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AN ASSESSMENT OF SHEA BUTTER PRODUCTION AND ITS ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY AMONG WOMEN IN SAKI, OYO STATE, NIGERIA.

By

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Abstract

Shea butter is a derivative of Shea nuts/Kernels which constitute an important source of affordable cooking fat that is widely utilized for domestic purposes such as cooking, skin moisturizer and as an ingredient in a cosmetic, pharmaceutical and edible product. The study aims at assessing the production of Shea butter and its economic sustainability in Saki-West Local Government, Oyo State, Nigeria. The research design was exploratory based on qualitative method of data collection, for in-depth understanding of the subject matter from the point of view of individuals involved in the production. Primary data was obtained through the use of interview guide via face-to-face interactions with the respondents. Key informant interviews were conducted with key informants. The results revealed that most of the producers sells the butter themselves, while some take the butter to certain markets, other give it to their children to hawk in small quantities while wholesale is done at home or by order. Furthermore, the study revealed that the activity could constitute a significant growth to the Nigerian economy owing to the myriad of industrial applications and domestic consumption. It behooves the research to proffer cogent recommendations to policy makers

Keywords: Assessment, Shea Butter, Production, Economic Sustainability, Saki, Nigeria

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Introduction

Shea butter is gotten from the nut of Shea trees. The Shea butter tree is considered as valuable asset in many parts of Africa. It is important for the livelihoods of the rural population as it has been for over centuries (Lovett & Haqq, 2018).The indigenous names of Shea butter in Nigeria include "Ori" (Yoruba), "Okwuma" (Igbo), and "Markade" (Hausa) (Ololade & Ibrahim, 2020).

Due to the attention ascribed to the Shea butter tree in West African discovery by land travelers, it became well known among European scientists by the early nineteenth-century. West Africa is the principal area where Shea trees can be found, and the trees grow naturally in the wild without the need of plantation (Nieburg, 2019, Elias, 2003). Though the trees have defied human manipulation in the past, there are cases of human plantation in Mali and Burkina Faso. However, these artificially planted Shea trees do not yield as much nuts compared to the ones that grow naturally in the wild (Matanmi, Adesiji, Olasheinde, & Oladipo, 2021).

Shea butter is a derivative of Shea nuts/Kernels which constitute an important source of affordable cooking fat that is widely utilized for domestic purposes such as cooking, skin moisturizer and as an ingredient in a cosmetic, pharmaceutical and edible product (Essiet, 2015). Almost every parts of the Shea tree has its use. Shea tree`s wood is termite resistant and used for building. The pulp is eaten by people and it also important food source for many organisms including birds and bats. The shell is used as a waterproofing material on the walls of mud-buildings. The pulp, bark, roots and leaves are used in traditional medicines in the treatment of cold, cough, catarrh and boil (Matanmi, Adesiji, Olasheinde & Oladipo 2021).All parts of the Shea tree have its use, for example; the fruits are eaten and the leaves are used as fodder and serve as an ingredient for making alkaline and paint (Lovett & Haqq, 2018). When the leaves are put in water, they form a frothy opalescent liquid, which is used to bath a patient that is suffering from acute malaria, yellow fever and any skin disease (Jibreel, Mumuni, Seidu & Al-Hassan, 2021). Shea butter is used in making soap and candles (Davou, 2020). Shea nut cake, the residue that remains after the extraction of Shea nuts serves as excellent fuel. It is a good ingredient for livestock feed formulation as well as for the treatment of skin diseases. The Shea nut cake is also ideal for use as manure and fertilizer production. The Shea butter is naturally rich in vitamins, A, E and F (Lovett,2018). As a cosmetic, it is used as a moisturizer for dressing hair (Elias, 2003), and for protection against the wet and dry weather (Bassel, 2015). It is often used as a substitute for cocoa butter in the chocolate and confectionary industries because of the sweetness (United Nations, Foods and Agricultural Organization, 2002).According to Davou (2020), Shea butter has been proven to be very good for the production of cosmetic and medicinal ointment. It is used traditionally in West African countries for treating rheumatism, cough, wound, catarrh and skin related treatment. Shea butter also serves as a good anti-inflammatory ointment. Other uses of Shea butter and its by-products include the use for making traditional cosmetics and other widespread cultural practices; for examples, African black soap, skin moisturizers for muscle sprains treatment (often functioning as an emollient with medicinal herbs) and for moisturizing new born baby (including removal of the umbilical cord), lubricating joint moving parts in the body and water proofing houses (usually as the residue), as an accelerant for fire lighting and as a traditional oil lamp (Shea butter candles are common at traditional funerals). The Shea tree produces a lot of fruits which when ripen fall down and gathered by women, children and some men from April to August of every year. The local production process of Shea butter in Africa involves the use of manual labour and rudimentary tools

