



SUCCESS STORY

Ghanaian shea butter products spreading into U.S. cosmetics market

Lotions and soaps from Ele Agbe and All Pure Nature will be on shelves in Ten Thousand Villages stores around the U.S.



Photo: Leah Quin, USAID Trade Hub

At All Pure Nature, a worker wraps rosemary-oatmeal soaps and seals them with a bar-coded price tag from Ten Thousand Villages

The Trade Hub acted as an honest broker, connecting buyers to suitable clients and fielding questions from both sides

Shea butter's moisturizing and skin-soothing properties are well known in West Africa and increasingly around the world, as the nut-based cream is stirred into an ever-wider variety of beauty products. In early 2008, two Ghanaian entrepreneurs will ship their own finished shea butter lotions and soaps to Ten Thousand Villages, a U.S.-based fair-trade retail chain that is making its first foray into the cosmetic market.

Comfort Adjahoe of Ele Agbe and Gladys Commey of All Pure Nature have teamed to fill the order for 12,000 soaps and 4,000 creams in specially made ceramic pots, scented with tea tree, lemon, rosemary, eucalyptus and mint essential oils. In addition to boosting their revenues, the order will provide work and investment opportunities for approximately 120 women in rural, northern Ghana which supply shea butter to the two businesses. And the businesses hired extra workers to process the shea and package products at their facilities in Accra.

Their relationship with Ten Thousand Villages began in 2006, when it participated in a handcrafts buying trip organized by USAID's West Africa Trade Hub. During this trip the buyer realized the potential for adding shea butter cosmetics to its line. The Hub introduced Adjahoe and Commey, who shipped multiple samples for inspection. In 2007, the Hub accompanied Ten Thousand Villages on a tour of shea-producing villages to verify fair wages and community investment.

"This buyer sells the village as much as the product," said Elitza Barzakova, the Hub's handcraft export advisor, who facilitated the order. "It's vital to them that everyone benefits all along the value chain."

The chain extends to other Hub clients in Ghana as well: TK Beads crafted the recycled glass ornaments on each container and bar of soap. Ten Thousand Villages also purchased home décor from Dan Beaded Handicraft, which will also be included in the final shipment.