

# L'OCCITANE RESIST<sup>1</sup> Program:

## Improving women shea producers' resiliency in Burkina Faso

L'OCCITANE has been working with shea producers in Burkina Faso since the 1980's to build a strong sustainable partnership with women's cooperatives. The first decades were focused on:

- Improving product quality and quantity
- Handling logistics from Burkina Faso to Europe
- Increasing women's income

From 2018 to 2021, L'OCCITANE launched a holistic program based on three pillars:

- Secure and restore shea parklands
- Modernize the shea butter production to reduce environmental impacts while attracting the young generation
- Improve the autonomy of women

The project has supported the development of OP2B's regenerative agriculture objectives to:

- Support farmer livelihoods
- Keep carbon in the soil
- Increase capacity of soils to hold water
- Protect the resource and enhance the landscape biodiversity

1. In 2018, L'OCCITANE launched RESIST (Resilience, Ecology, Strengthening, Independence, Structure, Training), a \$2 million project that aims to protect shea resources for 10,000 Burkinabe women producers and preserve biodiversity. The RESIST program is supported by L'OCCITANE, public donors such as USAID (thanks to Global Shea Alliance) and S&QUA (funded by the German Federal Government, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), via seque as part of the developpde program), as well as local shea butter cooperatives. Furthermore, it relies on the technical aid of the local L'OCCITANE team in Burkina Faso and the NGO NITUA. The program is recognized as 'exemplary' by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

## The impetus

L'OCCITANE creates products and cosmetics that are inspired by nature and use organic and natural ingredients. The RESIST program is part of a long-term commitment to preserve L'OCCITANE's star ingredients, which include shea. The company has recently committed to having all their iconic ingredients become fair trade and engaged in a positive approach for biodiversity by 2025, which necessitates a transition to regenerative agriculture.

Shea butter has been a pioneer product for L'OCCITANE as they received a fair trade certification in 2009. The company wants to continue developing its shea supply chain utilizing the same model and adapting it to various local contexts in order to meet 100% of supply requirements.

The shea tree is only present in the sub-Saharan system and plays a big role in the local economy, especially for women who may not have any other source of income. The shea tree is also a key pillar within the forest system in West Africa, and therefore it is integral to protect and regenerate the soil in the region.

While L'OCCITANE was already working with women in Burkina Faso to produce handcrafted shea, they decided to carry out a new phase of the project in 2018 to make the process more attractive for younger generations. The average age of shea producers was 45, and younger people were not previously participating due to the harsh conditions of the work. The company also realized that despite significant support from L'OCCITANE, the women-led cooperatives still needed other clients to secure their income.

## The solution

To improve the resilience of women shea producers in the region, L'OCCITANE operated the project with three pillars in mind: (1) protecting the resource, (2) sustaining the handcrafted process while making it more attractive for younger populations, and (3) diversifying cooperatives' revenue streams.

To protect the resource, L'OCCITANE worked with local authorities and women cooperatives to form agreements to gather nuts in protected areas. This small scale model ensures organic production. They involved the local community in forest management and trained women in regenerative agriculture techniques like seedling, nursing and assisted natural regeneration techniques thanks to a partnership with a research center.

Traditionally, industrial companies only buy shea tree nuts in Burkina Faso to transform them into butter elsewhere. Nevertheless, women in the region have a lot of traditional knowledge on producing handcrafted shea butter, and L'OCCITANE wants to maintain handcrafted end-to-end production in their supply chains. It was thus a priority to L'OCCITANE, that women involved remain the guardians of their ancestral knowledges as well as retain control of the technical and economical processes.

To reduce environmental impacts and to motivate younger generations in Burkina Faso to take part in the work, L'OCCITANE promoted the mechanization of the production processes to make the work less harsh, including roasting and cooking the nuts and replacing 100% of the wood by waste valorization.

Through this process, the cooperatives managed to increase their production capacity. This proves that it is possible to meet the supply requirements of an international cooperation and also maintain handcrafted women's production.

Furthermore, to diversify cooperative incomes, L'OCCITANE helped cooperatives to expand their client base and revenue. This not only increased their turnover but also increased their revenues per member. They also worked with one cooperative to sell hibiscus flowers in addition to shea.

## Two key learnings

- 1. Fair pricing is key:** You can't have fair trade shea butter at a low price. You need to be prepared to pay a higher price. L'OCCITANE pays more than twice the market price for their product and has increased their price again by 20% last year based on independent detailed



### OP2B Pillar 1:

## Scaling up regenerative agriculture

This pillar defines specific actions within the value chains of OP2B members on regenerative agriculture. Scaling up regenerative farming practices will leverage the power of plants to keep carbon in the soil (carbon sequestration) and increase the capacity of soils to hold water. It will further enhance the resilience of their crops, support the livelihoods of their farmers, and regain the nutrient density of food while decreasing reliance on synthetic inputs. OP2B has carried out a series of case studies of regenerative agriculture initiatives by member companies. This case study falls under pillar 1.

## Impacts as of 2020

- 100% of the cooperatives have an organic certification
- 10,000 women trained
- 0% of wood used and 100% waste valorization for two semi-industrial units

cost study. They developed pluriannual contracts with women and they pay 80% as a pre-payment to cover their initial production costs. They have also set up a biodiversity fund that enables communities to reinvest into the forest, in addition to a development fund for collective social projects.

- 2. Co-design with all stakeholders is critical:** Cooperatives, local NGOs, and partners with knowledge on technical topics like landscape management and regeneration training are critical to project success. L'OCCITANE asked a government research centre to help develop the project and collaborated with the Global Shea Alliance on client identification.

## What's next?

Through the RESIST program, L'OCCITANE has helped more than 10,000 women secure a source of income, helping them not only to support their households but also to become entrepreneurs. These women are now directors of a factory and remain in control of all the technical processes. They have managed to up-grade their traditional knowledge to attract the younger generation while also helping to protect the environment. The next step for L'OCCITANE is to help them with management and leadership training to support their transition into business ownership.

From a business perspective, L'OCCITANE has demonstrated the feasibility of incorporating biodiversity, climate change adaptation and social equity into their supply chain. This program is a clear example that you can buy high quality products that protect biodiversity while enabling livelihoods. They are now taking the Burkina Faso approach to Ghana to diversify their supply of organic and fair trade shea butter and to share best practices between the two territories.

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