(Lovett & Haqq, 2018). This usually leads to low output and lack of investment, despite its industrial potentials (Alex, 2000).

The Shea butter components make it an important ingredient in confectionary, skin and hair care products, as chemicals for pharmaceutical purposes in the West (United Nations, Food and Agriculture Organization, 2002), as well as for household consumption in Africa (Fleury, 2020). Its usage has been categorized into pharmaceutical, domestic, cosmetics, chocolate and confectionary, based on the quality and industrial application (Elias, 2003). Shea butter usefulness make it for high export value to Europe and the United States (Bassel, 2015). The local production processes entail gamut of social relations which has ensured production over the years. These social relations entail interactions, norms, values and the entirety of the embedded culture of Shea butter production. Shea products have been exported to Western Countries like Canada, U.S.A, Portugal, France and United Kingdom since the colonial period (Enaikele, 2013) where it has been used to produce cosmetics due to its soft, plant component (Leblanc, 2015).

In the West, Shea butter is mostly used for cosmetic products, and as an equivalent of cocoa butter for chocolate, and for soaps and toiletries. Particularly, European chocolate industries have found Shea butter to be of immense use (Lovett, 2018). This has necessitated the increased demand for cocoa butter (Essiet, 2015). Africa is home to about 90% of world Shea nut production (Ademola, Oyesola & Osewa, 2012). The Shea trees grow in the wild and has huge economic and ecological potentials. During the colonial era, colonial officials responded to metropolitan trade interests by devising an ambitious program to augment Shea nut and butter exports from northern Ghana and Nigeria (Lovett, 2018).Thus, to ensure greater export and fair-trade for processors, the UN, bilateral agencies and NGOs developed a project tagged as “revitalization of Shea butter production in Africa” (UN FAO) in 2002. This project has increased export and guaranteed higher remuneration for processors (Eneh, 2018).

Shea butter producing countries in Africa include Mali, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Sudan and Togo (Ademola et al, 2012). Nigeria, one of the high production zones, (Muhagir, Divine & Cessar, 2019) has an advantage in the production and export of Shea nut in Africa due to the large available arable land and suitable climatic conditions for its production. Shea trees are currently growing in many states such as Niger, Nasarawa, Kebbi, Kwara, Kogi, Adamawa, Benue, Edo, Ogun, Plateau, Sokoto, Zamfara, Taraba, Borno and Oyo. Nigeria accounts for over 50 percent of the production in West Africa with a total trade value of $400,000 (Ololade & Ibrahim 2020).

The sociological discourse within the context of Shea butter production and its economic sustainability is predicated on the internal and external interactions within Shea butter production. It is expedient to note that throughout the stages of Shea butter processing, social relations take place constantly. These relations inform the decision of what, when, where and how in the Shea butter production of not just the Shea butter producers but also the stakeholders both locally and globally. The social relations will equally affect people’s actions and behaviour towards Shea butter production, both at the micro and macro level. Such relations can be seen in the norms, beliefs, values and behaviour surrounding Shea butter production.

