

## Case Studies on Women in Organic Agriculture in Africa

*Eugenia Akuete, Naasakle Limited, Ghana*



Eugenia Akuete

Eugenia Akuete, a sixty year old, self-motivated and also hard working woman from Southern Ghana, went into the business in 1999 to originally package and sell shea butter. She bought from the local women and packaged to sell in the USA.

In 2000, Eugenia Akuete left the US after 23 years and relocated in Accra, Ghana, to better control the quality of the shea butter that she markets and also directly help the women and their communities. “My mother was a midwife and as I observed how she used shea butter on the skin of infants which appeared to be a better moisturizer, I was convinced that shea butter might contain some unique organic properties that are good to the human skin,” Eugenia Akuete said.

In 2000, Eugenia Akuete resigned her job as an accounting technician with Goodwill Industries of America, an NGO that trains disabled people for the job market in the USA, to set up her own business. Thus Naasakle Limited came into existence in 2003 with a factory located in Accra to produce shea butter using traditional methods. Now the company has 15 employees, most of whom, she proudly noted, are women, and works with about 1,500 women in the collection and processing of shea nut using traditional methods. Naasakle currently supplies 100 %, all natural, chemical-free shea butter to customers in the United States, Canada and South Africa.

“I really wanted to do something that would keep me busy and provide assistance to the women. It is one thing to just give handouts, but this way I am teaching them sustainable farming methods that will allow them to have continued future successes with or without the company’s help,” she explained.

Eugenia Akuete ensures that organic manure and not chemical fertilizer is used in the shea nut parklands. She observed that women farmers have embraced the traditional methods, which can be undertaken with minimal costs.

“Shea nut that grows naturally or from organic agriculture tends to be environmentally friendly and is in high demand. People have become health conscious and they demand organically healthier products without chemicals. This gives women farmers better prices for their produce as well as a wider market,” she said.

According to Eugenia Akuete shea nut picking and processing have made a huge impact on the livelihoods of 1,500 women and their children. Shea nuts and shea butter touches every house hold in the northern region of Ghana. The area incidentally ranks above the national average in poverty levels.

“It is such a great feeling when you talk to these women and realize how their lives have improved simply by organizing their production and providing them a market,” said Eugenia.

Zeliyatu, a member of an association working with Naasakle in the Northern region of Ghana, explained that before Naasakle shea butter orders, the lack of locally buying market required her to make her own shea butter soap to sell on the street.

She would sell the soap for 10 pesewa each (about 8 cents), selling only a few per day. This was devastating to her 14 dependants, including 9 children and 5 grandchildren for whom she was paying for schooling. Through Naasakle purchase of shea butter from the association, she is now able to save money to put in the rural bank. This allows her to purchase health insurance, pay school fees, and prepare for unforeseen expenses. By opening the bank account, she has gained enough trust to receive small loans to further her own business goals and support her family.



Eugenia Akuete in a meeting with women and opinion leaders in Temale

“Consumers are very health conscious and want to make sure they use products that will not harm them over a long period. These discerning consumers are at the forefront of the natural and organic movement. Naasakle share their concerns and can relate to their needs thus our company’s goal to make sure our shea butter is wholly natural and organic. That means organizing the women, educating the farmers on organic farming methods and applications, putting procedures in place to ease traceability and ultimately obtaining certification from an internationally recognized organic certifier,” said Eugenia.

This goal has been met with many challenges. From identifying the most appropriate group to work with, to deciding on the consulting company to help put procedures in place to help with the certification process, to choosing a certifying body that is recognized globally (most certifications are either recognized in US or in Europe). The last and the most important issue is funding for the preparation and cost of the certification, which is far beyond the reach of women groups in Ghana! We have been in negotiations with AgroEco, our training consultants, for the training, designing, putting in place procedures and preparation for the Certifying Company’s audit. With their help we have been able to identify the appropriate group, have done initial training to make them understand the need to involve in sustainable eco friendly farming methods and the importance of organic farming for the environment as well as the commercial rewards that goes with the extra effort needed to farm organically. They have bought into our vision. This is a first major step.

“Our next major challenge is funding the cost of designing, preparing and putting in place procedures and finally the actual cost of certification. To this end we have approached a number of organizations, some of which are SNV, EDIF and BDSF. Our hope is that one of these organizations will come through with assistance to enable us to reach our goal within the next 4 months,” said Eugenia.

*James Addy*  
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For more information about Naasakle Limited see the website: [www.sheabuttergh.com/](http://www.sheabuttergh.com/)