

**Documentation of Models for
Learning and Sharing to Advance
CSOs Financial Sustainability**

Local Resource Mobilization

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Local Resource

Mobilization

Case Study 3

The Shea Butter Story

Okere City

Executive Summary

Okere Community Development Project (Okere City) is an ambitious community-based social enterprise with one burning mission --- to transform Okere, a sleepy village in Otuke District, Northern Uganda into a thriving and sustainable city. Commonly known as 'Okere City', the idea is premised on the belief that using an integrated rural development approach based on social-market economic principles to design and implement community development projects can create catalytic rural transformation and sustainable agrarian reforms. Its motto, "Yamo Akwo Koddo" which translates to "A Living Wind Blows", captures this dream with an African theme. It has a bold vision: 'creating economically thriving and self-reliant rural households in Okere Parish'.

The Shea tree, scientifically known as *Vitalleria Paradoxa* (Nilotica), is one of the trees native to northern Uganda. While it may pass on as just another plant, given its commonality in this northern landscape, it is in reality an extremely valuable tree that is worth millions in cash terms. The challenge has been that the community has no idea just what they have been gifted with. Despite its value, the community has over the years cut down this tree with reckless abandon, ignorant of the potential that it holds to transform their lives. As a result, 80% of the trees that once adorned the Otuke district have been destroyed and now face the prospect of extinction. Shea trees are particularly prone to illegal cutting for charcoal because of their hard timber that presumably produces the world's best charcoal product. Yet, the Shea tree is living gold. The tree offers valuable health, ecological and biodiversity functions. For example, Shea butter, especially when raw and cold-pressed, contributes towards hair health by strengthening hair fibres, lubricating cuticles, and reducing frizz. Its value in the cosmetic, pharmaceutical and confectionary industries is not in doubt. Locally, it has been consumed by the community for centuries.

To stem the tide of destruction of a valuable community resource, Okere City initiated a project to protect the shea tree. The project is significantly contributing towards the protection, regeneration and conservation of shea trees by creating greater awareness about its value. In addition, it has established a community of women and built a movement that promotes the sustainability of Shea trees and harnesses their socio-economic and natural benefits for the well-being of the people of Okere Parish.

Recognizing the potential of the Shea tree, Okere City formed and registered the Okere Shea Cooperative Society in 2020. Registered during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, it was meant to be the bedrock upon which investments in Shea nuts and Shea butter would be based. Through the cooperative, the community has been educated on the value of the shea tree. They now appreciate that oil from the Shea nut is highly sought after to make skin and hair products. Furthermore, Okere City has also constructed office premises and storage facilities for the cooperative. Amazingly, the cooperative has been able to earn and pay dividends to members in 2020 and 2021, despite its young age. Shea butter is now sold in Kampala amongst other areas in Uganda, which is a testament to the determination of Okere City to capitalize on the Shea tree to transform the fortunes of this sleepy village. Despite its young age, Okere She Butter has established itself as a quality cosmetic product in the local market.

Despite its emerging success, Okere City still faces challenges as far as shea butter is concerned. Challenges include illegal Shea tree cutting and other threats to Shea trees in Otuke such as illegal bushfires and expansion of agricultural land. This has resulted in more than 80% of the Shea trees that once covered and breathed life into the region being destroyed. If Shea's re-forestation efforts are not successful, the Shea tree may become extinct in Okore Parish. There are other challenges. It is very expensive exporting Shea Butter to international markets. It has to be airfreighted, due to its temperature sensitivity. This adds to the costs of exporting at a time when freight costs are already sky-high following the Covid-19 pandemic. The stringent requirements for exporting to the EU market do not help matters. Challenges aside, Okere City has bold plans as far as this miracle tree is concerned. These include building a shea butter movement, establishing a Shea Butter Village and working towards positioning Okere Shea Butter as a leading Shea butter product line in the Ugandan market.

On lessons learned, Okere City has learned that listening to local and authentic voices is a key prerequisite for any community development work to succeed. It is therefore important to invest and organize community engagement platforms just to 'listen' because it creates a basis for lasting social change. Communities are often ignorant of the valuable resources they may have. Once sensitized, however, they can be rallied to exploit it for their development.

