

CASE STUDIES WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

CASE STUDY 62

Commercialisation of shea nut products by the RIMTEREBSOM Association. Small amounts, big impact? Burkina Faso

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Context

The shea nut industry provides Burkina Faso's 3rd largest agricultural export. Around 500,000 direct actors are involved in the industry, of which 400,000 are women. The women are mostly active in harvesting the nuts and in the main processing work (butter production). In rural settings, the shea nut is an indispensable resource for family life. Many thousands of families live from related income.

The sector has performed erratically since liberalisation occurred and the State let go of the industry in the 1990's. The problems include coordination and access to markets: no cost pricing mechanism is in place, neither is price information in circulation. There is also a lack of intra- and inter-link cooperation which could optimise the value chains.

The RIMTEREBSOM Association, which intervenes for the advancement of women by developing shea products, has not been sheltered from the storm affecting Burkina's shea network. The group requested SNV support in professionalising their approach to the market.

Client

The RIMTEREBSOM Association was founded for the advancement of women in 2001. The mission was outlined as improving living standards for women, at home and in their surroundings, by promoting various activities: shea butter production, soap production, weaving/sewing, group discussions on household life and neighbourhood hygiene. RIMTEREBSOM has 403 members divided into 4 basic groups.

The head office is run by 8 people, who administer the association's main activities: organisation and coordination of the harvest, processing and the marketing of shea products. The activities have created more than 100 jobs, for producers, processors, retailers and sellers.

The coming together of RIMTEREBSOM and SNV was facilitated by the LCB Sicarex, which came on the scene as a dynamic organisation with excellent growth potential. An advisory plan was formulated in the activities contract signed with SNV, with the goal of improving marketing and allowing this association to grow.

Intervention logic and methods

Initial diagnosis

Following the initial period of introduction and exchange of ideas, a SWOT analysis was made of the association. The main conclusions are as follows :

¹ Nut export development between 2002 - 2005 : 28,773 (2002), 26,656 (2003), 11,891 (2004), 22,037 (2005). Report CIRAD/PADAB II, June 2009

- In Burkina, there are 3 main links : production links (harvest of nuts and butter preparation), processing links (processing of butter into cosmetic products, soaps etc.), export/distribution.

Strengths

- In general, the association has mastered the nut production techniques concerning butter, soap and ointments/creams
- The existing range of products is large enough to attract good numbers of clients
- The products are known for their good quality
- Consumers have a positive image of the production line

Opportunities

- Interest in local products is on the rise among the urban upper and middle classes in Burkina and throughout the West African subregion (Abidjan, Dakar, Bamako)
- Several studies point the potential of the activities promoted by RIMTEREBSOM
- This all highlights growth opportunities for RIMTEREBSOM

Weaknesses

- The quality of packaging does not meet the standard set by the products themselves. The wrapping used does not add to the product's worth
- RIMTEREBSOM has no distribution outlet in Ouagadougou
- The sales force is still novice and not professional enough
- Should sales increase, regular supplies of nuts and/or butter cannot be guaranteed
- RIMTEREBSOM has organisational problems: over-simplified book-keeping, lack of data and sales analyses.

Activities and contract

In order to improve the association's commercial profile, a contract was drawn up based on the following:

Product: improvements must be made to product packaging and labelling. The goal is to create new packaging for six products.

Promotion: the goal of increasing sales and the subsequent improvement in packaging should be supported by promotion. This can be achieved by training and retraining the saleswomen. Trade rhythm will be created by temporarily employing the services of a sales specialist to implement tools for sales tracking and analysis. This is the contract's second goal.

Distribution (location): RIMTEREBSOM should acquire a sales outlet at a good location in Ouagadougou.

Supplies: Should there be an increase in demand for its products, RIMTEREBSOM would probably be limited by its current supply level. To guarantee supplies in the event of an increase in demand, RIMTEREBSOM should engage with new groups and/or expand the membership of existing groups. The association strives to better manage the connection with its base by reinforcing a close relationship and clarifying institutional and commercial ties with the groups encharged with nut and butter production. This point was the focus while mapping out future collaboration with the aim of clearly defining partnerships and/or transparent courses with new groups.

Outcome

With SNV support, new packaging was created for six products. This has increased the value of the products and made them more attractive. The striking packaging has been well received by clients. This success has been confirmed by retailers (in Bobo and Ouagadougou) and during a fair in Mali. The success of the new logo prompted the association to make it their official logo. RIMTEREBSOM is currently expanding this work by also giving other products a new look.

As far as communication is concerned, the association has produced a new and improved brochure displaying its full line.

Commercial administration has advanced with the introduction of monitoring files and sales records. With the establishment of a commercial tie between the association and a group of women in the villages of Manga and Sourgoubila, 50 women have been able to dispose of an impressive quantity of nuts valued at FCFA 1,400,000 (Euro 2.128).

With an eye to building up RIMTEREBSOM stocks, a business plan was drawn up, allowing the association to benefit from a FCFA 10-million (Euro 15.200) seasonal credit from Burkina's *Coris Bank*.

Finally, a feasibility study on setting up a sales location has been initiated with the help of a commercial management intern. This makes it possible for the association to work out the location and costs of this new distribution site.

Impact

Improvements include:

- Broadening of the association's skills. Harvesters' groups increased from four to six in number, and the total number of women involved from 403 to 600. This expansion of our range has undoubtedly allowed at least 50 other women to sell at least 373 kilos of nuts for an average of F 100 (Euro 0,15) per kilo. This represents FCFA 28,000 (Euro 42,56) for a month's work.
- Sales are increasing, thanks to the combined effect of improved product presentation, a boost in confidence and a pro-active approach to entering new markets with these more attractive and more professional wares.

With members' shea nut revenues linked to the growth of association sales, this increase in sales will most definitely result in higher income for all.

Lessons learnt

This case demonstrates that sometimes a helping hand from an external partner can be enough to give a group of women more confidence and to make them more pro-active. With six products revamped with SNV support, RIMTEREBSOM is continuing on its own with the repackaging of other products – eight others have already received a new appearance. The more the association becomes aware of the relevance of marketing tools, and thanks to the contact with communication specialists facilitated by SNV, the more communication support there is, such as the 'roll-up' for presentations (see photo). To quote the enthusiastic President:

'We make a difference every time we go out the door.'

However, the level of active and effective participation by women in the groups can still be improved. It will be difficult in the immediate future to formalise solid and transparent commercial ties between RIMTEREBSOM as umbrella organisation and new groups wanting to enter the association. All this leads us to say that the governance and the empowerment process for the women is complex and could take a long time if there are significant gaps in the women's levels of education. In the case of RIMTEREBSOM, the difference is considerable between the leaders (President and office staff) and the members of the groups in the villages and destitute zones.

Photos and quotes

'Our sales have shown exceptional growth this year. SNV support has helped us considerably in this respect. It's as though SNV had supplied us with remedies.'

One can have the means but not the will, and thanks to SNV we now have the courage to go ahead. With our new packaging, we no longer hesitate to present our products. From now on we will introduce our products with great pride. We manage to sell almost all of our products at every fair we attend. God bless SNV.'
Martine Kaboré, President of RIMTEREBSOM Association



Old Logo



'Roll-up' for presentations



New logo