Shea butter is sometimes referred to as “woman’s gold” because it provides an invaluable source of income for women to support food, clothing and education of their children. The traditional manual method of Shea butter production dominates and which is passed down from generation to generation. Though the manual /local method is time consuming, physical

exhausting and extremely labour intensive, requiring large quantities of water and fuel wood often carried from long distance. Some of the skills involved in the production of Shea butter process are: Shea nuts collection; Shear nuts de-pulping; boiling the nuts; sun drying of the boiled nuts; cracking of the dried nuts; washing of Shea nuts; drying, pounding and crushing of Shea nuts into grit; roasting, milling/grinding Shea nuts into paste; kneading; filtration, solidification and packaging. Shea butter is in high demand on the international market. The global demand is valued at about $20 billion and is projected to be over $50 billion by 2025 (Ololade & Ibrahim, 2020). The production of Shea butter has economical potentials to sustain Shea trees if Shea nuts processing is carried out using improved practice for income generation in rural areas. The product is one among the Non- Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) derives largely from off-reserve forests in the country. This is to enhance local livelihood and contribute to environmental sustainability to biodiversity conservation (Ritzer, 2010).

However, production of Shea butter has the economic potentials in sustaining income generation for rural dwellers. The potentials of Shea nuts productivity could only be achieved when technical efficiency of the processing becomes relevant. Therefore, Shea butter can be extracted by three methods; solvent extraction method, mechanical extraction (hydraulic press) and traditional method. Though the yield from traditional method is lower. Thus, the study focuses on the appraisal of Shea butter production and its economic sustainability by examining the patterns, efficiency and productivity of processing harvested Shea nuts.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the tremendous and numerous medicinal and economic benefits inherent in Shea butter, it attracts little or no welcome in many Nigerian homes. Besides this, many people see it as a shabby job as large population of people involve in processing of this commodity are rural women with little knowledge about its value, and who still adopt the traditional crude method in processing. Consequently, Shea butter producers are unable to sell at the best market value due to three major reasons: low quality of Shea butter as a result of crude method that is commonly adopted, unattractive packaging to enhance domestic and international patronage, and inadequate income to sustain producers. To this end, proactive measures need to be taken so as to forestall long term neglect of Shea butter production and its sustainability in the study area.

Objective of the Study

The general objective of this study is to appraise the production of Shea butter and its economic sustainability in Saki-West Local Government, Oyo State. While the specific objectives were to:

i. Examine the production and processing patterns of Shea nuts
ii. Identify the technology of production and technical efficiency of processing Shea nuts to Shea butter.
iii. Examine the marketing processes of Shea butter.
iv. Determine the economic sustainability of Shea butter among Shea butter producers in Saki-West Local Government Area of Oyo State.

Methodology

The research design for this study was exploratory based on qualitative method of data collection, for in-depth understanding of the subject matter from the point of view of individuals involved in the production of Shea butter. Primary and secondary data were used

to generate information. Primary data was obtained through the use of interview guide via face-to-face interactions with the respondents.

Purposive sampling method was used to select a local government that has a high availability and concentration of Shea butter trees in the state. Three villages were randomly selected from the local government because they were the major processing areas of Shea nuts, they are; Ilua, Oge and Wasangare. 27 processors were purposely selected for the study.

The use of frequency tables and percentage were used to describe the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents in the study area. Data generated from in-depth and key informant interviews were translated, transcribed and sorted. Content analysis of data was done thematically to ease out intended and unintended responses while responses were also quoted verbatim and assigned to subthemes.

Results

Table 1

Distribution of respondents by socio-demographic characteristics

Socio-Demographic Characteristics	**Frequency n (27)**	**Percentage %**
Gender of respondents		
Male	3	11.1
Female	24	88.9
Age of respondents		
20-29	2	7.4
30-39	2	7.4
40-49	2	7.4
50-and above	21	77.8
Marital status		
Single	1	3.7
Married	24	88.9
Divorced	-	-
Widowed	2	7.4
Level of education		
informal	20	74.1
Primary	5	18.5
Secondary	1	3.7
Post-secondary	1	3.7
Number of children		
1-5	5	18.5
6-10	17	63
11 and above	5	18.5

Source: Fieldwork.

