

CBI Gender transformative project in Benin shea sector

Inception phase

**Validation workshop of the pilot phase results
with stakeholders**

January 2026

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1. Context and justification

The transformative gender project, initiated by the CBI in the shea sector in Benin, aims to improve the socio-economic situation of women in the shea value chain in Benin. It stems from the observation that, although women are central actors in the production and initial processing of shea, they do not fully benefit from the sector's economic returns and remain exposed to precarious working conditions.

To address these challenges, the project developed a transformative approach focused on optimizing business models, improving access to local, regional, and international markets, and promoting gender equality and decent work. A start-up phase was conducted, including studies, a gender and working conditions analysis, interviews with stakeholders, the selection and assessment of beneficiary SMEs, micro-enterprises led by women, and cooperatives, as well as capacity building for businesses regarding market access and working conditions. This work identified a number of findings, the root causes, and structural factors explaining the persistent difficulties faced by women in the sector.

Organized after the start-up phase, the validation workshop is a key moment for presenting and discussing the lessons learned from the work carried out. It is part of a process of comparing the analyses with the realities and experiences of stakeholders in the sector, in order to consolidate the results and inform the future directions of the project.

2. Workshop objectives

The workshop aims to:

- Share and validate the findings from the research conducted during the start-up phase with all stakeholders.
- Present the identified root causes.
- Prioritize the most critical root causes requiring urgent intervention.
- Collect the solution approaches to be considered in future interventions.

3. Methodology used

The validation workshop was designed as a participatory space for exchanging and comparing analyses from the project's start-up phase. It brought together representatives from public institutions, professional organizations, companies and cooperatives in the shea sector, service providers, and technical partners.

The methodology combined plenary presentations and thematic group work to encourage the sharing of results and the active participation of stakeholders. The main findings and systemic analysis were first presented in plenary session, providing a common basis for discussion. Three working groups were then formed around the following themes: (1) The position of women in the shea value chain; (2) Micro-enterprises and SMEs in the sector; (3) Enabling environment and ecosystem.

Each group worked on four key questions:

- a. What needs to be adjusted or modified?

- b. What more needs to be added?
- c. What are the three priority root causes?
- d. What solutions or activities can be proposed for these priority causes?

The results of the group work were presented and discussed using a World Café approach, allowing for cross-fertilization of productions and collective improvement of results (See Appendix 2).

4. Workshop outline

The workshop took place on January 29, 2026, in the conference room of the Sossa Hotel in Cotonou. The main points outlined below were key to the workshop's proceedings.

4.1. Welcome and setup of participants

Participants were welcomed from 8:30 a.m. in the dedicated workshop room. The setup took place in a friendly atmosphere, fostering informal exchanges between the various stakeholders before the official start of the workshop at 9:15 a.m. It is worth noting that no significant delays were recorded, reflecting the interest and commitment of the stakeholders to this validation workshop.

The workshop brought together a total of 30 key stakeholders in the shea sector, including 15 women, reflecting an inclusive and multi-stakeholder approach. The table below shows the breakdown of participants by stakeholder category.

Table 1: Distribution of participants by category of actors

No.	Participant type	Effective
1	Public institutions	5
2	Technical Partners	6
3	Professional organizations	3
4	Businesses (micro and SMEs)	8
5	Cooperatives	2
6	Intermediaries	2
7	Private service providers	4
Total		30

4.2. Official opening of the workshop

The official opening ceremony of the workshop began at 9:15 a.m. with a welcome address by the Country Director in Benin. In his remarks, he reviewed the project's implementation context and the specific objectives of the validation workshop. He encouraged all participants to adopt a critical approach to the presented results and to actively engage in the discussions, in order to ensure that the conclusions accurately reflect the realities of the sector and to identify relevant and actionable corrective actions.

A speech was then given by the CBI, during which the organization's missions, the sectors it covers, and its target countries were presented. The speaker placed particular emphasis on the CBI's vision

for the shea sector in Benin through the project, namely, "Women in the shea butter and derivative products sector in Benin benefit equitably from production and export activities."

