

BSR Financial Resilience in Shea Program | Learnings Report

MARCH 2025 | REPORT



Table of Contents

Executive Summary2

Background.....2

Project Overview3

Findings | Outcomes of the Financial Resilience in Shea Program4

Successes & Impact7

Challenges8

Conclusion8

**While the results of our monitoring and evaluation approach show our trainings contributed to some of outcomes stated in this report, we acknowledge that other confounding factors beyond our control may also have influenced some of the observed results.*

Executive Summary

In partnership with The Estée Lauder Companies (ELC) and The Estée Lauder Companies Charitable Foundation (ELCCF), BSR developed and conducted a financial resilience program for shea nut collectors and processors across the shea value chain in the Tamale region of Ghana. The program consists of two phases – the first phase of this program was developing and piloting of a bespoke financial resilience model for the shea sector. The pilot phase took place from January 2021 – December 2022, with trainings taking place in cooperatives in northern Ghana, and yielded significant positive results. The program then went on to a Phase 2, which intended to extend the reach and impact generated in Phase 1 through four different scaling models developed and delivered from January 2023 – December 2024. This report summarizes the learnings and outcomes from the second phase. The findings are based on the results of a monitoring and evaluation approach, which gathered information on the results and outcomes of the four models trialed in this phase through various data gathering mechanisms and which are detailed in a separate, in-depth comparative study.

The findings detailed below showcase significant growth in areas of financial literacy and significant behavior changes toward increased financial resilience among women shea nut collectors and processors. In addition, positive shifts were observed among families and communities as a result of the trainings. The report provides a summary of results across the four different scaleup models and highlights areas of success and challenges.

Background

In agriculture, women are often engaged in informal activities and face several challenges related to access to and control over productive resources, access to training and education, low earnings, and balancing unpaid work and care. The Global Shea Alliance estimates that 16 million women collect shea nuts and process shea butter across West Africa.¹ Often called “women’s gold” for its potential to increase their revenue, the collection and processing of shea nuts is not devoid of exploitation and vulnerability for women involved in this activity.

Women work along the shea value-chain by gathering and collecting the raw shea nuts and selling those directly or working to process shea nuts into shea butter. Women who live in rural areas are mostly shea nut collectors who gather and process shea nuts for sale. Given there is a short seasonal window in which collection is possible, the amount of income nut collectors can acquire via the nuts they harvest is limited.

In contrast, women who live in semi-urban communities and cities are mostly shea butter processors; meaning they add value to the raw shea nut kernels by processing the nuts into shea butter, a primary product required in the cosmetics and other industries. Women who engage in shea butter production can do so throughout the year, and therefore earn improved incomes than their counterparts who are only shea nut collectors. However, there are also women in rural and urban areas who engage in both activities as both nut collectors and butter processors.

¹ <https://www.globalshea.com/overview?page=MjkwMzA1NjI0LjE0MTU=/Industry%20Overview>

**While the results of our monitoring and evaluation approach show our trainings contributed to some of outcomes stated in this report, we acknowledge that other confounding factors beyond our control may also have influenced some of the observed results.*

The seasonality of nut picking means that much of this work is completed in high temperatures in late spring to early summer, and collectors choose when to sell their nuts. However, market fluctuations regularly change the sale rate for raw shea nuts and processed shea butter. This dependence upon the shea season's yield and changes in market fluctuations leave women collectors and processors exposed to agricultural and financial shocks, which are further exacerbated through climate change as shea trees grow on wild parklands and not actively cultivated. The changes in biodiversity and in climate affect the yield of shea trees and the amount of nuts that can be collected from these trees in a given year.

Project Overview

During an initial scoping phase and based on the research that identified the challenges mentioned above, BSR found that financial inclusion and resilience training was a significant need due to the seasonality of shea and the lack of training for women on how to manage money received from their shea collecting and processing work. Although women engaged in shea activities usually organize themselves as groups or registered community-based co-operatives, financial resilience was a struggle for women in their families and as individuals, as most existent training in shea is currently aimed at the cooperatives rather than the individual and family.

Based on these findings, with the input and support of the ELC and ELCCF teams as well as with input from our local Ghana-based implementing partner PureTrust, BSR developed a bespoke set of financial trainings relevant to women working in the shea context in the pilot phase of the program (Phase 1). The topics deemed most relevant to shea nut collectors and processors that were covered during the trainings are as follows: Financial Planning, Budgeting, Savings and Borrowing Responsibly, Talking about Finances with Your Family, and Digital Financial Services. Given the successes of Phase 1 and the requests for more training of this kind by suppliers and by women, financial resilience was deemed a prevalent need for women in shea. Therefore, building upon the learnings and successes of Phase 1, Phase 2 was developed to extend the reach of the program and its impact beyond the original pilot sites.