The result of the survey shows that majority (88.9%) were female, reflecting the observation that processing of Shea butter is mostly done by women. In the same vein, 77.8% of the sampled respondents were between the age range of 50years and above. This low involvement of young processors could be due to rural-urban migration of youth for modern education and white collar jobs in an urban center. The table also shows the marital status of the respondents which reveals that 3.7% were single, 88.9% were married. The greater involvement of married people as processors in this business is driven by desire to increase family income. Table 1 further revealed that 74.1% had no formal education and 25.9% attended school. It can therefore be deduced from the table that most processors are educationally disadvantaged. This is because the processing involves no serious management skills or calculation and most literate people see it as a shabby job which could have a negative impact on the processor's adoption of innovation on new techniques. The table also revealed that 63% of the respondents were having 6-10 numbers of children in their household. Therefore, married people with large family size have an alternative supply of labour to work during processing especially when the children are available to support in processing activities. Hence, family members are capable of providing quality labour during the processing activities.

The Production and Processing Patterns of Shea Nuts.

Reasons for Venturing into Shea butter Production

According to certain respondents, the findings disclosed that a large number of the respondents grew up in household where Shea butter was a major source of income for the family and their interest on involvement in Shea butter production was prompted by their mother-in-laws at the onset of marriage. Furthermore, Shea butter production is a traditional economic activity that has been bequeathed to their mothers by their grandmothers, this shows that Shea butter production is unique and can only be performed by women who possess the knowledge, history, timing and processes of harvesting Shea nuts.

The following responses buttress this;

"Although I do help my mother, I didn't start Shea butter business until I got married at the age of 25years. My mother in-law was already in the business, which was why I also joined" **IDI/Female/55/Ilua/October, 2023**

To quote this;

...I grew up with the knowledge of Shea butter in my family. een.. eeen..My mother was actively involved in it. Initially, I was not involved in the production fully, but at a stage I became involved in it because my other business (tie and dye) was no longer in demand". I have been producing Shea butter for more than twenty years (20).

KII/Female/57/Oge/October, 2023

Division of Labour

Division of Labour is a component of social interaction that is displayed in the processing and pattern of production of Shea butter in Saki-West. This has been revealed by the findings.

According to an interviewee:

'There isn't much relationship between men and women; they hardly get involved in Shea butter. At a tender age, females are indoctrinated into Shea butter production, male are not so taught the tricks of the trade, although they help us out every occasionally".

IDI/Female/33/Araromi/October/2023.

A further account by another interviewee revealed:

"We have to relate with men because we cannot operate the machines so they help us. Also, some men picks the nuts and give us to produce the butter, we then become partners. But we don't share the profit equally."

The Technology and Technical Efficiency of Shea Nuts to Shea Butter.

Type and Source of Tools

Studies have shown that more than half of African women who produce Shea butter use local tools and implements (UN FAO, 2002, Ademola et al, 2012). Recent findings suggests that this status quo is changing as women are beginning to use modern machines, albeit adequacy of such machines is a source of concern.

The following were reported by the respondents:

"We started using modern technology about a year ago here. Before then, we use manual tools such as mortal, pestles, clay pots, nylons and bowls". Although I prefer the modern engines because it makes work easy and fast, there are still certain stages that require local tools. So I use the two methods".

KII/Female/65/Ilua/October, 2023

To support the above statement:

"The government provided the modern machines here. We were told the machines belong to us. I have access to it anytime I want to process nuts. The modern machine is faster and easier than the local tools we use. The local tools are more tedious. I don't have any practice to ensure optimum production"

IDI/Female/60/Ilua/October, 2023

Access to and Usage of Technology

The Shea butter factory in Saki-West is one of the four factories established in Nigeria by the Standard and Trade Development Facility (STDF) in collaboration with the Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC).The factory has milling machines that can crush, grind Shea nuts and mixes milled Shea nuts with water, but the modern engines are not enough to cater for the large number of Shea butter producers in Saki-West. Therefore, Shea butter producers have adopted by combining both traditional and modern tools.