1 Introduction

The Okere Community Development Project – better known as Okere City, is an ambitious community-based social enterprise on a journey to transform Okere, a sleepy and laid-back village in Otuke District, Northern Uganda into a thriving and sustainable city. Despite its big name, the Okere City project is registered as a community-based organization (CBO) by Otuke District Local Government – underpinning its roots and vision. It is a community-driven movement to transform lives rather than a Kampala-based organization working from the sidelines. As a result, its initiatives are driven by actual community needs and the implementation of project activities led by community members.

Okere City strives to be a community-based social enterprise that creates multiple opportunities for agrarian reforms and rural transformation in Okere Parish. It does this by encouraging open and forward-thinking, mobilizing, organizing and training the rural populace through a series of innovative initiatives that generate practical solutions for the day-to-day challenges they face. It seeks to undertake, influence and direct holistic rural development initiatives to create socio-economic opportunities for prosperity in Okere Parish, Adwari Sub-county, Otuke District.

The Okere City idea is premised on the belief that using an integrated rural development approach based on social-market economic principles to design and implement community development initiatives can create catalytic rural transformation and sustainable agrarian reforms. This belief is aptly captured in this moto, vision and mission:

Motto

“Yamo Akwo Koddo” translates to “A Living Wind Blows”

Vision

Creating economically thriving and self-reliant rural households in Okere Parish.

Mission

To work with rural households in Okere Parish as partners to access and create economic and social opportunities that will stimulate catalytic, holistic, and sustainable rural development

Objectives

Okere City has three key objectives. These are:

- To stimulate holistic and sustainable economic and social development in Okere through partnering with individuals and different rural community groups, leaders, platforms, etc.
- To invest in, consult with, and build the capacity of our partner communities to become economically secure and self-sufficient.
- To create a platform for sharing and disseminating knowledge on sustainable and replicable models of rural development in Africa.

Values

Okere City is guided by a set of core values and principles that influences its organizational culture and contributes to the achievement of the overall strategic plan. They form the word **P.E.R.T.A.I.N.**

Partnership: Okere City promotes collaboration and networking with community members, district authorities and other like-minded development partners. Okere City refuses to use the language “beneficiaries” to describe the people engaged in its projects because the success of its projects necessarily hinges on collaboration with the rural communities its partners with.

Efficiency: Okere City strives to achieve maximum impact using minimal resources, by utilizing and building on existing assets.

Respect: It treats all its partners with dignity and honor by giving them time, space and any kind of platform to fully express themselves. This respect entails humility, patience, and collaboration.

Timeliness: Okere City strives to conduct all project and research activities in a timely and accountable fashion.

Accountability: It strives to ensure openness, honesty, and transparency to all partners, stakeholders and the development community at large.

Innovative: Its holistic approach to community development brings together the resources required for innovative solutions to address endemic poverty. Its innovativeness is driven by research and understanding of the complex realities that rural communities that it works with go through.

Non-Discrimination: Okere City does not discriminate against anyone based on age, sex, gender, race, religion, political affiliation, or physical ability.

Just like all other villages in Otuke District, the suffering inflicted by both the LRA war and the Karamojong cattle raids has been disastrous. The human and material losses incurred by the people can never be quantified. However, what is certain is that, for decades, households and individuals have never been able to fully or even partially recover from such losses.

Because of these political and civic instabilities, Otuke district remains one of the most undeveloped parts of northern Uganda in general and the Lango sub-region in particular. Among other disadvantages, high illiteracy rates, bad roads, and inadequate access to water, and sanitation facilities make life in the area nightmare for the majority. This is also coupled with extreme weather conditions - such as prolonged drought, which is a common occurrence.

Inspiration

That in years to come, our rural transformative journey will be a lesson to the whole world because we took a leap of faith, risked, and invested in our people because from the beginning, we knew it was the only path towards prosperity. And that when we look back at that time with our wrinkled faces or gentle souls, we shall rejoice and be glad well knowing that we did all that was within our means to empower our people to exploit as many opportunities as possible, and realize their fullest potential on the road to economic and social freedom.