During this Phase 2, BSR developed four different models to test approaches to scale and build capacity and resources for the training to reach a wider group of women in the shea value chain. The curriculum that was piloted in Phase 1 was used in each of the four models. The four models tested in Phase 2 were as below:

- **Models 1 & 2:** Building up the capacity of a supplier to deliver the financial resilience trainings within the cooperatives they source shea nuts and butter from (**Partner for this model: Savannah Fruits Company**) as well as in Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) run with women shea nut collectors and processors (**Partner for this model: AAK**). For these two models, following capacity-building workshops of field officers, field officers then trained either peer educators or women directly on the curriculum content throughout the course of the year.
- **Model 3:** Strengthening access to key financial resilience topics by developing a radio program in a dialogue format between women shea nut collectors and processors and an expert in several episodes. The five key financial resilience topics are: Financial Planning; Budgeting; Saving and Borrowing Responsibly; Talking about finances with your family; and Financial Products and Services. For each episode, a trainer presented the topic of interest and facilitated a discussion session with members of a peer community group. The episodes were aired via the “Kpihi Saha” program on Zaa FM and Simli

radio in the northern part of Ghana. These episodes were broadcast in November 2023 and January 2024. **(Partner for this model: Farmers' Voice Radio, a Lorna Young Foundation initiative).**

- **Model 4:** Strengthening financial literacy knowledge among shea nut collectors and processors involved in a program wherein they are provided with loans. For this model, we complemented existing financial literacy trainings that were being delivered to communities with augmented content from our own curriculum and strengthened the capacity of field officers in delivering those trainings before providing loans to women. **(Partner for this model: a Microloan Service Provider)**

This report includes a summary of both the results of a baseline and endline survey delivered to women, and observations gathered during various monitoring visits in different communities. These served as opportunities to complement the findings from the surveys through more qualitative, informal discussions on how the women felt about the trainings, what they learned from them, and what benefits they perceived.

Finally, the BSR team organized a field visit in May 2024 to gather additional information on the outcomes of the program. During that field visit, we held three focus group discussions with women in three different cooperatives and organized a workshop gathering all partners to complement findings with additional learnings on the impact of the program so far and identify areas of improvements as well as recommendations for a further iteration. In the report below, we present findings and learnings from the surveys and field visits conducted for all four models and identify potential areas of improvement.

The findings outlined below provide a comprehensive summary of the results of the surveys, monitoring & observation visits, and focus group discussions*.

Findings | Outcomes of the Financial Resilience in Shea Program

Summary of the main outcomes:

- Overall, women are now overwhelmingly more confident in their ability to handle expenses, to save, invest in loans, start a business. They feel more empowered to talk with their family about financial topics and make decisions jointly; they have built up their self-confidence overall, all leading to positive changes at the family- and community-level.
- Women have built additional streams of income including strengthening investments in shea and have expressed desire for further training and support. Several of them have cited feeling capable of accomplishing things they did not believe they were able to do previously.
- New models for delivering training were tested and a variety of new communities were reached which led to ripple effects within communities including common investment in infrastructure needs for villages and/or co-op needs to strengthen shea production.
- Partners now are trained to deliver this training within their own projects moving forward and most of our partners in this scale-up phase have expressed interest in carrying this onward. There are some resource challenges, but they are keen to explore what is possible because they see high value in the program.
- Field officers trained in these topics have also started practicing financial resilience lessons in their own life and have reported strengthened outcomes in their family life as a result of the lessons learned.

**While the results of our monitoring and evaluation approach show our trainings contributed to some of outcomes stated in this report, we acknowledge that other confounding factors beyond our control may also have influenced some of the observed results.*

Case Study: Change in respondents' savings behavior after the trainings

During a monitoring visit PureTrust conducted to evaluate how the knowledge of financial resilience acquired during the training is helping women achieve their financial dream goals, all the women said they are saving money to achieve their goal. Respondents were asked to rank all that applies from eight set of behavioral change domains that help them to achieve their goal.



A strong majority of the women said they practice regular savings towards achieving their financial dream goals, but a few of them said they were not able to save regularly due to low income. However, these women also expressed interest in starting other income generating activities to earn more income and practice regular savings. This category of respondents were shea nut pickers who do not have regular source of incomes as opposed to shea nut processors who have more steady income throughout the year. Several respondents also engaged in managing risk by pursuing income source diversification to increase their incomes and to make their finances more resilient. This complemented their practice of budgeting and tracking their expenses.

