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Title: Shea butter: a pro-poor, pro-female route to increased income?

TREET AID works in Africa’s drylands to unlock the potential of trees to tackle poverty and improve the environment.

Raising agricultural productivity of the poorest households is often not a viable route out of poverty, as farm sizes are small and yield potential low. These challenges are being amplified by climate change. Off-farm sources of income are often cited as a better alternative, but in remote communities, off-farm opportunities can be scarce. In northern Ghana, non-timber forest products (NTFPs) have the potential to provide alternative sources of income and underpin a transformational climate-smart strategy to reach vulnerable households, especially women. Here we present a quantitative study of 223 households in northern Ghana, half of whom were provided with training and inputs to enhance their involvement in shea butter value chains.

A digital platform, built on open-source software, called Rural Household Multi-Indicator Survey (RHoMIS) was used to collect a set of farm household characteristics, performance and welfare indicators to quantitatively assess the outcomes of interventions. The analysis of farm practices and farm performance, allows to make a quantitative link between the farm households, livelihoods and management strategies and internationally established welfare indicators.

The results showed that the poorest households self-selected to take part in shea butter production and sales activities, and that these activities and the income remained in the control of women.

Incomes derived from shea amongst project beneficiaries was compared to a control population. There were significantly less households below the 2,500 kcal per person ‘calorie line’, higher cash incomes, and better progress out of poverty scores amongst project beneficiaries than amongst non-beneficiaries. The findings suggest that beneficiaries earned double the annual income of the control group in shea harvests - on average 30 US$ more per household per year. In the context of the area of intervention, where median income per person per day is less than 0.10 US cents and 81% of the population are classed as severely food insecure, this increase produced a measurable impact. Reasons for pro-poor self-selection and how value chain development practices may have influenced the project are also discussed.