To date, Okere City has created authentic relationships with the community in which it is domiciled. In addition, it has been at the forefront of implementing several initiatives that focus on early childhood development promotion; ensuring access to clean and safe drinking water; bringing basic grocery goods and services closer to the people; environmental conservation through community forestry projects and campaigns against cutting down of natural trees, among others. In doing so, it is transforming this sleepy and laid-back village, one step at a time.

2 Social Enterprise

2.1 Okere City Social Enterprise Approach

Okere City seeks to be an enabler for the rural community in the parish to be more imaginative, cooperative, creative, innovative, and enterprising. The aim is to enable them to become successful as well as champions of rural poverty reduction. One of the key strategies to achieving this rests on the mighty but unappreciated Shea tree, scientifically known as *Vitalleria Paradoxa* (Nilotica).

Shea is one of the trees native to northern Uganda and eons ago, once covered many of its landscapes. Hiding in plain sight, is this extremely valuable tree, if well harnessed can support a billion-dollar industry in the region. Despite its potential, the community has over the years cut down this tree with the potential to transform their lives, ignorant of this treasure in their midst. As a result, 80% of the trees that once adorned the Otuke district have been destroyed and now face the prospect of extinction. Shea trees are particularly prone to illegal cutting for charcoal because of their hard timber that presumably produces the world's best charcoal product. Yet, the Shea tree is living gold. The tree offers valuable health, ecological, and biodiversity functions. It is sought after in the cosmetic, pharmaceutical and confectionery industries as a valuable ingredient. For example, Shea butter, especially when raw and cold-pressed, contributes towards hair health by strengthening hair fibres, lubricating cuticles, and reducing frizz. Unfortunately, other than a food product, the Shea nut in Okere Parish has ended up being a valued energy source through charcoal and firewood. Yet, the Shea tree takes 20 years to mature and fruit – a period even longer than that required by a newborn baby to become an adult. It is therefore costly to destroy it, both in terms of time and lost revenue opportunities. In 2021, Okere City began a bold initiative to stem the tide. It planted 1,500 trees as a first step towards the restoration of the Shea tree as the crown jewel of the Otuke district.

To capitalize on its immense potential, Okere City adopted a social enterprise approach. In so doing, it sought a structure that would put the people of Okere in the very center of its exploitation. The best way of doing this was by the use of a SACCO as the key vehicle towards the development of a Shea tree industry in Okere Parish. In line with this, the Okere Shea Cooperative Society was initiated on 11th

September 2020 at Okere Community Centre by 120 community members. Ironically, this was at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, which curtailed movement, and meetings amongst other activities. However, given the excitement following the discovery of what the She tree could do for Okere Parish, the community was not willing to wait. They wanted a vehicle that could enable them to exploit the Shea tree as quickly as possible. 90 of those who attended the meeting went on to become members. The smaller number was not because of the lack of interest, but rather because of the membership criteria by the cooperative. Following its registration in September 2020 by the commercial office in Otuke District, a board of 11 people was established to spearhead its development. Okere Shea Cooperative Society was born.

2.2 How it works

The Okere Shea Cooperative Society was meant to be the bedrock upon which investments in Shea nuts and Shea butter would be based. The community came up with two key requirements that had to be fulfilled for one to become a member. These were:

- Buy a minimum of 1 share worth US\$ 2.
- Provide 100kg of Shea butter.

The 100kgs of Shea nuts were not an in-kind investment though. The cooperative paid for them at the end of the financial year at the price of US\$ 1 per kg. Members were therefore guaranteed of earning US\$ 100, which is a significant sum of money in Okere Parish.

Most members have one to three shares. 350 shares have been purchased by 130 members to date. The slow progress has been due to the 100kgs of Shea nuts that have proved harder to get, partly due to the previous destruction of this valuable tree. The biggest shareholder is Okere village bank which has invested US\$ 60,000 into the cooperative. As a result, it owns 51% of the shares. This investment was used to construct office premises and storage facilities for the cooperative. It also supported working capital and marketing costs for the Shea butter in Kampala.

