

Knowledge Of The Medicinal Health And Nutrition Benefits And Qualities Of Shea Butter Among Members Of Ebonyi State University Community, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

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Abstract: *The aim of this study was to appraise the knowledge of the medicinal health and nutrition benefits and qualities of shea butter among members of Ebonyi State University Community, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Survey research design was used in this study. The research was carried in the four campuses of Ebonyi State University, namely: Permanent Site Campus, Ishieke Campus, CAS Campus and Presco Campus. The population used in the study was 36,242. The sample used was 200. The method of data collection was questionnaire and interview. The research revealed that the respondents agreed that the people were aware of Shea butter, its medicinal, health and nutritional benefits. Also the respondents used Shea butter to treat some ailments. The researcher recommended that the government should device means of enlightening the public on the applications of shea butter. Also that health practitioners such as nurses and doctors should be made to be aware of the healing qualities of local herbs such as Shea butter.*

Keywords: *shea butter, medicinal, health, members, ebonyi, university, community*

I. INTRODUCTION

Shea butter is a substance extracted from fruits of the Shea nut which is a product of the Shea tree- *vitellaria paradoxa*. It grows profusely in the wild without any special nourishment and attention. (Shea butter scientific information, 2011). Every part of the indigenous tree is found to be useful. Its distribution is exclusive to sub-Saharan West Africa in the Savannas, particularly in Burkino Faso where it provides economic substances to rural women (Thomas, 2002).

Its distribution extends from Senegal to Ethiopia and Uganda. The Shea tree, though slow in its initial growth, has a useful fruit-bearing life span of 15-20 years. Under the indigenous farming system while clearing for agricultural activities, Shea trees are preserved and their exclusive plantation is restricted to avoid shading of other crops. However, the operations of weeding and management of soil

fertility adopted for other crops also facilitates shea tree growth (Fold, 2000).

The Shea fruit matures into the shea nut which has the Shea Kernel within it. The kernel is the source of the Shea butter that is extracted through an arduous several hours of processing, over 22 steps to produce 1 kilogramme of the butter. In Burkino Faso, it is an exclusive prerogative of rural women numbered from 300,000 to 400,000 (more than 50% of the population of the country). In local Dioula language, it is known as "Karite" (Akihisa et al., 2010),

The fruit is shaped like a large plum and has a smooth skin with an egg-shaped nut with kernel that yields the fatty Shea butter. The product that is extracted as fat from the kernel of the Shea nut, has five primary fatty acids (Fold, 2000).

Through a fat, it is not extracted in a fluid state like other oils, but is processed in the form of a white, odourless and nearly tasteless creamy paste or similar to firm butter. The

Shea butter produced in Burkina Faso has a higher average stearic acid percentage and is thus harder than the Shea butter from the other West African regions. This is due to scientific inference that the phenolic content in Shea kernel varies from region to region (Akihisa et al., 2010).

The quality of Shea nut and butter are basically dependent upon post harvest processing. In this process, parboiling of Shea nut is carried out at the beginning of the season as it eliminates germination and helps in faster drying. Better quality is obtained by sun-drying of the Shea nut since smoking the nut over a fire contaminates it with hydrocarbons (SBSI,2011).

Shea butter which is extracted from the Shea nut is rich in vitamins and minerals, which are vital to daily existence of the people. The Shea butter is used to enhance the taste, texture, and digestibility of the major regional dishes, as cooking medium. Other activities related to Shea butter enhance the financial income of the impoverished people. It could be used as ingredient to make cosmetic, chocolate (as substitute for cocoa butter) pharmaceutical applications and soap (Akihisa et al., 2010).

Soap manufacturers use it typically in small amounts (5-7% of the oil in the recipe) as it has a hardening property while leaving a small amount of oil in the soap. Other uses include: water proofing wax, hair dressing and candle making. Its export potential is on account of the industrial production into stearin for use with cocoa butter equivalents or improvers and margarines and an oil fraction used as a low-value base for margarine and as a component of animal feeds. Its use is also noted in traditional African percussion instrument to increase the durability of wood (such as curved djembe shell), dried calabash gourds, leather tuning straps (Fold 2010).