The speeches from FNPk, IKB, ATDA Pôle 3, ADPME, and the Embassy of the Netherlands then marked this opening phase. These presentations unanimously praised the project's relevance to the development of the shea sector in Benin and expressed high expectations for its capacity to sustainably strengthen the economic and social position of women within the sector.

The table below presents a summary of the main speeches given during the official opening.

Table 2 Summary of opening speeches

No.	Speakers	Function/institution	Topic addressed
1		Country Director	Project context, workshop objectives, call for critical and active participation
2		Program Manager / CBI	CBI's mission, ambition for the shea sector, project objectives
3		National Coordinator/FNPk Benin	Relevance of the project for women in the sector, acceptance of the project by the federation.
4		President / IKB	Assessment of the validation process for findings, Role of stakeholders in the sector and competitiveness challenges
5		Director of Development and Infrastructure/ ATDA Division 3	The project's local roots and consistency with agricultural policies
6		Representative / ADPME	ADPME's availability to support SMEs in the sector
7		Representative of the Embassy of the Netherlands	Need to improve the position of women in the sector.

4.3. Presentation of the results of the start-up phase

The project implementation team opened this session with an overview of the project. This introduction served to reiterate the central problem the project aims to address, the different levels at which it manifests itself, as well as the project's vision, ambition, and areas of intervention. The expected results and the main activities carried out during the start-up phase were also presented to situate the work within its broader context.

A second presentation then focused on the main findings from the start-up phase, structured around several levels of analysis: cooperatives, gender and working conditions, micro-enterprises and SMEs in the sector, the market, profitability and income distribution within the value chain, as well as available support services and the sector's ecosystem. This presentation highlighted the main dysfunctions and imbalances observed, while linking them to operational realities on the ground.

These two presentations were followed by an interactive question-and-answer session, during which participants expressed their satisfaction with the relevance and overall consistency of the results presented, which were deemed largely in line with current realities in the sector. However, an important clarification was provided by the FNPk and the IKB, indicating that the State has not set the price of shea kernels for approximately two years, a factor taken into account in the consolidated analysis.

Following these discussions, the project team presented a systemic root cause analysis, highlighting the system's main limitations along three key axes: the position of women in the value chain, the competitiveness of micro-enterprises and SMEs in the sector, and the enabling environment. Using the iceberg methodology, this analysis distinguished, for each axis, the visible elements of the system (events) from the deeper levels, namely recurring trends and patterns, system structures, and mental models.

This presentation helped to clarify the root causes of the inequalities and poor performance observed in the shea sector, while also preparing the ground for the thematic reflection sessions conducted in group work.

