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GHANA SHEA LANDSCAPE EMISSION REDUCTIONS PROJECT (GSLREP)

Document prepared by WOCAN

Project Name	Green Climate Fund-financed “Ghana Shea Landscape Emission Reductions Project (GSLERP)”
W+ Project ID	
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1. DESCRIPTION OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT ACTIVITIES

1.1 Summary Description of the Women's Empowerment Activities Implemented

The GSLERP is located in Ghana's Northern regions, encompassing all 5 regions regions (Northern, Savannah, Northwest, Upper West and Upper East) and their districts. GSLERP covers all 5 regions and districts of the North. Listed below are the GSLERP regions, and their corresponding districts, in which GSLERP nurseries are located:

- Northern region: Savelugu, Kumbugu, Tolon, Yendi, and Gushiegu districts
- Savannah region: West Gonja, East Gonja (including Salaga), Central Gonja (including Buipe), and North Gonja (including Doboaya) districts
- Northeast region: Walewale, Langbensi, and Yagaba districts
- Upper West region: Wa West, Wa municipal, Sissala West and Nadowli Kaleo districts
- Upper East region: Talensi-Naddan, Garu-Timpani, Kassena-Nankana, Kasena-Nankana East, and Builsa North districts

The shea value chain in the project region faces multiple structural and operational challenges that hinder its potential for sustainable growth and income generation, particularly for women who are the primary actors in this sector: (1) shea parklands suffer from low productivity, largely due to poor tree management practices, aging tree populations, and limited reforestation or regeneration efforts. This results in low yields and reduces the availability of raw materials; (2) shea nut collection is predominantly carried out using rudimentary techniques, which limit efficiency. Poor post-harvest handling, particularly drying, further compromise the quality and yield and the absence of standardized practices further undermine the quality of shea nuts, resulting in diminished market value; (3) shea butter production remains largely artisanal, with minimal use of improved technologies or quality control standards. This leads to inconsistent product quality, affecting competitiveness in both domestic and international markets. Another challenge is that market access remains a significant constraint. Weak or non-existent market linkages limit opportunities for producers and processors to connect with higher-value markets. This, in turn, restricts income generation.

It is these challenges in the shea value chain which the GSLERP is addressing through a range of targeted activities, which are further discussed below.

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Education & Knowledge

Through their cooperatives, women have received different trainings provided by different implementing partners operating in the regions. These training initiatives have addressed key technical, organizational, and entrepreneurial competencies aimed at strengthening the performance and sustainability of women's involvement in the sector:

1. Nursery set up and management: Women were trained in basic nursery set up and management including nursery bed construction, poly bag selection and potting, seed selection, proper seeding, watering regime, weeding, mulching, seedlings hardening, transplanting, among others.
2. Parkland management: firebelt, tenure and protection of shea trees, young seedlings, pruning protection, mulching, and grafting. Women received training on sustainable parkland management practices, including the establishment of firebelts, the protection of shea trees and young seedlings. Additional topic includes shea grafting.
3. Training on Cooperative Development, Business Management, Aggregation, and Marketing. This training aimed to strengthen the organizational and entrepreneurial capacities of women's cooperatives. It covered key topics such as group dynamics, the formation and strengthening of women's groups, basic financial and administrative skills, including record keeping, and strategies for price setting and accessing pre-financing. Additionally, the training addressed aggregation techniques, market linkage development, storage and sorting practices, quality control standards, as well as marketing tools such as advertising and product certification—all essential for improving market competitiveness and income generation.
4. Training on Improved Technologies for Shea Processing. This training focused on the adoption of improved technologies to enhance the efficiency, quality, and safety of shea production processes. Women were trained on best practices on collection and first-level processing, emphasizing the importance of drying. For shea butter cooperatives, sessions also introduced advanced techniques for producing high-quality shea butter, ensuring consistency and meeting market standards. Additionally, cooperatives were provided with **improved cook stoves**, which reduce fuel consumption and smoke inhalation, thereby improving working conditions. Shea butter processors also learned to operate different equipment such as kneading machines, which significantly reduce the physical labor involved in butter production and increase productivity.