Bark of the Shea tree is used to cure ailments such as skin diseases in children, and treatment of minor scratches and cuts. Shea unsaponifiables are used for anti-inflammatory treatment of arthritis and topical treatment of eczema and other skin conditions including herpes lesions. A patented product "nutraceutical" is a Shea product that has been developed for lowering cholesterol in humans. Its use as a medicinal ointment, has been claimed to have anti-inflammatory, emollient and humectants property (Akihisa, 2010).

In most parts of West Africa, destruction of Shea tree is forbidden due to its economic and health benefits. Many Africans regard Shea butter as an invaluable agent for internal and external body purification. It is used as an after shave, hair balm for dry and brittle hair and on the head of the drums to prevent drying and cracking. It is sacred food for many (Tella, 2009).

Characteristically, Shea butter has a smooth and soft paste texture and is either yellow-white to ivory colour depending on how it is processed. The tree resembles the American oak. The kernel is first sun dried; the butter is prepared by boiling the kernel in water, and has the appearance of a Spanish olive. Women are usually responsible for the process of making Shea butter (SBSI,2011). This process take place in the rainy season from May to August when the Shea nuts are harvested and involves many days of carefully picking, gathering, drying, pounding and kneading (Thomas, 2002).

Shea butter is organic and as such has a useful life span. The healing properties reduce as the butter ages. It is typically useful for 12-15 months after it has been harvested. After this time, it becomes simply a very good moisturizer. It could be stored in a cool dry place with limited light for the best keeping (L G A,2006). The medicinal crushing gives a pure and natural butter with all its inherent qualities, but this method does not allow the extraction of the total amount from the nut. The quantity produced is less than by solvent extraction, therefore the price is high (Akihisa et al., 2010)

II. OBJECTIVE

- ✓ Ascertain their awareness of the shea butter
- ✓ Assess their awareness of the medicinal, health and nutritional qualities (benefit) of shea butter.
- ✓ Ascertain their usage of shea butter
- ✓ Suggest measures to promote their usage of shea butter.

III. METHODOLOGY

The survey research design was adopted in this study. The population was 36,242. The sample size was 50 persons per campus, summing up to 200. The study was carried out in the four campuses of Ebonyi State University which included Permanent Site Campus, CAS Campus, Presco Campus and Ishieke Campus.

IV. CONSUMERS AWARENESS OF SHEA BUTTER

Nigeria produces one of the highest quality Shea butter in Africa and the world in general. In Nigeria pure Shea butter is available at the cost of almost nothing. It is used mostly by women for hair and treatment. A few use it for cooking. In the northern part of the country, it is called *Kadanya* and in the southern part it is commonly known as *Ori*. The purest Shea Butter is sold locally by market women. Even though it can be found in shops at a higher price, the quality is lower than that of the once locally sold (Akihisa et al., 2010).

Shea butter is soft, creamy and beige in colour. At room temperature it is the texture of butter, but once heated slightly, it melts. The smell is not exactly nice but sometimes one may come across Shea Butter that has a perfumed smell. That is the kind that has been adulterated and no matter what is written on it, be it "100% Shea Butter," it is not pure. Also once Shea butter has any colour apart from beige, it is not pure. Sometimes, one may come across brown or white shea butter. It has been adulterated (Fold, 2000).

CONSUMERS AWARENESS OF THE MEDICINAL, HEALTH AND NUTRITIONAL QUALITIES (BENEFITS) SHEA BUTTER

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	N	EX	X	Dec.
1.	Shea butter is from shea butter tree	150	20	10	20	200	700	3.50	Accepted

2.	I have used shea butter before now	120	25	20	35	200	630	3.15	Accepted	13.	Shea butter is used as a make-up remover	30	50	70	50	200	460	2.30	Rejected
3.	Shea butter tree is called the tree of life	25	130	15	30	200	550	2.75	Accepted	14.	Shea is used as a treatment for skin problem	100	50	30	20	200	630	3.20	Accepted
4.	Shea butter is used for cooking	65	90	15	30	200	590	2.95	Accepted	15.	Shea butter is used in cooking food	40	20	60	80	200	420	2.10	Rejected
5.	Shea butter is soft creamy and beige in colour	70	80	40	10	200	610	3.05	Accepted										

Table I: Mean response on Consumers Awareness of Shea Butter

Information on table I reveals that items 1,2,3,4, and 5 with mean of 3.50, 3.15, 2.75, 2.95 and 3.05 respectively were accepted by the respondents. Which indicates that the respondent agree that they are aware of shea butter.

