



# The Computerworld Honors Program

Honoring those who use Information Technology to benefit society

## Final Copy of Case Study

**Year:**  
2013

**Status:**  
Laureate

**Organization Name:**  
PlaNNet Finance Group – StarShea Ltd.

**Organization URL:**  
[www.starshea.com](http://www.starshea.com)

**Project Name:**  
Empowering rural women and providing sustainable access to market

**Category:**  
Economic Development

**Please provide an overview of the nominated project. Describe the problem it was intended to solve, the technology or approach used, how it was innovative and any technical or other challenges that had to be overcome for successful implementation and adoption. (In 300 words or less.)**

The Star Shea project in Ghana is the first joint partnership between SAP and PlaNNet Finance to create sustainable business models for rural African countries through access to microfinance, education, and information technology. SAP and PlaNNet Finance joined forces to specifically help improve the incomes and living conditions for rural Ghana women engaged in shea nut harvesting and the shea butter business. The women harvest and process shea nuts into high quality, hand-crafted shea butter used in many cosmetic products. PlaNNet Finance and SAP combined their supply chain and development expertise to create a value chain reinforcement program in partnership with two local Ghanaian microfinance

institutions (MFIs), Grameen Ghana and Maata-N-Tudu. Since 2011, the initiative has also been supported by the European Commission and the French Development Agency to achieve several objectives: 1) Organize shea women into village groups and associations and create one national network. 2) Provide women with reliable access to health services. 3) Improve shea product quality and value through technical and business training. 4) Effectively link the women with the shea market through technology. 5) Provide adapted financial services to women workers through microfinance institutions. 6) Promote the protection and productivity of shea trees. 7) Support women processors' economic and human rights. The women processors can now offer their products via StarShea Ltd., a social business created to link them with shea nut and shea butter buyers around the world. The software that runs the system is SAP Rural Market Connection, which allows a fully traceable system of the production and order management. This makes it possible for buyers to access high-quality shea nuts in large amounts and expands the markets into which the women processors can sell the shea nuts or butter.

**When was this project implemented or last updated? (Please specify month and year.) Has it incorporated new technologies and/or other innovations since its initial deployment? (In 300 words or less.)**

The project was started in January 2009 through a NGO project operated by PlaNet Finance. The software is under development and the last update was made in September 2012. The software is enabling traceability from each women processor to the end buyer, through a barcode system, with women identification numbers. The system can be used for nuts and for butter, so that the client can know exactly the origin of the products. The system also enables users to follow the day-to-day stock, and organizes the orders and the payment for the women processors.

**Is implementation of the project complete? If no, please describe the project's phases and which phase the project is now in. (In 300 words or less.)**

Project is still under development.

**Please provide at least one example of how the technology project has benefited a specific individual or organization. Feel free to include personal quotes from individuals who have directly benefited from the work. (In 300 words or less.)**

Women in Ghana have gathered shea nuts from the bush for generations, but it is hard work. The combination of smartphones, business software and microfinance make the process a little easier. SAP, which devised the

smartphone app, also provides the business software and hosts the server in the cloud that stores data on shea nut transactions. StarShea Ltd. facilitates shea commerce by providing harvesters with personalized barcode labels. The harvesters attach a label to each shea nut sack, and a smartphone scans the label on delivery and as sacks are weighed. The software also records what each farmer should be paid according to weight, basic price and quality. Data synchronization does not require an Internet connection; it can also be executed via bulk SMS over mobile networks. Fatama Abduli of Tamale, West Ghana, relies on shea nuts to make a living and spends hours collecting nuts every day. "With the introduction of the price information system, we know about prices in various locations and when prices change," Abduli says. "We don't have to accept any price offered any more. The Star Shea Network helps us find buyers rather than selling on the open market where prices are lower." Senyo Kpelly, a nut buyer from Ghana who conducts business with shea farmers, adds, "Companies want to buy high-quality shea nuts and butter, but they don't have the funds to invest in the education of the women that harvest the nuts to ensure quality. The Star Shea project, by educating the women farmers, helps attract more buyers." Iddi Zakaria, business development advisor for PlaNet Finance in Ghana, says, "At the end of this project, the local women harvesters will be linked to international buyers so they can make more profit compared to having to go through intermediaries."

**Would this project be considered an innovation, a best practice or other notable advancement that could be adopted by or tailored for other organizations and uses? If yes, please describe that here. (In 300 words or less.)**

"This is an important project. If this social business comes out successful, it will pave the way for many such social businesses in agriculture." – Muhammad Yunus, Nobel Peace Laureate, 2006. The success of the program was illustrated when the shea nut program won the Greenbang Award for best corporate responsibility project. PlaNet Finance is turning the solution into an economically viable model that can be adopted by other farm supply chains in rural areas. The two companies plan to drive the project forward by scaling up to 10,000 or more women shea farmers. This quantity would create a viable economic model that could further be scaled to as many as 100,000+ farmers. The system is innovative by applying sophisticated enterprise software to a traditional, pre-agricultural activity carried out by economically challenged farmers. The project has also impacted farmers that used to work as individuals. They have now formed a federation of local groups that gives them more bargaining power with buyers. By working collectively, they can offer a reliable supply, attract bigger buyers, and eliminate some of the links in the market chain. In 2010, the project's first season, there were 1,500 women participating in the program that generated an output of 93 tons. In 2012, 5,000 women participated and sold approximately



200 tons. Another benefit is that the women farmers have been able to sell nuts later in the year, when they have dried more nuts and can secure a higher price rather than offloading them early because they need cash. According to a study by Sonali Rammohan of Stanford University's Graduate School of Business, last year the women were paid 59% more for standard nuts than they would have received in the local market in June. For premium nuts, they gained 82%.

**If there are any other details that the judges should know about this project, please note them here. (In 300 words or less.)**

The Star Shea Network, established as part of this project by SAP and PlaNet Finance, unites women farmers through local associations owned and managed by the women. They are trained in professional handling, hygiene and processing of high-quality shea nuts. Through microfinance, members can invest in clothing to protect themselves from snakes, which commonly inhabit the shea fields. The shea processor women's greatest goal has already been achieved: they receive market prices directly on their mobile phones via SMS messages. Before, middlemen would interact and offer below market pricing. Today, 5,000 women are part of the Star Shea network. They have solid income and can enter bigger markets over time. This allows them to support their families and send their children to school. The plan is to bring 7,500 women into the network within the next 12 months. The women have also received training on how to react to pricing data received on mobile phones; how to check prices in the broader market; and how to move up the value chain into processing butter. Officials from the local farmers' co-operative say that farmers seeing an electronic record of their produce now trust their bookkeeping and believe they are paid what they are owed. The officials, in turn, are in a stronger position with buyers. Please see video: <http://www.sap-tv.com/video/7334/sustainable-business-in-ghana>.