4.4. Key results of the workshop

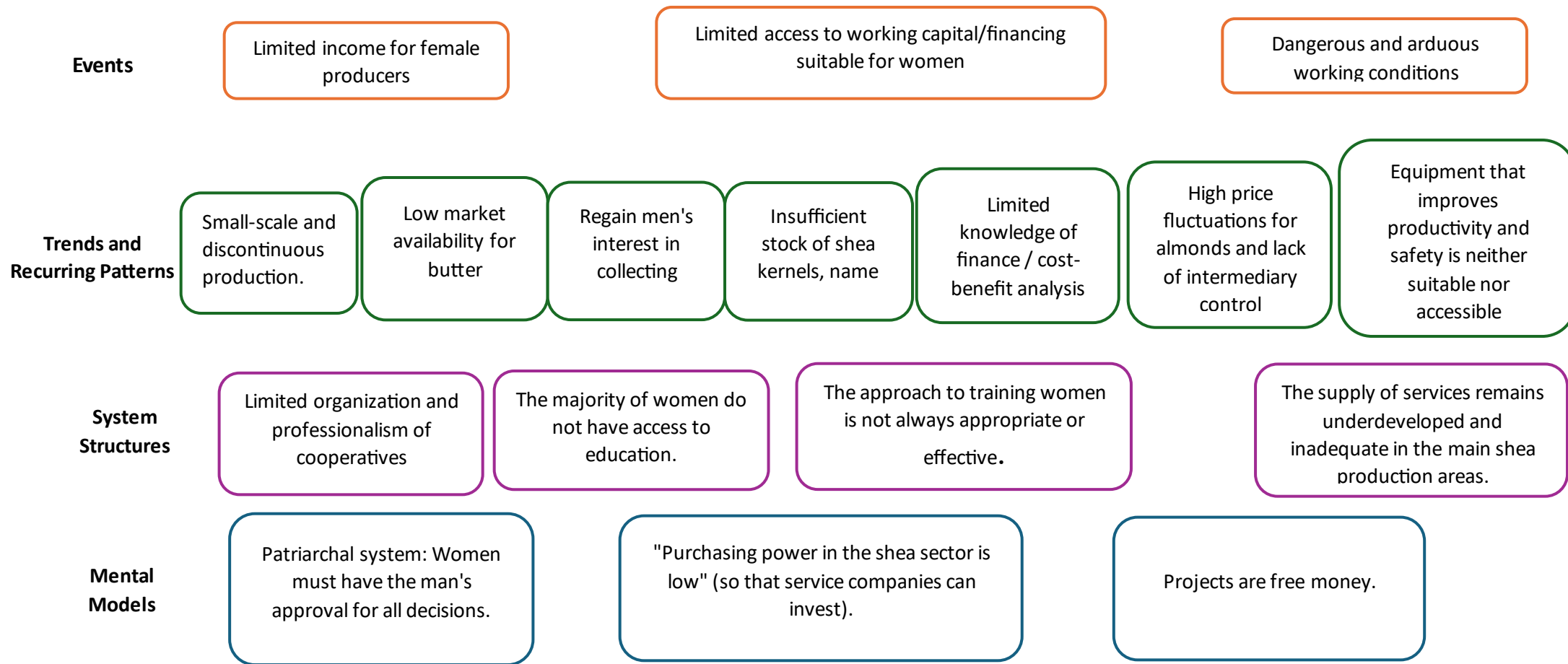
Thematic brainstorming sessions, organized as group work, allowed participants to thoroughly examine the findings and systemic analysis presented. These discussions enabled them to refine the root cause analysis, identify priority root causes by area, and develop solutions or activities to address these priority causes.

The discussions fostered a confrontation of viewpoints among the various stakeholders and a sharing of experiences and knowledge within the sector. The results of this group work, consolidated after the feedback sessions, are presented below.