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	N	EX	X	Dec.
6.	Shea butter cures itching	70	80	40	10	200	610	3.05	Accepted
7.	Shea butter is used for curing leprosy	30	50	70	50	200	460	2.30	Rejected
8.	Shea butter is effective on dry skin	125	40	10	25	200	665	3.33	Accepted
9.	Shea cake is used for animal feed production because of its nutrient content	120	25	20	35	200	630	3.15	Accepted
10.	Shea butter prevents wrinkles, sun burn, ultra-violet induced cancer.	70	80	40	10	200	610	3.05	Accepted

Table II: Mean Responses on Respondents Awareness of Medicinal Health and Nutritional Benefits of Shea Butter

Data on Table II shows that items 6,8, and 9 with means of 3.05, 3.33, 3.15 respectively were accepted by the respondents while items 7 and 10 with means of 2.30 and 2.10 respectively were rejected by the respondents. This indicate that the respondents agree that shea butter cures itching, is used for dry skin, and that shea cake is used for animal feed, but disagree to the face that shea butter is used to cure leprosy and that it prevents wrinkles sunburns, ultraviolet induced cancer.

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	N	EX	X	Dec.
11.	Shea butter is used as treatment for burns	25	130	15	30	200	550	2.75	Accepted
12.	Shea butter is used as hair conditioner	150	20	10	20	200	700	3.50	Accepted

Table III: Mean responses on Respondent Usage of Shea Butter

Table III reveals that items 11, 12 and 14 with means of 2.75, 3.50 and 3.20 respectively were accepted by the respondents; while items 13 and 15 with means of 2.30 and 2.10 respectively were rejected by the respondents. That is to say that the respondents agree that shea butter is used to treat burns, used as hair conditioner, and also used as treatment for skin problem.

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	N	EX	X	Dec.
16.	Incorporating shea butter into household products and pharmaceutical products e.g. body creams	60	80	40	20	200	580	2.90	Accepted
17.	Organizing seminars and workshop to enlighten consumers on the benefits of shea butter	100	50	30	20	200	630	3.20	Accepted
18.	Government should support of herbs and herbal product	125	40	10	25	200	665	3.33	Accepted
19.	Advertising agencies should help by promoting shea butter and its products.	120	25	20	35	200	630	3.5	Accepted
20.	Policy makers and curriculum planners should incorporate the use of natural products into their curricula.	150	20	10	20	200	700	3.10	Accepted

Table IV: Mean response on the Measures to Promote the Usage of Shea Butter

Table IV reveals that items 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20 with means of 2.90, 3.20, 3.33, 3.15 and 3.50 respectively were accepted by the respondents. That is to say that measures to promote the use of shea butter include incorporating shea butter into house hold products and pharmaceutical products, organizing seminars and workshops to promote the use of shea butter, government should support & promote the use of herbs and herbal products among others.

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The major summary of this study includes:

- ✓ Respondents agree that they are aware of shea butter and that shea butter is from shea tree. Some of them have used shea butter before now; that shea butter tree is called the tree of life; that it is used for cooking and that shea butter is soft, creamy and beige in colour.
- ✓ The respondents agree that shea butter cures itching and is used for dry skin while shea care is used for animal feed.
- ✓ The respondents agree that shea butter is used to treat burns; used as hair conditioner and also used as treatment for skin problems.

Conclusively, the respondents agree that measures to promote the use of shea butter include inculcating shea butter into household products and pharmaceutical products; organizing seminars and workshops to promote the use of shea butter; that government should support and promote the use of herbs and herbal products.

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