

Inspiring A Generation Of Agri Change Makers: The Case Of Vanessa Dodoo



In July 2022, Vanessa Dodoo arrived in the Wantugu village in Gushegu, with a singular mission, to support the Tungteiya Women's Co-operative through business improvement services. Her 2 month stay with the group was part of an [internship programme](#)

under the Shea Business Empowerment Programme (SBEP), a partnership between the Mastercard Foundation and the Global Shea Alliance. SBEP links students from the University of Development Studies (UDS) with women shea co-operatives, providing crucial support to the co-operatives whilst also exposing young people to opportunities in the shea industry for social entrepreneurship and positive impact.

"As a BSc Agribusiness student, I knew my skills and knowledge would be beneficial to the group and I have a strong passion for rural development work but most especially, I was excited to work with a co-operative made up entirely of women",



Vanessa stated. During the internship, she supported the co-operative through financial record keeping, business development practices such as negotiation, conflict management, marketing and branding as well as digitalisation. At the end of her internship, Vanessa had designed a logo for the co-operative, created a business plan and supported the group to repackage their shea butter and other products for sale at the market.



Vanessa working with the Tungteiya Women's co-operative

Beyond this primary role, Vanessa noticed a major problem in the value chain, which was the way the shea kernels were dried during processing. *“There are two stages of drying in shea butter processing”* referring to the process of transforming shea fruits into kernels and then into shea butter. *“I noticed the amount of time that each drying stage required, coupled with the fact that the women relied entirely on the sun to do this”*. Exposing the products to direct sunlight is not only time consuming, but it also creates room for potential contamination. *“It can take several days to several weeks for the women shea collectors to completely dry their kernels before moving onto the second stage of processing. High moisture content in poorly dried kernels results in high free fatty acid levels when processed further, making the shea butter rancid and of poor quality.*

Inspired by this need and motivated to provide a solution, Vanessa discussed her idea with a team of friends who designed and built a mechanical solar drying system, the **Sunify Solardry Technology**. The technology reduces the drying time to 5 to 7 hours (depending on the moisture content of the kernels) and varies from other mechanical dryers



because it is mobile. This feature provides flexibility to the co-operatives to either take their kernels to the drying stations or rent the device for a day and then move it into their community for drying. The prototype was

tested with the co-operative and discussions with the woman collectors were a valuable part of the team's market research. In November 2023, the innovation qualified for the 2024 KIC Agritech Challenge, a Mastercard Foundation funded programme, winning a prize of USD\$30,000, earmarked for developing 2 full life size prototypes for piloting with some of the women co-operatives.



Vanessa with the technology team

“The internship experience changed my entire perspective on life and my career goals. I am now convinced that my work should bring an impact to the community and the world around me”, Vanessa stated.



Vanessa’s story is evidence of the tremendous potential young people hold in driving innovation and positive impact across agricultural value chains and the shea industry specifically. The Shea Business Empowerment Programme offers a unique platform for youth engagement for positive change and impact by connecting young people with women led shea co-operatives, promoting both social entrepreneurship and sustainable business practices. Through hands on internships, SBEP exposes students to real world challenges in the shea sector, empowering them with skills in business development, agroforestry and community leadership. By working directly with co-operatives, students gain practical experience, whilst also driving positive change through innovative solutions that enhance productivity, promote sustainability and strengthen the value chain. This engagement enables young people to make a lasting impact on local communities and the environment.