Income & Assets

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The project contributes to improving women's income through two approaches:

- 1) By creating self-employment opportunities through cooperative memberships (either shea kernel or shea butter production)— as well as through employment within the project nurseries, it provides women with a regular source of income, enhancing their financial security and autonomy.
- 2) By strengthening women’s capacity to engage more effectively in the shea value chain through cooperatives. Through formal cooperative development and targeted training on business management, cooperative governance and aggregation, women are now able to aggregate large amounts of shea and engage directly with buyers, thus increasing their incomes.

The project also provided access to productive assests, namely warehouses for aggregation and storage, as well as improved cookstoves, among other.

1.2 Project sector and type

The project operates across multiple sectors:

- Forestry and Land Restoration: Activities focus on rehabilitating degraded savannah forests and shea parklands to restore biodiversity
- Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation: Strategies are implemented to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while enhancing community resilience and adaptation to the adverse effects of climate change.
- Gender and Social Inclusion: the focus is on empowering women through capacity building to enhance their participation in the shea value chain and involve them in local decision-making processes.

Key activities include:

- Capacity Building: Training women in agroforestry practices, governance, and business development to increase income and sustainability
- Infrastructure Development: Constructing warehouses and improving processing facilities to enhance local shea processing capacities, building nurseries for planting materials production

1.3 Project implementers

Organization name	Global Shea Alliance
Contact person	Cornelius Kuukaraa
Title	Manager

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Address of Home Office and Field Office	Tamale, Ghana
Telephone	+233 24 324 8417
Email	c.kuukaraa@globalshea.com

1.4 Other Entities Involved in the Project's and Women's Empowerment Activities

Organization name	Forestry Commission of Ghana
Role in the project	Green Climate Fund Executing Entity for the GSELRP
Contact person	Roselyn Fosuah Adjei
Title	Director, Climate Change at Ghana's Forestry Commission and National REDD+ Focal Point for Ghana
Address	
Telephone	
Email	

1.5 Project activities start date

21 August 2020 (Effective starting: 10/05/2021)

1.6 W+ Domain and Crediting Period

<i>W+ Domain and title of related activities</i>	<i>Start Date</i>	<i>End Date</i>	<i>Crediting period:</i> <i>Total Years</i>	<i>Any Associated Standard</i>
Knowledge & Education – Women in the shea landscape benefit from capacity building and training throughout the different stages of shea value chain. The trainings were focused in the following key areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • parkland management • cooperative development • construction of improved cookstoves 	10/05/2021	Ongoing	2 years	NA

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> improved business management Marketing and aggregation 				
Income & Assets – By enhancing processing infrastructure—such as building warehouses and introducing energy-efficient cookstoves—and strengthening women-led cooperatives, the project supports increased income for women. Improved facilities boost processing capacity and product quality, while stronger cooperatives facilitate access to quality certification, storage, and international markets. These efforts enable women to add more value to their products, attract private sector interest, and secure better prices, leading to greater economic benefits and resilience.	10/05/2021	Ongoing	2 years	NA

1.7 Description of project activities

Through the training offered by the project, women acquired technical knowledge and practical skills in shea seedling cultivation, business management, kernel aggregation, quality production, and cooperative management

Increased income has resulted from the capacities women developed through the training offered by the project. They are now able to engage more effectively in income-generating activities by enhancing product quality and expanding market access.

1.8 Project’s activities boundary and scope

The project targets women involved in the shea value chain across the Northern zone of Ghana in the five Northern regions: Northern, Savannah, Upper East, Upper West and North East regions. These regions represent the main shea-producing landscapes of the country and are highly vulnerable to environmental degradation. The beneficiaries include shea nut collectors and processors.

Project’s activities are carried out through public-private partnerships between a network of 17 implementing partners including NGOs, international organizations, government agencies and other technical service providers working at the community level, and shea private sector companies.

The project’s scope covers diverse activities designed to build women’s technical capacity, enhance their knowledge, and promote their economic agency. Training and support provided to women cover a wide range of areas, including parkland management, aggregation and market linkages, business management, shea quality, improved processing technology, nursery management, warehouse and storage management, health and safety

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practices, cooperative development. In addition, cooperatives were provided with processing equipment and warehouses.