Detailed outcomes & findings:

The scale-up and trainings empowered women to understand what was within their control around managing their finances and gave them the ability to use these means to **amplify their savings, create goals which could lead to greater revenue, diversify their income streams, share these learnings with family for increased joint decision-making**. We observed a **significant level of growth among women** in their ability and propensity to save, their understanding of financial planning, their practices of making decisions jointly with their family and/or husband, and their confidence in being able to meet unexpected expenses.

Many women have stated **they now consciously think about how they spend their money, save, budget, plan ahead**, which was not the case prior to the trainings. Many have also expressed satisfaction in discussing topics such as power dynamics and its various forms, and their impacts, which conveyed a sense of enlightenment and empowerment, contributing to more self-confidence. Women have also **gained an added sense of agency** by overcoming the traditional mindset that only men can save, which has led them to take **increased responsibility for decisions that concern the family**. This has in some cases led them to **prioritize sending their children to school** instead of having them work.

Beyond learning about the content of the training modules and changing their financial practices for the better, **saving and cutting expenses to reach their newly defined financial goals** have led several women whose sole source of income was shea to successfully **pursue secondary sources of income** – either by taking up farming activities such as animal rearing, opening up shops, selling goods to the community. Others have **expanded secondary businesses** which they had already started by taking out a loan. Income diversification allows shea nut collectors and processors to rely on more than one income

**While the results of our monitoring and evaluation approach show our trainings contributed to some of outcomes stated in this report, we acknowledge that other confounding factors beyond our control may also have influenced some of the observed results.*

source rather than being dependent only upon shea, giving them new means to meet their needs and those of their family. In addition to secondary sources of income, many women have taken the learnings from the trainings to **improve their shea processing output** by investing in more shea nuts at the beginning of the season so they can process more butter and gain more income. Many women have stated that their financial situation and living standards overall have improved.

Beyond individual changes, this program has had ripple effects on the people in the communities around the individuals trained. Many of the women mentioned they shared what they learned during a given module with their family members, partner, other members of the community disseminating the knowledge to many more individuals than has been our initial target. This has implications for generating potential long-term impacts that we cannot observe yet; for instance, **children are now knowledgeable of certain financial concepts and have started**



practicing habits such as savings at a very young age. Some of our partners have also observed more immediate changes with all women **paying back their loans in full.** In addition, some noteworthy community-level changes occurred among several communities with increased cohesion, solidarity and collaboration leading to collective action in some of the communities including **pooling finances together to strengthen access to clean water in their villages.** Moreover, the increased level of confidence and comfort women now have with talking about their finances with their family members has enabled better communication overall, which has helped families with making better financial decisions.

In addition, there were benefits to the other stakeholders involved in this scale-up, from the field officers themselves, to the suppliers, who have also expressed gratitude for this program, the results achieved, and the learnings they have taken out of it – from increased capacity building, to the recognition that women empowerment is fundamental to creating resilience in shea supply chains and communities, learnings from the curriculum itself. Indeed, while we did not focus on impacts to field officers in this report, some of our partners shared with us that even **field officers have started making some internal changes to how they consider financial matters** within their families after being trained on the curriculum and delivering the modules to peer educators. Much of the information received during the capacity building workshops is new to them as this level of financial education is not commonly delivered in Ghanaian schools. Another field officer indicated that his **relationship with his wife has strengthened** – he has been offering to support her with cooking and other household chores as he comes to appreciate better the pressure that women are under and the **importance of teamwork** when it comes to managing their family.

**While the results of our monitoring and evaluation approach show our trainings contributed to some of outcomes stated in this report, we acknowledge that other confounding factors beyond our control may also have influenced some of the observed results.*

Case Study: Daina Nyanayi's family holds family meetings



“My name is Daina Nyanayi from the Sakpalebani community. I am a member of the Wumboretureti Shea Nut Group. I am a farmer and a shea nut collector. Before the financial planning training, my children attended the public school in our community. The school lacked enough teachers, and there were not enough learning materials and furniture for the pupils. In the next village there was a good private school operating. I didn't bother to send my children there because I thought private schools are for rich people.