Given that members have to bring a minimum of 100kgs of she butter, the cooperative does not have to tie down valuable capital in buying raw materials. This innovation has enabled the cooperative not only secure valuable working capital, but it has also done so at zero interest rates. Another innovation concerns labor. Every member has to donate several days during the year in supporting the cooperative. This

enables the save on labor costs while leveraging a widely available resource. Not only does it support working capital, but it also ensures that members remain active in the cooperative throughout the year. The mandatory engagement ensures that they continue to support the activities of the cooperative and don't just appear during the harvesting season and disappear during the rest of the year. Furthermore, it also helps rally and unify the members behind the cooperative. The cooperative uses this labor in the drying, storage and processing activities. Shea butter must be dried every 1-2 months to prevent mould. All the cooperative has to meet is the cost of meals when the members are working.

100kg of Shea nuts worth US\$ 100 provide 36 litres of Shea butter worth US\$ 400. The processing is done by Moo Me Gen, which is based 15km away in Otuke District. However, the packaging and branding are done by Okere Cooperative. 80% of the Shea butter is now sold in Kampala with the rest being distributed to other smaller towns in Uganda. Despite its young age, it has established itself as a quality cosmetic product in the local market. It is one of the top 10 Shea butter trends in Kampala despite being a new entrant.

The financial year runs from July to June the following year which coincides with the harvesting season. Amazingly, the cooperative has been able to pay dividends to members in 2020 and 2021. The first dividends in 2020 were paid just months after its registration.

Okere Shea Butter comes in four different sizes, namely;

- 800g - 40,000 UGX
- 400g - 30,000 UGX
- 250g - 20,000 UGX
- 125g - 10,000 UGX

Okere City appreciates that it needs to restore the Shea tree population if its efforts to build an industry are to be successful. As part of 'Our Shea Project', Okere City has also run a series of sensitization campaigns to broaden the community's understanding of the benefits of the Shea tree. Through the cooperative, locals there have been educated on the value of the Shea tree. They now appreciate that oil from the shea nut is highly sought after to make skin and hair products. With this education, it has become very difficult to cut trees in Okere. Furthermore, community members are becoming more protective of the Shea trees. While

traditionally, it was considered a community resource that was God-given and therefore accessible to anyone, even if it was on one's land, community members are increasingly finding ingenious ways of preventing others from harvesting Shea trees from their land. This is a testament to the increasing value of a tree that was once taken for granted.

2.3 Successes/achievements

Okere City has several achievements down its belt, despite its young age.

Profits: It registered profits of US\$ 2,000 in 2020, from sales of US\$ 14,000 in its inception year. The profits increased to US\$ 4,700 from sales of 25,000 in 2021. This is expected to increase in 2022 given the expanding markets.

Dividends: In 2021, the cooperative gave out dividends with the least shareholder getting US\$ 20 and the highest US\$ 300. US\$ 1,500 was paid in dividends in 2021. The payment of dividends has increased the interest of the community in the cooperative. It has proved through deeds and not words alone, that the Shea tree has money.

Growing membership: 90 members joined the cooperative in 2020. A further 300 have signed up to join – though some are yet to complete meeting the membership criteria. The most challenging of these has been securing the 100kgs required as part of the membership requirements.

Growing Market Share: Sales grew from \$10,700 in 2020 to US\$23,000 in 2021. Given the interest in the product, Okere Cooperative expects to enjoy increased sales over the next few years. It is now one of the top 10 Shea Butter brands in Kampala.

Partnerships: The cooperative has partnered with Moo Me Gen in Otuke to process the Shea nuts into butter. The company is just 15 km away from Okere City. This has enabled it to leverage on its equipment and capacity to grow thus saving it from the heavy investment that it would have required to buy its equipment. The company processes the Shea Butter from she nuts provided by the cooperative and Okere packages and brands.

Media Attention: Despite its young age, Okere Cooperative has been covered by various media including the respected Guardian Newspaper in the UK. This demonstrates the excitement that this innovative initiative is generating well beyond Uganda's borders.