The project has directly benefited 6,000 women, the majority of who are located in the Northern region.

REGION	# of women	Districts	Implementing partners	Private Sector Partners
Northern region	2400	Savelugu, Kumbugu, Tolon, Yendi, Gushegu	Tree Aid, Tungteiya, Ripples Ghana, Sahel Agricultural Services, Green Prints and Patches,	Ecosia, Maltiti A Enterprise Ltd The Body Shop International Wilmar International Co.Ltd Ad Charis
Savannah region	1800	West Gonja, Central Gonja, East Gonja	Tropenbos, Green Print and Patches, Shea Network Ghana, A Rocha Ghana	SWIDA Ad Charis The Savannah Fruits Company Churchwin Trading
Northeast region	1200	West Mamprusi, East Mamprusi, Mamprugu-Moaduri	ASDEV Foundation, Eco-Restore, SAS, Seedworld	Savanna Agri Chains Ltd Bunge
Upper West region	300	Wa West, Wa municipal, Sissala West and Nadowli Kaleo	PFC Alliance, HATOF	Ghana Nuts Agri-Access Commodities
Upper East region	300	Talensi-Nabdan, Garu-Timpani, Kassena Nankana East	SAS, ICRAF	Wilmar International Co.Ltd

1.9 Conditions Prior to the Project's Initiation of Activities

Prior to project implementation, the shea value chain in the target region was marked by a range of structural and operational challenges that limited its potential for sustainable growth and income generation. This was especially significant for women, who were the primary actors across all stages of the shea value chain—from harvesting to processing and local trade. The constraints in the value chain directly impacted their economic opportunities and, by extension, their empowerment.

Shea parklands suffered from low productivity due to poor tree management practices, aging tree populations, and limited efforts in reforestation or regeneration. These issues resulted

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in low yields and reduced the availability of raw materials, thereby restricting the volume of nuts women could collect and process.

Collection and post-harvest processing practices were rudimentary, reducing efficiency and compromising the quality. Women were operating at an individual, small scale level, and therefore had low market power. Since women largely depended on this income, such quality-related losses weakened their financial stability and decision-making power within households and communities.

Additionally, weak or non-existent market linkages significantly constrained access to higher-value markets. The lack of formalized market structures and networks limited women’s ability to scale their businesses, negotiate better prices, or invest in improved production practices. These conditions collectively hindered women’s capacity to achieve greater economic independence, influence, and empowerment.

1.10 Compliance with Laws, Statutes and Other Regulatory Frameworks

The project is in compliance with all national laws, statutes and regulatory frameworks of Ghana.

1.11 Project Implementer’s Right to Engage in the Project

There are no barriers to GSA’s right to engage in this Project or W+ Standard measurement process.

1.12 Other Forms of Environmental or Social Credit

NA

1.13 Additional Information Relevant to the Project

NA

2. GENDER ANALYSIS

All participants in the focus group discussions were women members of cooperatives in Ghana—some formed through the support of implementing partners, others independently established. While all women received training under the project, only a limited number are currently involved in supported activities such as nursery operations. All are members of shea kernel cooperatives or and shea butter processing cooperatives. Selection into these units primarily hinges on regular attendance and willingness to volunteer.

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Women engaged in these units work daily seasonally, with hours and days fluctuating based on the volume of tasks. For shea kernel and shea butter production, payments are made based on product sales from the cooperative to a buyer. For nursery work, payments are made either daily, weekly, or monthly. However, women who receive monthly payments have in some cases raised concerns that the timing often does not align with urgent financial needs, limiting the usefulness of the income in addressing their day-to-day household demands.

Shea kernel and butter processing is traditionally women’s work in Ghana. Women are responsible for harvesting, processing, and transforming shea nuts into butter using labor-intensive, manual methods. This knowledge and responsibility are passed down through generations, making shea production a cornerstone of women’s economic roles. However, the traditional process is time-consuming and physically demanding, involving many stages such as nut collection, drying, roasting, grinding, kneading, and boiling.

