



## SUCCESS STORY

# Malian exporter leads shea federation

**By connecting stakeholders, a shea federation helps the industry develop**



*Kadijatou Lah has led Mali's shea stakeholders to form a national federation, giving women pickers and processors a louder voice in the industry's evolution.*

*Madame Lah's initiative of Mali's National Federation of Shea Professionals brings the industry together, helping to ensure quality product, market access and higher value to the women who pick and process shea nuts.*

When public and private sector stakeholders came together to form Mali's National Federation of Shea Professionals in November, they elected Kadijatou Lah as its first secretary general. Lah is a dynamic force in Mali's shea industry, working with thousands of women pickers and processors, heading up two important shea groups and running her own export company. The sector sustains the livelihoods of 80% of rural Malian women – more than five million people, according to the government.

“She has played a very big role because she knows the entire sector,” said Binta Konte of *Projet Karité*, a UNDP-funded shea project. “Thanks to her, the federation came together.”

This new federation is putting the country's shea industry on the right track, with a focus on improved quality to positively impact the millions of women involved.

“It includes all of the actors, from people working with the tree to export,” Lah said. “It was created to find solutions to problems in the sector. It's an alliance.”

Alliances are a strategic thrust of the Trade Hub's work in nontraditional export sectors. When companies come together, they can advocate to government on problems that affect them all but that are too big for any one to resolve individually.

The federation worked closely with the Trade Hub and Mali's Ministry of Women to host Global Shea 2010, the third annual international shea industry conference in Bamako in March preceded by Mali Shea Day.

The events connected stakeholders in Mali to international buyers, experts and service providers.

“Our goals are to improve quality, attract market and increase value to the women collecting shea nuts and making shea butter,” Lah explained. “Our vision is to be the best supplier of quality shea nuts and butter to the world. And I think we'll succeed.”