

DEVELOPING AGROFORESTRY VALUE CHAINS THROUGH REGREENING AFRICA'S LINKAGE FORUMS

NÉRÉ AND SHEA VALUE CHAINS FORUM IN MALI

11-12 AUGUST 2022 | BAMAKO, MALI



Introduction

Regreening Africa is implemented in Mali by four organisations including SAHEL ECO, Catholic Relief Service (CRS) and World Vision, under the leadership of OXFAM. The project aims to scale up regreening practices and reverse land degradation through a selection of land restoration techniques adapted to ecological, economic, and social contexts, including the development of non-timber forest products (NTFP) value chains.

In its promotion of NTFP value chains in Mali, Regreening Africa has adopted **user-focused** approaches:

A diagnostic study of the market was conducted, to take stock of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) and pre-select priority NTFPs in a participatory manner. This study also helped identify actors involved in the sector and assess their capacities. Moreover, it identified the challenges that hinder the development of agroforestry value chains, such as:

- the ageing of agroforestry parks;
- the disappearance of certain tree species that provide NTFPs;
- weak organisation of actors in the NTFP sectors;
- poor market access; and
- difficult access to credit and financing mechanisms for NTFP producers and processors.

To address these challenges, **Regreening Africa strengthened the technical and material capacities of groups**. This capacity-building process included:

- technical training on production and processing routes
- training on re-greening techniques (such as direct seeding and 60 cm x 60 cm holes)
- entrepreneurship training
- business plan development
- the provision of processing equipment such as multifunctional processing units, small work equipment (basins, barrels, pots, packaging pots), hand washing devices, and other necessary tools to enhance productivity.

During August 1st to 12, 2022, Regreening Africa's implementation partners, ICRAF, OXFAM and SAHEL ECO, organised a national forum on *Parkia biglobosa* (néré) and *Vitellaria paradoxa* (shea) value chains at the Bamako National Park.

The objective of the national forum was to promote visibility and communication efforts on the development of agroforestry value chains and to promote the creation of links between the different actors to support sustainable market access and services.

VALUE CHAIN FORUM OBJECTIVES

Create visibility for the actions of Regreening Africa on the development of the *Parkia biglobosa* (néré) and *Vitellaria paradoxa* (shea) value chains in Mali.

Promote co-learning and experience sharing between partners and projects that support the development of néré and shea value chains.



Provide opportunities for local, regional, and national value chain actors to showcase products and services that can benefit from the development of néré and shea value chains.

Promote public-private partnerships and network relations between actors in agroforestry value chains.

Facilitate the direct link between local chain actors and potential buyers and service providers.



Forum proceedings

Mali's national forum on shea and néré value chain development hosted a wide range of panel discussions and presentations by producers, agricultural financiers, government and NGO representatives. The presentations included (but were not limited to) the following:

MALI'S STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

In his presentation at the forum, Mali's Minister of Environment, Sanitation and Sustainable Development, Mr. Modibo Kone, stressed the importance of néré, shea, gum arabic and cashew nuts as critical to Mali's future. "We are a desert, Sahelian country, we have land. We must ensure that our populations get involved in the exploitation of non-timber forest products which could enable the growth of the country's green economy," he said. Mr. Kone explained that Mali's strategic framework for sustainable land management, adopted in 2011, has made it possible to break the circle between poverty and land degradation by implementing strategies that give actors the means to ensure their subsistence while improving their living conditions and promoting agro-forestry-pastoral activities. He called for a shift from the current export of products in a raw state to greater product processing within Mali.

SAVINGS FOR CHANGE GROUPS

Representatives from OXFAM International presented their work on preserving and restoring the potential of néré and shea plants, in four regions (namely San, Tominian, Yorosso, and Koutiala) covering an area of 160,000 ha and reaching 80,000 households. The scaling model is based on several practices, such as identifying relays and producer lead trainers in all the intervention villages, involving women and youth in regreening, using local associations for field activities, and creating and revitalising EPC groups. To convey information and provide training on regreening options, the project uses the "Savings for Change" groups. Each group consists of approximately 25 women who meet weekly to discuss regreening activities within their community, undertake actions to recover degraded land through CES/DRS techniques, and install local nurseries to produce seedlings of indigenous species. Women will also receive training in operating improved stoves.

SHEA VALORISATION PROJECT

Mali's Directorate of Water and Forestry (DNEF) showcased the Shea Valorisation Project in the commune of Faragouaran, in which interventions on exploitation of NTFPs (specifically shea, néré and zaban) have helped improve socio-economic conditions of women's groups in Faragouaran, as well

as preserving the local forest ecosystem. The project identified 15 associations comprising 1,835 producers or actors in the sector, the capacities of whom were strengthened through several training courses and the provision of modern equipment. Cooperative members were also trained on production, processing, conservation, and marketing. These efforts have resulted in significant positive outcomes for the project.