Despite their critical role, women face limited access to modern equipment, credit, and markets, which constrains productivity and income. Additionally, as the sector modernizes and expands, men are increasingly entering the higher-value segments—such as aggregation and industrial processing—potentially marginalizing women further.

The heavy time demands of shea processing compound **women’s overall time poverty**. Many women must wake before dawn to prepare meals and manage household tasks before traveling long distances —sometimes by bicycle for over an hour—to collect shea. After completing these labor-intensive activities, women then join their husbands on the farm before returning home to handle an array of unpaid domestic chores, including cooking, childcare, cleaning, laundry, water and firewood collection.

Focus group discussions emphasized the **disproportionate burden of reproductive labor** carried by women, who perform all household tasks with little or no support from men. A typical daily schedule during the rainy season, shared by women in Ghana, highlights the relentless layering of responsibilities:

- **5:30 AM** – Wake up and prepare food
- **6:30 AM** – Leave for farming activities
- **1:00 PM** – Return home and prepare lunch
- **2:00 PM** – Short rest (about one hour)
- **4:00 PM onwards** – Fetch water, do laundry, continue household chores

Men’s schedules, by comparison, are less burdensome and more narrowly focused on farm work and rest.

A significant issue revealed in the analysis is the lack of visibility of domestic labor. While men’s agricultural tasks—such as land clearing or planting—are recognized as visibly

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productive, the work women perform at home often remains overlooked and undervalued, even though it is just as time-intensive and crucial for the household’s well-being. This invisibility contributes to the persistent undervaluation of women’s efforts and reinforces the expectation that they must constantly prove their productivity. Because women’s domestic labor is not formally acknowledged, they face limited access to support mechanisms, policies, or societal changes that could help ease their substantial workload.

Furthermore, the analysis reveals a persistent **perception that leadership and decision-making authority lie predominantly with men**. This cultural norm limits women’s influence both within cooperatives and in household decision-making, restricting their ability to advocate for changes that could reduce their workload or improve their economic opportunities. The male-dominated leadership structures often mean women’s voices and concerns are marginalized, further entrenching gender inequalities.

This gendered division of labor and undervaluation of domestic work not only exacerbates women’s time poverty but also limits their economic empowerment, even when engaged in income-generating activities like shea butter processing.

3. SELECTION OF W+ DOMAINS

W+ Domain	Benefits	Challenges/ Risks
<i>Knowledge & Education</i>	<p>Women are gaining essential skills and knowledge through targeted training programs offered via their cooperatives. In parkland management, they are learning techniques such as establishing firebelts, protecting shea trees and young seedlings, grafting, pruning, and mulching—practices that help conserve and improve shea tree resources.</p> <p>They are also building their organizational and business competencies. This includes understanding group dynamics, forming and managing cooperatives, maintaining financial records, setting prices, and accessing pre-financing. Women are trained in product aggregation, storage, sorting, and quality control, as well as in using marketing strategies like advertising and certification to improve their products’ visibility and competitiveness.</p> <p>In shea processing, women are adopting improved technologies and best practices. They are learning how to properly harvest mature nuts, handle post-harvest processing, and produce consistent, high-quality shea butter.</p>	<p>Low Literacy Levels – Limited reading, writing, or numeracy skills can hinder learning and application of business and technical training.</p> <p>Group Management Conflicts – Disputes within cooperatives or weak leadership can reduce the effectiveness of knowledge sharing and decision-making.</p> <p>Lack of Ongoing Training – Without continuous learning opportunities, women may not keep up with evolving market and processing practices.</p>
<i>Income & Assets</i>	The project is boosting women’s income through two key approaches. First, it creates direct employment opportunities in nurseries and shea butter processing units,	Limited Market Access – Without stable market connections, women may

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	<p>providing women with steady, reliable income and enhancing their financial independence.</p> <p>Second, by equipping women with better practices for selecting, sorting, and processing shea nuts, the project enables them to produce higher-quality products. These improvements lead to better prices in the market, allowing women to increase their earnings and build greater economic resilience.</p>	<p>not earn fair prices for their products.</p> <p>Climate Challenges – Environmental factors like drought or bushfires can reduce shea nut yields and affect income.</p> <p>Equipment Maintenance Issues – If processing equipment breaks down and can't be repaired, productivity and earnings may drop.</p> <p>Dependence on External Support – Income gains may not be sustainable if external funding or support ends.</p>
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4. WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PLAN (WEP)