Regeneration of the Shea Tree Population: In September 2020, Okere City began implementing 'Our Shea Project' with a US\$ 3,000 support from CivSource Africa. The project is significantly contributing towards the protection, regeneration and conservation of shea trees. It has also brought together a community of women in a movement that promotes the sustainability of Shea trees and harnesses their socio-economic and natural benefits.

2.4 Challenges

Despite its success, Okere City faces several challenges. These include:

Illegal Shea tree cutting and other threats to Shea trees in Otuke such as illegal bushfires and expansion of agricultural land: Though the destruction of the Shea tree has dramatically reduced since the entry of Okere City, some losses of the tree still occur. If Shea's re-afforestation efforts are not sustained, the tree may become extinct.

Freight Costs: It is very expensive exporting Shea Butter to international markets. It has to be airfreighted, due to its temperature sensitivity. This adds to the costs of exporting at a time when freight costs are already sky-high following the Covid-19 pandemic.

Export Conditions: Export conditions make it more difficult to export to western markets despite the large potential they hold. Okere has only managed to fulfill one small trial export order to Italy. It is gradually gaining the expertise and partnerships required to export a sensitive but valuable product such as Shea butter.

Pricing and Costing: It is challenging to cost and price the shea butter product against the competition in the market. Okere has high-quality Shea butter that is not processed. It is therefore different from others that are lower quality but have been processed.

Distribution: This is still challenging given that the cooperative is new. It will take time to establish an effective distribution network in Kampala and other parts of Uganda.

Marketing: Okere has relied on social media and word of mouth to promote its shea butter products. It is expensive and time-consuming to promote a new product. Okere City also lacks the resources required to promote it unlike most of its competition.

2.5 Future plans

Okere City's plans include:

Strengthen the Shea Butter Movement: This will ensure the protection, regeneration and sustainability of the Shea tree which is critical to the shea butter industry that Okere City seeks to create. If the Shea tree is to play its envisaged role in securing the industrial base of Okere City, the tree population has to be restored to its historical levels.

Build a Shea Butter Village: This will be the backbone of the shea butter industry. It will include the capacity, skills and expertise required to make Shea butter the backbone of Okere City. The cooperative realizes that it has just begun to scratch the surface. To exploit the full potential of the Shea tree, it has to develop an ecosystem that entails growing, harvesting, processing and marketing this valuable's tree's products. This requires the acquisition of the appropriate knowledge and capacity that will turn Okere City into a renowned She Butter Hub, not just in Uganda but the world as a whole.

Market Leadership: This will involve positioning Okere Shea Butter as a leading Shea butter product in the Ugandan market. It will require significant investments in marketing in large cities like Kampala. There is also a need to build and strengthen the Okere Shea Butter brand and visibility not just in Kampala but in Uganda and the East African region as well.

3 Lessons Learned

Okere City has learned several lessons over the years. These include:

Building on existing community assets is key for community development: This includes natural resources such as Shea trees as well as cultural and social activities that bind the community together. Okere City has capitalized and invested in them as key ingredients for its success.

Always listen to the authentic community voices: Listening to local and authentic voices is a key prerequisite for any community development work to succeed. It is therefore important to invest and organize community engagement platforms just to listen because it creates a basis for lasting social change.

Leadership: This is important in inspiring and organizing communities so that they can exploit existing resources for their development. Without good leadership, the people perish.

Having a vision: Establishing a strong vision and sharing it with the team and community is critical for success. The vision has to respond to community needs and be owned by them. It is this vision that enables the leadership to rally the community to support innovative ideas and initiatives.

Creative Thinking: Devising innovative ways of addressing social challenges and creating wealth is critical to sustainable development. Okere City is not the first development actor in Otuke District. Neither is it the only one. Its unique value proposition has been its innovative approach to tackling social and economic challenges that face the community.

Branding takes time and effort to establish a well-known brand in the market. Okere City still has much to do in securing the expertise and support required in building a strong and successful Okere Shea Butter brand.