4.4.1. Validation of root causes by category of actors

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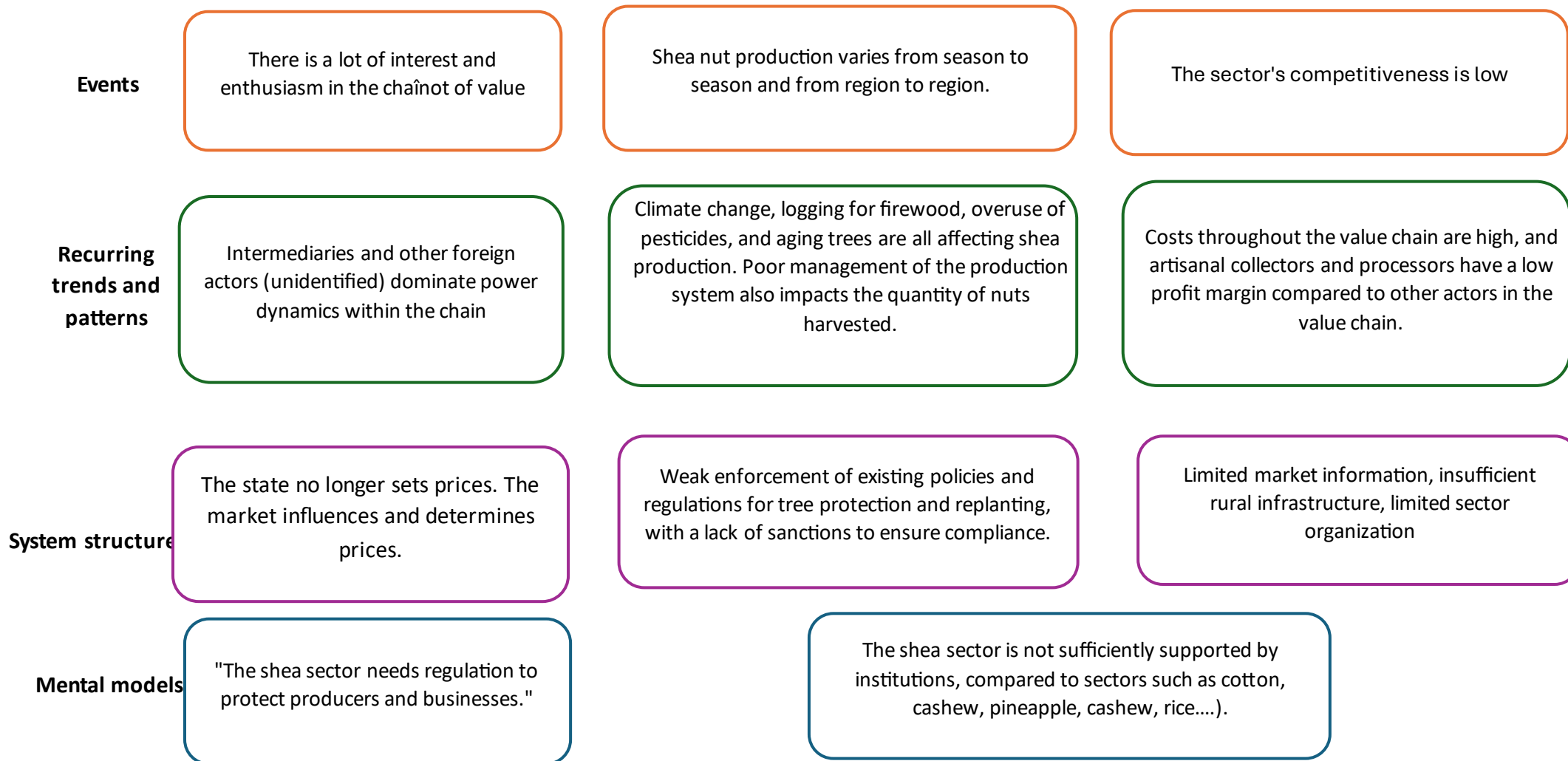
Group 1: Position of women in the sector



Group 2: Competitiveness of micro-enterprises and SMEs



Group 3: Favorable environment



4.4.2. Prioritization of root causes and solution approaches by stakeholder category

- **Position of women in the sector**

No.	Priority causes	Solutions/Interventions	Actors to involve
1	Women's collective organization and professionalism are limited.	Restructuring the entire shea butter sector in Benin with a focus on choosing an appropriate model for the production link	MAEP, FNPB, IKB, CNA Benin PTF, ANKT
		Capacity building for women's leadership	
		Training and post-training coaching on community life and governance	
		Strengthening synergies in action to avoid duplication and encourage complementarity	
2	The equipment that improves productivity and safety is unsuitable and inaccessible.	Training equipment manufacturers on equipment design and maintenance	FNPB, Equipment Supplier, INRAB, ANM, Ministry of Living Environment, Ministry of Commerce, PTF Equipment Supplier
		Supporting microfinance institutions to create or adapt equipment to women's financial power	
		SFD training on cooperative business models	
		Train cooperatives on the use and maintenance of equipment	
3	Low market availability for butter	Creating lasting business relationships between cooperatives and companies and exporters (networking)	FNPB, Cooperative, PTF, CCIB, PTF, Support partner
		Capacity building for women in contract negotiation techniques	
		Support for packaging improvement	
		Media promotion of shea butter	