Knowledge & Education

Result Level	Statement	Indicator	Means of Verification (MoV)	Challenges Addressed / Assumptions
Impact	Women lead safe, informed, and dignified engagement in the shea value chain	% of women reporting confidence in processing, health safety, and decision-making	Endline survey, FGDs, case studies Women's statements	Norms on women's leadership
End Outcome	Women apply and share acquired knowledge in safe, productive, and sustainable ways	% of women applying improved shea processing practices % following health and safety protocols	Field assessments, trainer evaluations Women's statements	Availability of ergonomic equipment is ensured
Intermediate Outcome	Women adopt user-friendly, safe technologies and participate in enterprise groups	# of women using energy-efficient, ergonomic tools # of women engaged in cooperative discussions	Site visits, usage logs, cooperative attendance records	Tools are tailored to diverse physical needs

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Immediate Outcome	Women demonstrate increased knowledge in processing, safety, and business	% improvement in post-training test scores # of women completing safety and business training	Pre/post-tests, attendance records	Literacy, heat exposure, and physical limitations accounted for
Outputs	Training delivered on ergonomics, occupational health, and business management	# of health/safety trainings held # of toolkits distributed # of manuals developed	Attendance, distribution logs, feedback forms	Sessions are inclusive and tested across age and ability groups
Inputs	Trainers, ergonomic stoves/kits, translated materials, inclusive venues,	# of ergonomic tools, deployed availability of water/shade/rest breaks during processing	Procurement and training checklists	Technologies are co-designed with participants

Income & Assets

Result Level	Statement	Indicator	Means of Verification (MoV)	Challenges Addressed / Assumptions
Impact	Increased leadership and decision making power	% of women reporting decision-making power over income	Household surveys, income tracking, FGDs Women's' statements	Pre-financing dependency and climate shocks are addressed
End Outcome	Improved livelihoods and income security	# of women with secondary livelihood sources	Cooperative reports, off-season activity logs Women's' statements	Cooperatives are participatory and resilient to shocks
Intermediate Outcome	Functioning cooperatives Women negotiate prices collectively and diversify income sources Investing additional income to acquire assets	% of transactions done collectively # of alternative income activities initiated % of income, they save # of assets, they acquired # of cooperatives with market linkages Price increase	Buyer agreements, seasonal income analysis Cooperative's records and accounting	Market intelligence and climate knowledge is accessible
Immediate Outcome	Increased income Women gain skills in collective bargaining, market intelligence, and adaptation	# of training sessions on pricing, negotiation, and adaptation % increase in price awareness % increase in average income # of women in cooperatives	Training attendance, post-tests, buyer interviews	Climate-resilient options are locally appropriate and appealing
Outputs	Training and mentoring provided on group organization, fair trade, and resilience Forming cooperatives	# of formalized groups # of market intelligence updates shared # of women trained in diversification	Group registrations, info bulletin records, workshop logs	Effective facilitation and access to ethical markets are in place
Inputs	Advisors, facilitators, mentorship programs, early warning systems	# of mentors assigned # of climate-smart materials distributed # of pricing bulletins	Monitoring reports, bulletin archives	Gender-sensitive facilitation and platforms for feedback are functional

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		disseminated Partner with key organizations specialized in strengthening collective action and cooperative governance to enhance sustainability and scale of women-led groups.		
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Project's intentionality