4 Conclusion

4.1 Conclusions

It is not in doubt that communities have resources that can spur their development. The value of these resources is sometimes not appreciated by the community. This is the case with the Shea butter tree whose true worth and value escaped the people of Okere Parish in the Otuke District of Uganda until Okere City came along. A tree that had been cut down and turned into what the community thought was good charcoal, turned out to be a valuable pharmaceutical, cosmetic and confectionary tree whose oil was sought after for myriads of uses. While the community was aware of its food benefits, it did not appreciate that it could also be used in chocolate making, cosmetics and pharmaceuticals. Okere City has transformed the communities thinking and appreciation towards the product and is leveraging it to transform Okere Parish.

Rather than a typical project, Okere City sought a social enterprise approach that put the community at the center of its development. It chose the cooperative model because it not only gave the community a bigger voice but also enabled them to earn dividends

from their shares. Through initiatives in 2020, it has managed to generate profits in 2020 and 2021. Its membership has grown from 60 members in 2020 to 130 members in 2021 with another 60 members seeking to join. It registered profits of US\$ 2,000 in 2020 and US\$ 5,000 in 2021. The initiative has demonstrated that it can both be sustainable as well as the basis for significant community development in Okere City.

What is more, the initiative is led by sons and daughters of Okere Parish. People who came back to make a difference in the community. They did not return as old people at the end of their professional careers, but rather as young people, fully inspired and itching to make a difference in their communities. Their energy and ideas are already transforming this sleepy and laid-back village. It is no longer business as usual but unusual. Rather than depend on external ideas, Okere City has rallied the community towards identifying and solving its problems. For Okere City, the sky is the limit.

4.2 Replication Steps

The replication of the Okere City/ Okere Cooperative Shea Butter Model would require:

Step 1: Rally the community and listen to their voices and needs: Real and effective development begins and ends with the community. If the initiative is domiciled on real community needs and solutions, its chances of success are significantly enhanced. The community is not stupid – they will know when they are being taken for a ride. Any engagement with them has to be genuine and based on mutual respect.

Step 2: Develop a shared vision, mission and values: Communities are brought together by shared values and interests. To succeed, it is important to take the time to develop a shared vision and mission to guide the initiative. It is not about dictating what you want to do, but rather letting the community shape their future. Furthermore, if this vision is based on their culture and traditions, then it has a higher chance of success. Okere City and its cooperative have been able to leverage the social capital of the people to build a successful enterprise.

Step 3: Establish a team to spearhead the implementation of the vision and mission: The ideas are stillborn unless they are implemented. It is important to establish a competent team that works with the community in translating their dreams and aspirations into reality. One has to remember that there have been many other ideas

that have remained just that – ideas. Having the right team to steer the idea into reality can make the difference between failure and success.

Step 4: Get Board buy-in for the vision and mission: Good governance is key to the success of the venture. Many great ideas and aspirations have died at the altar of greed and poor governance. Getting the board to buy into the bigger vision and mission is therefore paramount. This ensures that they sacrifice their interests for the greater good. Since they work as volunteers, their full support and commitment are critical in maximizing their input into the intervention. If they do not lead from the front, then it may undermine the success of the initiative.

Step 5: Make the community a critical part of the process: Working with the community should not end at inception. In short, it is easy to forget the community along the way once the initiative is running. The community must be part and parcel of the entire journey. In reality, their contribution and ownership of the intervention process must grow and strengthen over time rather than wither and die. It is important to ensure that they fully participate rather than appear to receive reports. In Okere Shea Butter Cooperative, they capitalize on the enterprise through their 100kgs of nuts and provide labor that ensures that the business thrives. It is therefore important to continuously find ways to keep the community productively engaged in the enterprise.

Step 6: Identify community resources and assets that can be deployed to spur its development: Communities have myriads of resources that can spur their development. Many times, it is just that they have lived with them for so long that they take them for granted. At other times, it's ignorance of just what they have been gifted with. Rather than rush out for external resources, development initiatives need to start by identifying resources that can be harnessed for the community's development. Seeking external resources must be one last resort, not the first and only option. Furthermore, they need to complement the use of local resources and not replace them.