- **Competitiveness of micro-enterprises and SMEs**

No.	Priority causes	Solutions/Interventions	Actors to involve
1	Lack of focus and clear value proposition	Coaching companies to better understand their target audience and refine their value proposition	
		Training in communication planning, marketing, and business plan development	
		Information on market opportunities and support for participation in trade fairs and events	APIEX
		Training and coaching on the importance of recruiting marketing and communication specialists	
		Conduct a feasibility analysis of setting up physical venues for organizing trade fairs.	ADPME, MAEP, MIC APIEX
		Training for companies on marketing, visibility, and governance	
		Supporting SMEs to register on sales platforms like Sheamarket, etc.	
2	No strong interprofessional body capable of regulating	To provide institutional support to the IKB to have two families of actors instead of four	MAEP, CNA APIEX, CCI Benin, ADPME
		Supporting IKB in setting up an information system that facilitates the dissemination of information to SMEs	

No.	Priority causes	Solutions/Interventions	Actors to involve
	the sector, particularly supply and demand	Raising awareness among industry stakeholders and groups of actors about the risks incurred in the event of non-compliance with the regulatory framework governing industry activities.	
		To encourage members of umbrella organizations to take responsibility for paying their dues on time to support the IKB	IKB
		Supporting IKB in advocacy efforts to propose to the relevant authorities a reduction in shea nut exports.	CBI, CCI Benin
3	Insufficient support mechanism for technical and financial assistance	Training on structuring, access to financing and access to markets	
		In-depth technical training in the field of natural cosmetics	
		Provide a financial mechanism to supply subsidized cash flow to SMEs that have markets	ADPME, FNDA
		Advocating for the raising of specific funds dedicated to shea butter	IKB
		Inform businesses about existing structures that can provide technical and financial support	IKB, APIEX, CCI Benin MIC
		Financial support (facilitation) and monitoring of companies on how to manage financing	
		Supporting businesses in developing business plans, securing guarantees, drafting sales contracts, and creating business model canvases.	

- **Favorable environment**

No.	Priority causes	Solutions/Interventions	Actors to involve
1	Insufficient structuring of actors in the value chain	Restructuring and regulation of all links in the IKB chain	State actors (MAEP, MCVT, MIC, MPEPM)
		Raising awareness among different groups to join IKB	IKB, NGOs, Buyers and Intermediaries, PTF, OPA, Interprofessional Organizations
2	The lack of control over the Shea tree production system	Promote and fund research on the development of short-cycle shea trees in collaboration with other producing countries	National Chamber of Agriculture, MEF, MAEP, MCVT, OPA
		To train direct and indirect stakeholders on the shea tree preservation system, and on the establishment and management of new plantations.	INRAB, FNPK, ATDA, IKB,
		Establish sustainable management of shea parks	University Research Institute, INRAB, FNPK, ATDA
3	Limited market information, insufficient rural	Conducting periodic parking assessments to better understand export costs and liberalizing information through various	MAEP, MCVT, MIC, City Hall, NGOs, OPA, ATDA Pole 3, FNDA, IKB, Ministry of Commerce

No.	Priority causes	Solutions/Interventions	Actors to involve
	infrastructure, limited sectoral organization	channels to facilitate access to information	Interprofessional organization
		Resume the process of proposing a minimum price and raise awareness among stakeholders about how it is applied.	
		Supporting the construction of the necessary infrastructure (stores, runway, processing unit, etc.)	
		Organize regular meetings between stakeholders	

4.5. Participants feedbacks and workshop concludes

The workshop concluded with remarks from FNPk, IKB, and ATDA Pôle 3, who expressed their satisfaction with the quality of the discussions and the relevance of the workshop's outcomes. The speakers commended the participatory approach adopted and emphasized the importance of maintaining this momentum in the next phase, which will focus on validating the project's intervention plan.

The CBI then delivered the closing remarks, thanking all participants for their presence until the end of the workshop, their sustained commitment, and the quality of their contributions throughout the proceedings. She reaffirmed the importance of the results achieved in guiding the future of the project in a coherent and realistic manner.

5. Post-workshop reflection on results monitoring

Following the validation workshop on January 30, 2026, a working session was held to develop the first draft of the project's theory of change. This session, facilitated by the CBI team, brought together the teams in a collaborative approach.

The work has made it possible to clarify and formalize the main structural elements of the theory of change, including the desired impact, the causal chains (pathways) of the project, the expected results in the short, medium and long term, the activities to be implemented, as well as the associated monitoring indicators.