Policy for gender/women's empowerment	Budget targeted for women's empowerment	M&E plan for women's empowerment	Internal capacities for gender analysis and women's empowerment	Project's selection criteria of beneficiaries to demonstrate equal opportunity for participation of women from all social groups in project activities
<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>
The project includes a comprehensive Gender Action Plan (GAP) that integrates gender across all activities.	The GAP assigns specific budget portions to gender-responsive actions.	Monitoring indicators in the GAP are disaggregated by gender. The project reports regularly on women's participation in leadership, training, and cooperative structures.	A Gender and Safeguards Officer was hired (though the 2024 report notes staff turnover), and 77 staff have received gender training. Gender capacity-building for field staff and implementing partners is ongoing. However, staff directly involved in the implementation in the field could benefit from additional training.	The GAP includes targets such as 50% of participants in consultations and trainings being women, and that selected farm sites be prioritized for women. Activities are designed to address women's constraints (e.g., timing, location, women-only groups). For future phases, the project would benefit from a stronger focus on intersectionality—recognizing how age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, disability, and other factors shape women's needs and access to opportunities.

5. MONITORING AND EVALUATION PLAN

Please see Women's Empowerment Plan (Section 4)

6. DO NO HARM

The GSLREP project has created opportunities for women's participation in the shea value chain. However, several challenges—ranging from occupational health risks to economic marginalization and climate vulnerability—have emerged, potentially undermining the empowerment outcomes. While women's participation in production and processing is

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notable, structural constraints must be addressed to ensure their health, economic agency, and resilience are sustained.

As part of the assessment, we conducted focus group discussions across participating communities, engaging a total of 58 women involved in different stages of the shea value chain. The discussions were designed to explore women’s experiences with the project, including whether any aspects of the intervention were unintentionally causing harm or reinforcing existing vulnerabilities. Participants were asked about their health, income, access to decision-making spaces, and the effectiveness of support structures. The insights shared during these conversations directly informed the analysis and formed the basis for the recommendations outlined below.

Recommendation 1: Improve occupational safety and inclusiveness in processing facilities

A core challenge identified is the occupational strain experienced by women working in shea butter processing facilities. The excessive heat generated by traditional and improved stoves poses unintended health risks, especially for older women. Additionally, the physically demanding nature of the work disproportionately excludes women with limited physical strength, including elderly participants.

During field observations and informal consultations, women expressed fatigue, heat stress, and physical exhaustion. Several expressed hesitations about continuing the work due to its impact on their health, but felt compelled to do so given the lack of alternative income sources.

Recommendation: Introduce improved, energy-efficient, and ergonomically appropriate processing technologies. Ensure that these technologies are user-centered and tested with a wide representation of age groups and physical capabilities. Design workflows that reduce physical strain and incorporate rest periods. Additionally, establish health and safety standards within processing facilities, including ventilation and access to water and shade.

Recommendation 2: Strengthen women's economic agency and market power

Women in the shea value chain currently lack meaningful leverage in price-setting mechanisms for both shea nuts and processed butter. Many are compelled to accept prefinancing arrangements during the off-season, which results in selling their produce at significantly reduced prices. This perpetuates a cycle of dependency and limited agency in the market.

Focus group discussions revealed that women feel disempowered during negotiations and are often unaware of the prevailing market prices. Some noted that even when prices rise, their margins remain stagnant due to pre-agreed terms and middlemen interventions. Although cooperatives are said to exist within the project framework, in practice, many

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women continue to operate individually. There appears to be limited support for strengthening group cohesion or enabling effective collective action. Without targeted investment in building the capacity and functionality of these groups, women remain largely disconnected from the benefits that organized structures can offer—such as improved bargaining power, access to markets, and shared resources

Recommendation: Build women's capacity in financial literacy, collective bargaining, and market intelligence. Where appropriate, support the transition of informal groups into more structured entities—such as cooperatives or registered associations—ensuring this is done in a participatory manner that respects existing social dynamics. Strengthen their ability to engage with buyers collectively, access fair trade networks, and negotiate transparent pre-financing arrangements. Encourage linkages with ethical buyers and financial institutions offering inclusive, fair, and predictable financing terms.

Recommendation 3: Enhance livelihood resilience to climate change

Climate variability is leading to declining shea tree yields, threatening the primary source of income for many women. Given their limited access to diversified livelihoods, women are increasingly vulnerable to economic shocks and food insecurity.

As noted in seasonal trend analyses and women's testimonials, erratic rainfall and prolonged dry periods are impacting both nut availability and tree productivity. The absence of climate-resilient alternatives exacerbates income instability.