According to an interviewee:

"I use the machines here. We don't pay for the engines, except to contribute money according to the quantity of Shea nut a producer wants to process. The money is used to maintain the machines and pay operators. We buy the other implements such as big bowls, cartons, nylon, firewood and pots in the market".

IDI/Female/40/Wasangare/October, 2023

Another interviewee revealed:

"Although I prefer the modern engines because they are less stressful, there are still certain stages that require local tools. So when I crush and grind with mechanized tool I take them home for further processing. I use the two methods…. the machines are not enough for all the

women here. So we rotate the usage. When a woman has some nuts to process and it's not her turn, she takes it to local engine operators who crush the nuts and the rest is done at home. We have to be wise".

IDI/Female/55/Ilua/October, 2023

This was revealed by an interviewee:

"I use hand to crush the nuts and mix the butter because the engines are not available here. This has been responsible for low production of Shea butter here. You can see these women. They are all idle because there are no machines to relieve them of the stress. The nuts are also expensive".

IDI/Female/35/Oge/October, 2023

Marketing, Packaging and Advertising.

The study revealed that majority of Shea butter producers sells the butter themselves, while some take the butter to certain markets, other gives it to their children to hawk in small quantities while wholesale is done at home or by order. Also, packaging of Shea butter is done by groups of women depending on the quantity of butter that needs to be packaged. Shea butter producers have not tapped into the opportunities available in advertising. From the findings, some challenges of Shea butter production include; inadequate mechanized tools, credit facilities and lack of available network to export companies.

As said by an interviewee:

"I sell the butter myself at the market. I don't wish my children to hawk it any longer. I only implore the government to help us get people who would come to the market to buy them without the hassle of taking them to the market. Government has been making promises but they have not fulfilled their promises"

IDI/Female/50/Ilua/October, 2023

As claimed by another interviewee:

"My children help me sometime to sell the butter at the market. The men do not sell butter. We cannot give it to men because it is not their duty. The butter is taken to Sango market where people from Lagos and Abuja purchase them. It has been taken abroad also where it is used for body cream but we use it here for domestic purposes".

IDI/Female/50/Wasangare/October, 2023

The responses show some form of apathy towards advertising:

"We don't advertise our products. Patronage is based on client's prior knowledge of our products. I simply take order and deliver. People know I sell the butter".

IDI/Female/59/Oge/October, 2023

Also by an interviewee:

"I don't advertise. The butter advertises itself when I take it to the market. People know I sell Shea butter. It is a traditional job that I am known for. My buyers from other state call me and tell me what they want. Why should I advertise?

KII/Male/57/Wasangare/October, 2023

The Economic Sustainability of Shea Butter among the Shea Butter Producers.

Values, Taboos and Beliefs Surrounding Shea butter Processing

In every society, there are norms, belief and values that shape the activities of the people. These cultural heritages are practices that ensure the sustainability of Shea tree, quality of its butter and the people involved in the production. Findings in Saki-West reveal that these cultural beliefs are different, it is safe to assume that local taboos, beliefs and values vary, depending on ethnic group in Nigeria. The following statements from different respondents reveals this,

An interviewee claimed:

"I was told by my mother that when I am processing Shea butter, I mustn't get angry with anyone or fight, neither must I be sad. We have seen cases where the butter didn't come out well because of these taboos. Our heart must be pure. We have kept this to heart ever since"

IDI/Female/58/Wasangare/October, 2023

Other interviewee had this to say:

"One of the values we adhere to is trust. Producers of Shea butter have to be truthful to one another. There is no room for deceit, not to those you buy the nuts from nor fellow processors. One must also not steal someone else's nuts, bear grudges or malice. It is a taboo".