This collective reflection drew heavily on the lessons learned from the validation workshop, particularly the consolidated findings, the prioritized root causes, and the directions proposed by stakeholders in the sector. It thus contributed to updating the theory of change initially formulated in the project's business case, in order to better align it with the realities on the ground, the identified needs, and the priorities expressed by stakeholders. Therefore, three pathways around which the results chain was built are:

- Pathway 1: Sustainable and inclusive economic models.

- Pathway 2: Public and private service providers enhance the performance of cooperatives and SMEs.
- Pathway 3: Favorable business environment.

6. Lessons learned

The main lessons learned from the validation workshop are as follows:

- The integration of private service providers into the value chain remains limited, which restricts access for stakeholders, particularly women and SMEs, to appropriate and quality services.
- Stakeholders expressed a strong expectation for the structuring and organization of the value chain, seen as essential levers for improving the sector's performance.
- The power imbalance to the detriment of women has been confirmed and recognized as a major issue, calling for targeted actions to strengthen their economic position and their participation in decision-making spaces.
- The supply of raw materials appears as a key challenge for companies, confirming the strategic nature of the upstream part of the chain for the overall competitiveness of the sector.
- ADPME has demonstrated a strong commitment and willingness to collaborate with the project. It is currently developing a partnership model between local and foreign companies in the shea sector, which is likely to generate positive spillover effects across the entire value chain.
- Apart from intermediaries, we have the Buyers who communicate directly with the client and have the capacity to have a storage facility for the plugs at the intermediaries' locations.
- The National Chamber of Agriculture is an important link in the SHEA sector in Benin.

7. Conclusion and recommendations

The validation workshop was a crucial step in the implementation of the Benin Shea Gender project, allowing for the consolidation of the results of the phase startup and to test them against the realities on the ground with all stakeholders. The discussions confirmed the relevance of the approach adopted and the robustness of the analyses produced, while reinforcing their grounding in the actual dynamics of the sector.

The lessons learned from the workshop directly informed the updating of the project's theory of change, ensuring stronger alignment between the project's stated objectives, the priorities expressed by stakeholders in the sector, and the planned interventions. This approach reflects the project's capacity to learn, adapt, and refine its direction based on shared evidence.

At the end of the workshop, the following recommendations were made to the IWC:

- (1) Develop synergies with actors such as ADPME, APEFE and TechnoServe, which implement targeted interventions in the shea sector in favor of women and businesses in order to maximize the effectiveness of support.

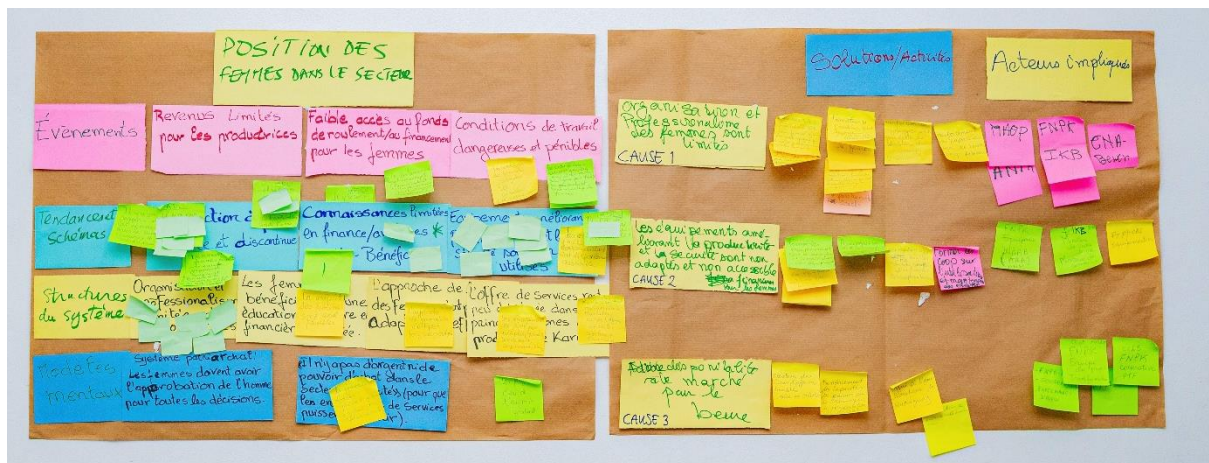
- (2) Ensure consistency between direct support to businesses and cooperatives and actions to structure the ecosystem, by promoting better articulation with key sectoral dynamics, including the organization of actors, market information, service provision (equipment, finance, etc.) and the regulatory framework.
- (3) Supporting the structuring and institutional strengthening of the IKB, in accordance with the requirements of the national regulatory framework in order to consolidate its role as a reference interprofessional body, to improve the organization of the value chain, the dissemination of information and the defense of the interests of actors, in particular women and local businesses.