Recommendation: Promote diversified livelihood options aligned with local conditions, such as agroforestry, small livestock rearing, or off-season vegetable cultivation. Pair this with climate-smart agricultural training and support for community-based natural resource management. Work with local stakeholders to develop early warning systems and climate adaptation plans tailored to women's specific needs and contexts.

Recommendation 4: Establish structured and participatory consultation mechanisms

A persistent disconnect exists between the types of support women require to increase their income and the interventions delivered. Many women feel they are not adequately consulted in the planning or implementation phases of project activities, leading to mismatched priorities and underutilized investments.

Interviews highlighted a desire among women for more frequent, structured engagement and for their feedback to influence decision-making processes. There is currently no consistent, formal platform through which women can raise concerns or propose solutions.

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Recommendation: Establish formal, recurring consultation channels such as women-led advisory committees or community investment forums. Ensure these mechanisms are accessible, inclusive, and respected within the project governance structure. Additionally, integrate participatory planning approaches that ensure women's voices guide investment decisions from the outset. Document and respond to feedback through transparent follow-up processes.

Recommendation 5: Promote inclusive leadership and gender-sensitive implementation structures

A significant challenge identified relates to the structure of project implementation and communication. Currently, the main liaison between the Global Shea Alliance (GSA) and the women participants are the 17 implementing partners along with their private sector partners. 12 out of 17 are male led. While this may align with existing community norms, it also reinforces the perception that leadership and decision-making authority lie predominantly with men.

During field discussions, it emerged that there is a widespread belief that women are more likely to comply with instructions when they are delivered by men. Additionally, some stakeholders expressed concern that appointing women to leadership roles may be ineffective, as other women might not respect or follow their guidance. This dynamic not only limit women's leadership opportunities but also undermines broader empowerment goals.

Recommendation: Encourage greater gender balance within implementation structures by actively identifying and supporting capable women leaders at the community level. Introduce mentorship programs and visibility platforms to build credibility and trust in women's leadership. Additionally, provide gender-sensitivity training to implementing partners and community stakeholders to challenge restrictive norms in a respectful and inclusive manner. Representation matters—not only to ensure communication flows effectively, but to model more equitable leadership roles that can shift perceptions over time.

7. BENEFIT SHARING MECHANISM

Since women are already organized into cooperatives and receive payment for their work through existing mechanisms, these channels could be effectively leveraged for benefit sharing related to W+ credit revenues. Utilizing established structures would allow for a smoother and more familiar distribution process. However, doing so would require close collaboration with the implementing partners, who have so far played a central role in setting up and managing these payment systems. A potential challenge is that each partner operates differently, meaning that benefit-sharing mechanisms may vary across groups. This diversity in approaches could make standardization difficult and tracking more complex, underscoring the need for clear coordination and transparent monitoring systems.

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8. DECLARATION OF NON-INVOLVEMENT IN ANY FORM OF DISCRIMINATION, SEXUAL EXPLOITATION, ABUSE OR HARASSMENT (SEAH)

Hereby declare that, to the best of my knowledge, neither (name of project implementer) or any other entity involved in project design or implementation has not been involved in or will be involved in any form of discrimination, sexual exploitation, abuse, or harassment (SEAH).

This signed declaration is made in good faith and with my full consent, without pressure or coercion. I understand that any breach thereof may/will result in the termination of the W+ Application.

This signed declaration forms part of the requirements of the application of the W+ Standard.

Signature of authorized representative submitting this Project Design Document

Name: _____

Title: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

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W+ Project Design Document Template Revision History		
#	Date	Description
1	2015	Original
2	22 May 2017	Edits to nomenclature for consistency. Removal of redundant information requests. Addition of time-frames and specificity regarding multiple domains and prevention of double-counting.
3	16 June 2017	Expansion of PDD requirements, transferred text from W+ Standard responding to public comments.
4	12 February 2019	Edits to clarify content of each section
5	27 October 2020	Edits to clarify content of each section
6	7 November 2023	Edits to clarify content of each section and include Women's empowerment plan and intentionality