During the training on financial planning, I realised the state of teaching and learning in the public school in our village cannot help my children to be well educated and get good grades to become working professionals in the future to achieve my financial dream goal. I discussed with my spouse the need to enroll the children in a private school for a better education. He suggested we hold a family meeting so I can educate all family members, including his second wife. The family meeting was held, and a joint decision was taken to enroll all the children in the family in the private school. At the moment, all the children are attending a private school. We are all saving money to finance the education of the children. The family now holds monthly meetings to discuss how to improve our lives. I use that opportunity to share with all family members the knowledge I get from all the modules as we learn from the training. I am thrilled with the improvement that is happening in our family. We are now one big happy family. I am saving and will soon open a shop in the community to sell provisions”.

Successes & Impact

Overall, the scale-up phase was successful and achieved the desired results, and more. Our intention was to bring the impacts of the pilot phase to a wider population of women within the shea supply chain. Learning from challenges and recommendations of Phase 1 and replicating what worked, we were able to iterate and adapt the program for Phase 2, by means of developing the four different scale-up models described in this report.

Indeed, the scale-up has shown what is possible when multiple channels are used and various partners work together further the reach of the program. The four scale-up models have each reached a significant number of women – as a result of these combined efforts, the program has now reached approximately **89 shea cooperatives and communities**, built up the knowledge and capacity of one local NGO to deliver trainings, trained **21 field officers** on the 5-module curriculum, reached over **7,000 people** through trainings, and broadcast radio programming covering financial resilience on local stations with a catchment area of over **421,000 people**. Most of the partners have even expressed interest in continuing the trainings in other communities, whether independently or through other (grant-funded) projects. This shows the continued impact-potential from such trainings and interest from stakeholders in furthering the impact.

**While the results of our monitoring and evaluation approach show our trainings contributed to some of outcomes stated in this report, we acknowledge that other confounding factors beyond our control may also have influenced some of the observed results.*

Challenges

Despite the many successes of the program, there are a few challenges worth noting:

- The shea supply chain presents unique and systemic challenges due to its decentralized nature, with women independently selling their nuts and butter, which complicates the application of traditional workplace models used in other agricultural sectors. This meant that significant additional planning was required to reach women at times that were convenient and which would not impede on their collecting or processing time or family time. This was done in partnership with all of our partners and involved a lot of coordination and strategy sessions.
- Given the iterative and flexible nature of the scale-up – with changes implemented for various of the models as we progressed with their coordination and design, we were not able to deliver a baseline and endline survey for two of the scale-up models. This limits the possible comparison of knowledge and behavior of women who took part in these two models before and after they received the trainings or heard about the episodes on financial resilience
- Despite meaningful buy-in from all of our project partners, there are some challenges for them to scale further. Considering the resources and time required to disseminate these learnings in a wide geographical swath of communities. The partners we worked with would like to embed these trainings throughout all of their programs as they find these trainings extremely valuable and want to scale it within all of their operations. However, there is a need for further socialization among buyers so suppliers can continue to engage in meaningful additional work such as this. A goal in the next and final phase of this work is to strengthen the business case and improve the socialization of these models among other actors in the supply chain so there can be wider industry buy-in for increased scale.

Conclusion

As BSR looks to the next steps, the goal is to encourage even further uptake of these trainings across a variety of partners in the shea supply chain. These training materials have the capacity to strengthen the financial resilience of women, their families, and their communities thereby making shea collector and processor individuals and groups more resilient to changes in the wider market or environment. Further strengthening of partners, dissemination of learnings, building the business case, and encourage new partners to engage will enable wider industry engagement on these key financial literacy topics for women in the shea supply chain.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors Clíodhnaigh Conlon, Jessica Witten and Sandrine Moubarak wish to thank The Estée Lauder Companies Charitable Foundation, The Estée Lauder Companies, AAK, The Savannah Fruits Company, Farmers' Voice Radio – an initiative of the Lorna Young Foundation, and PureTrust Foundation LGB for their participation in and contributions to the program, without whom we would not have achieved the results presented in this report.

**While the results of our monitoring and evaluation approach show our trainings contributed to some of outcomes stated in this report, we acknowledge that other confounding factors beyond our control may also have influenced some of the observed results.*



BSR™ is an organization of sustainable business experts that works with its global network of the world's leading companies to build a just and sustainable world. With offices in Asia, Europe, and North America, BSR™ provides insight, advice, and collaborative initiatives to help you see a changing world more clearly, create long-term business value, and scale impact.

www.bsr.org

Copyright © 2025 by Business for Social Responsibility (BSR) All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

**While the results of our monitoring and evaluation approach show our trainings contributed to some of outcomes stated in this report, we acknowledge that other confounding factors beyond our control may also have influenced some of the observed results.*