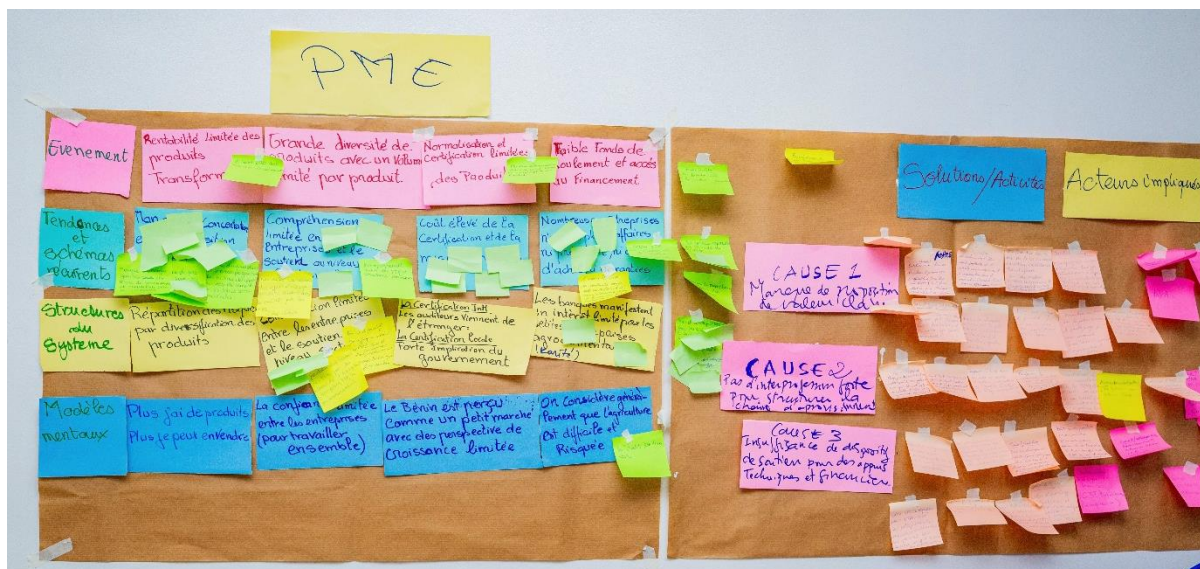
APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Workshop Agenda

Schedules	Activities	Officials
09:00 – 09:35	Welcome address and presentation of the workshop context	
09:35 – 10:05	Official speeches	CBI, FNPB, IKB, MAEP, ADPME, Embassy
10:05 – 10:35	- A closer look at the project - Presentation of the main findings	
10:35 – 11:05	Coffee break	Provider
11:05 – 11:30	Presentation of systemic analysis	
11:30 – 13:00	Validation of key findings and intervention/solution concepts through group work	
13:00 – 14:15	Family photo and lunch break	Provider
14:15 – 15:45	Continuation of the proceedings (World Café) and plenary session	
15:45 – 16:00	Feedback from key players and participants	FNPB, IKB, MAEP, ADPME, CBI
16:00 – 16:30	Official closing	
16:30 – 17:00	Coffee break and informal discussions	Provider

Overview of group work materials





Outputs from the working groups