THE SHEA PROJECT

Sponsored by the Government of Mali and the African Development Bank in support of the empowerment of women, the Shea Project aims to:

- Improve the shea sector in Mali through both qualitative and quantitative means;
- Support the establishment of interprofessional interventions among shea actors;
- Support environmental protection; and
- Support product marketing.

The project faces several challenges that need to be addressed to ensure its success. Firstly, there is a need to organise women around the sector, which can prove difficult due to the dispersed nature of the producers and the low literacy levels of women, limiting their ability to access information and training programs. The project also requires the costly establishment of a shea processing unit, necessitating the involvement of private investors that have to date been slow to invest in the shea sector due to its low

profitability and perceived risk. Another challenge faced by the project is environmental degradation, which can negatively impact the production of shea and other timber forest products.

Despite these challenges, there are still opportunities within the framework of this project, specifically at the national, sub-regional and international market, and in the support of technical services, and access to land through groups.



NITIDAE'S FORECO PROJECT

As part of Nitidae's FORECO project ("forest territories and innovative sectors for the forest and the local economy") in partnership with Sahel Eco and AMASSA Afrique Verte, Nitidae supports associations, cooperatives, unions, federations and companies in the collection, processing and marketing of the shea, gum Arabic, and cashew value chains. Nitidae's work in Mali combines environmental preservation with economic performance for local communities, through:

- increasing product quality;
- increasing the added value of products through certification (Fair Trade, Organic Agriculture);
- making product processing more environmentally efficient (increased waste recycling and reduced wood and water consumption through extracting shea butter by pressing); and
- market analysis.

TREE-AID'S SUPPORT OF COOPERATIVES

Tree Aid is active in the field of natural resource management and the development of forest resources, particularly NTFP activities. Tree Aid has 5 projects in three regions including:

- the Koulikoro Region, improving the socio-economic status of 1000 women (funded by UK AID) with several other environmental support projects; and
- agroforestry and carbon projects in the Kayes and Ségou regions, in partnership with SAHEL ECO.

Tree Aid's NTFP value chains support approach is based on Village Tree Enterprises (VTEs), voluntary groups around a given product. Cooperatives are established at the village level using the OHADA approach, following which Tree Aid provides training on cooperative aspects, good practices in production, processing, etc.; processing equipment, packaging, etc.; and linkages with other direct actors, suppliers, service providers, financial services, alongside support in forest governance, agroforestry activities, and soil and water conservation, amongst others.

PRODUCT EXHIBITION DAY

Day 2 of the forum included a public exhibition of NTFP products, with stands run by ICRAF-CIFOR and by cooperatives of NTFP women processors, including the Tominian Women's Processing Cooperative and the Yorosso Women Processors Cooperative.

NTFPs exhibited included shea butter, soumbala by néré, baobab leaf powder, baobab grain powder, with ICRAF-CIFOR showcasing seedlings of different species. The woman cooperatives also shared their experiences with the Regreening Africa project, highlighting the positive impact partnering with NGOs such as OXFAM and SAHEL ECO has had on their activities.



Key insights on agroforestry value chain development in Mali



Investing in land restoration can result in economic benefits for rural communities.



Combining restoration actions with the development of agroforestry value chains is an effective strategy for scaling up regreening actions.



Organising women and young people into groups can facilitate their access to and ownership of products from preserved trees, making them important actors in the restoration of drylands.



The Savings for Change approach can strengthen the investment capacity of groups by mobilising their internal

savings, reducing their dependence on external financing with high-interest rates.



Local fairs and culinary competitions are effective strategies for creating commercial relationships and local demand for products made from agroforestry.



Shea remains an important food source in the lean season, and has improved economic value with the sector currently experiencing renewed interest from high-potential edible fat processing industries.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE VALUE CHAIN DEVELOPMENT

Forum participants made the following recommendations:

- Regreening Africa enabled a first level structuring of agroforestry value chain actors into groups. It is recommended to **move towards forming these groups into cooperatives** so as to increase production volumes and strengthen their ability to negotiate more advantageous prices.
- Since the products are seasonal, it is necessary to **diversify the range of products** for each group (transformation of shea + néré + honey + baobab leaf, etc.)
- **Establish a strategy for large cities to stop using wood as the primary source of energy** and promote alternative energy sources such as butane gas, ecological coal, solar, and biogas.
- **Strengthen the application of forestry legislation** to better protect species of economic value (néré and shea). Take measures to protect and conserve forest resources, ensuring the sustainability

Suggested Citation

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