Step 7: Do your groundwork. Research the opportunities that you want to pursue: It is important to research and learn more about what you want to do. In Okere's City's case, it is only when they researched about Shea tree that they realized that they were sitting on gold. It is this realization that inspired them to found the Okere Shea Cooperative despite the challenges heralded by the Covid-19 pandemic. In short,

knowledge is power.

Step 8: Develop strategic plans to guide what you want to achieve: Irrespective of how good one's ideas are, they may not be achieved if they are poorly executed. Developing strategic plans not only act as a guide to how these ideas can be effectively and successfully executed but also help in selling the initiative to other well-meaning partners. This is captured by the management mantra that failing to plan is planning to fail.

Step 9: Capitalise on business plans to guide social enterprise activities: Social enterprises are businesses with a social mission. Business planning is therefore crucial to their success. Okere City has a business plan to guide its Shea Tree activities. This not only enables it to use its limited resources more effectively but also to plan for the growth and development of the enterprise. Business plans make it easier to attract other investors to support the initiative.

Step 10: Sell the vision to potential partners and investors and rally their support: Development requires the involvement and support of many actors. It can never be a solo project. Okere City

and its Shea Cooperative continuously sell its grand vision and mission to potential investors and supporters. While it has taken significant efforts to convince people that there is great potential in the sleepy parish of Okere, more investors are gradually buying into the vision. Their support is important in mobilizing the long-term investment that Okere City needs to achieve its grant dream.

Step 11: Think Creatively. Think of new ways of capitalizing on resources, solving social challenges and exploiting opportunities. As Einstein said, you cannot solve problems using the same old approaches. Solving the problems and challenges of Okere Parish or any other area requires new and creative thinking. This demands courage and the willingness to think outside of the box.

Step 12: Keep the faith. Believe in the process and rally the community and partners to support it. Things will not always move as quickly as you want them to. There will also be those who doubt the potential of ideas and attempt to drag you down. The leaders need to rally the community to keep the faith and keep going until success is achieved.



“Okere Shea Coop has lifted me” Ajacin

Jacinta Awor, a single mother of six children, is a member of the Okere Women's Shea Cooperative Society. Over the past five years, Ajacin, as she is profoundly called, has taken investment in Shea nuts as a top priority to increase her household's source

of income and ultimately improve the standard of living. Every year, she collects over 200 kilograms of Shea nuts and also buys shea nuts from other women in the neighborhood.

In 2022, Ajacin brought 300 kilograms of Shea nuts in addition to the 200 kilograms she had collected/harvested herself giving a combined total of 500 kilograms of Shea nuts. As a member of the cooperative society, Ajacin brought her annual membership contribution of 100 kilograms, sold 200 kilograms, and saved 200 kilograms with the coop. This makes her the biggest contributor in terms of the Shea nut share value in the cooperative society.

Jacinta received \$150 when she sold her Shea nuts to the coop in 2022. As she waits to recoup the dividends from her investment in Shea nuts in June 2023, which is projected at \$300, Jacinta is excited about the significance of investing in Shea nuts. But before that, selling her Shea nuts to cooperative society at a price that almost doubled what other middlemen were offering to the collectors was a relief to Jacinta's household. "The coop society is preventing us from being exploited by the middlemen who traverse our village offering exploitative prices," she says. "The money I got from selling the Shea nuts to

Okere Coop lifted my family because I used it to pay school fees for four children, in addition to helping me to meet medical expenses", Jacinta recollected.

But beyond the money, Okere Shea Coop which also invests in providing adult education to its members has helped women like Jacinta to learn basic numeracy and literacy skills. "The functional adult classes I attend as a member of Okere Shea coop has enabled me to plan and budget well from the money I get from selling Shea nuts", Jacinta said.

After realizing immense benefits from her first year as a member of the coop, Jacinta now hopes to borrow money from Okere Village Bank to invest in buying 1 ton of Shea nuts this coming season. She expects to use the profits and dividends generated from the sale of Shea nuts to build a semi-permanent house so that her children can always be guaranteed a good roof over their heads now and tomorrow.





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