas. Things that business owners want to immediately implement within their company as a result of this training are to improve their staff management, particularly by strengthening internal organization, employee safety and working conditions. Others intend to directly put some tools into practice such as the sales funnel, structured prospecting, adapting commercial strategies based on the product, or improving the company's presentation. These insights illustrate strong appreciation for the content, the approach used during the training, and the relevance of the topics for participants. A few suggestions related to the duration of the training, with some participants indicating that a shorter format or a split session could allow for more exchanges and practical discussions.
Lessons learned	➤ We have noticed strong engagement from business owners. ➤ Companies are small and are engaged in small-scale production (only once or twice a week during the season and not at all during the off-season), which limits job creation. ➤ The available market opportunities are the local and regional markets, particularly the Senegalese market for raw bure. ➤ Transport is also a key issue that limits their access to regional market ➤ Women do not benefit as much from the shea activities because of two keys problems: systemic issues and a problem related to household dynamics. Women produce small volumes and have difficulty accessing credit because of banking rules, legal rules relating to land ownership. If men do not support women activities and vision, women cannot obtain credit. On the other hand, men produce larger volumes because they have easier access to credit.
Next step	- Sharing the training material with participants - Come back to participants about the next step of the project

Annexe

Annex 1:

Thing that SMEs want to change the upcoming 6 month about their inteen practices

- Having permanent employees in order to establish sustainable production (Alibori Consulting Group)
- Recruiting competent sales staff who comply with specifications and standards (Kaza Manan)
- Improving occupational health and safety, employee productivity, and human resource management (Itrak Benin, Nature Cosmétique, Label Magnificat, Zara Destin, Esso Wassa, Monrado)
- Strengthening staff motivation and skills development (Nature Cosmétique)
- Providing employment contracts to workers (Label Magnificat)
- Improving compliance with working hours (Zara Destin)
- Improving compliance with quality standards (Natura)

Technical support required

- Support to recruit qualified staff (sales assistant, production assistant) (AD Market)
- Capacity building of staff on compliance with manufacturing and quality standards (Natura)
- Capacity building on human resource management and occupational health and safety (AD Market, Natura, Kaza Manan, Label Magnificat, Ittrak Benin)
- Capacity building on staff motivation to increase productivity (Espace Sains, Nature Cosmétique)
- Support for the declaration of permanent employees (Alibori Consulting Group, Espace Sains)
- Strengthening and refresher training for business owners on how an enterprise operates (Monrado)

Annex 2 : SMEs stakeholders analyses

Approvisionnement	Transport et logistiques	Normes, Qualités, certificats	Soutien à l'export
- Coopérative - Collecteur Individuel (Ramasseuse) - Groupement de femmes - Parc W - LCB - Foret classe (IAK)	- Bus - Taxi - Avion - Poste bénin - Service de livraison - DHL - Transporteurs (Chauffeurs de Camions)	- CCIB - DDIC - Laboratoires ABSSA - ANM - LCSSA - ABMeD - Ecocert - IRGIB(Labo) - APEFE	-CCIB -FEMMPACT -APIEX -GSA

- Natural Shop - Bell Afro LCB	Compagnies de transport terrestre	- ONG inter entrepreneur - Laboratoire Science Agricole (UAC) - MAEP - ATDA 3	
Distribution au niveau locale	Distribution à l'international	Distribution au niveau régional	Autres acteurs
- Supermarchés - Boutiques cosmétiques - Pharmacies - Instituts de beauté - Marchés locaux - Foire intercommunale	- France - Canada - Californie - Allemagne - Espagne - Etats Unis	- Togo - Sénégal - Cameroun - Gabon - RDC - Mali - Cote d'ivoire - Foires régionales - Nigeria - Niger - Ghana	- GIZ - Parasep - Proagri - Monrad o - Natura - Helvetas bénin - Make trade for women in west Africa