IDI//Female/26/Ilua/October, 2023

An interviewee revealed a norm that is different from what the previous said:

"After sexual intercourse, a woman must bath herself before she processes Shea butter. That is what I know. I also belief when I produce Shea butter, I will be successful. I have seen people being successful in this business. I will also be like them one day".

IDI/Female/40/Oge/October, 2023

Nature of Challenges and Coping Strategies

Studies show that challenges of Shea butter production include inadequate mechanized tools, inadequate credit facilities and lack of access to Shea nuts and trees. While the findings of this study gave credence to the above challenges as evidence, it will profit the body of knowledge if other challenges are unearthed. Also, the coping strategies peculiar to Shea butter producers in Saki-West need to be documented and analyzed for posterity and sustainability of Shea butter producers in Saki-West and Nigeria.

"The entire processes of production are challenging. After bringing home the nuts from the farm, I have to bring it home from the farm. After this, we make fire and cook it. I wash the nuts before sun-drying them. I still wash it after I roast it and take it to the market. After this, I can rinse it for 3 times while mixing it. Body pain is also a problem. We just have to do the job as there is no other job. We have adjusted ourselves to it. Sometimes we solicit the help of others; this has been a coping mechanism for us"

IDI/Female/50/Ilua/October, 2023

Another interviewee;

"....another challenge is that one may buy a bad nut which will affect the quality of Shea butter that will be produced. This depends on the nut; there is nothing we can do about it. To get firewood and water is worrisome. The smoke from the firewood destroys my eyes. This weakens my body. What can I do?"

IDI/Female/60/Wasangare/October, 2023

The abovementioned challenge appears to be a natural problem that cannot be solved. However, a critical analysis of this show that human manipulation of Shea nuts can cause bad Shea nuts.

Another response from an interviewee;

"We also need people to come to our factory to buy the butter rather than taking them to Sango market. As you can see, I have much butter available but no buyer for it. We need people to come and buy our product from time to time and we also need more machines. This will make us more productive".

IDI/Female/52/Wasangare/October, 2023

Therefore, the processors resort to the use of local tools as a coping mechanism. This has been used as a strategy to stay and survive in the Shea butter production sector by local producers. From the responses, the lack of adequate machines means that producers use "mix methods". This means that modern machines are combined with local tools to extract Shea oil. However, this is a strategy used by local processors to remain in the production and it has implication for health and environmental degradation.

Discussion of Findings

The findings shown that the processors are predominantly females, reflecting the observation that processing of Shea butter is mostly done by women and that women are the backbone of the economy, particularly in the informal sector which have more women entrepreneurs that generate huge Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the country. Further stressed that the traditional methods predominates and this could be due to lack of funds to procure appropriate simple tools to facilitate and expand the production of Shea butter. It can be seen that stress is the main problem faced by the processors because of the traditional method being employed by some processors and which is energy consuming. Attempts have been made to introduce new technologies into the gathering, roaster, kneader, storage and process of Shea butter and the establishment of four factories by the Standard and Trade Development Facility (STDF) in collaboration with the Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC) that will compliments the manual process and reduce drudgery of the traditional system.

It can further be deduced that Shea butter enterprise is profitable and that the higher the number of basins of Shea nut, the higher the profit, and that Shea nuts processing activity is their main source of livelihood that cater for their children's education, health needs of their family, improvement in access to household food and assets. However, the local processors are over dependent on family labour for the processing of Shea nuts into Shea butter because the capacity of women processors depends on the availability of family labour as a source of labour.

Conclusions

Shea butter production in Saki-West is a source of livelihood for producers and their household. More than half of the respondents attested that it is their only source of income. Besides, producers testified that they employ women and youth who have no source of income. Furthermore, the study revealed that the activity could constitute a significant growth to the Nigerian economy owing to the myriad of industrial applications and domestic consumption of Shea butter and it derivate. If maximized, the raw material can serve as a foreign revenue generator and changed the mono-economic status of the Nigeria economy which has not proven to be viable enough to bring about the much needed human development in Nigeria society.

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