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AAK and Mars partner in a ten-year sustainable shea initiative to empower women in West Africa

AAK has joined forces with global confectionery, food, and pet care company Mars, several leading NGOs, and an impact investment fund to create a public-private partnership. This will improve the livelihoods of women working in Ghana's shea supply chain. Running until 2030, the Women in Shea (WISH) initiative aims to reach 13,000 women shea collectors from more than 150 communities in northern Ghana.

Project goals

Stakeholders in the WISH initiative have the common goal to bring economic and social benefits to the 13,000 women in the program and promote environmental improvements for the shea tree parklands while meeting the growing market demand for high-quality shea kernels.

Project goals will be achieved through expanding the women's access to savings and financial credits, improving natural resource management techniques, and reducing the time burden and labor intensity of the work associated with shea kernel collection and processing. Each of these areas will enable the women in impacted communities to gain more from the kernels they collect.

In the long term, the project will also have a positive impact on the quantity and quality of shea kernels, and the overall sustainability of the shea supply chain. AAK supplies Mars with cocoa butter equivalents based on shea butter for chocolate and confectionery applications. The companies have committed to purchasing the shea kernels produced within the WISH initiative for its decade-long duration. The project builds on AAK's existing direct sourcing program, Kolo Nafaso, through which the company sources shea kernels directly from women smallholder farmers in West Africa, enabling them to increase their income sustainably. It is also closely aligned with AAK's corporate purpose – Making Better Happen™.

Common business values

Luis Parra, Global Business Director for Chocolate & Confectionery Fats at AAK, said: "Mars and AAK share common business values, including a long-term commitment to sustainability. The WISH initiative will deliver economic and social benefits to the women in the project and promote environmental improvements for the shea tree parklands. It will also provide sustainable shea kernels that AAK will transform into high-quality products for Mars to use in its chocolate and confectionery brands. The WISH initiative is a true collaboration effort and we are thrilled to be involved."

Anne Mette Olesen, AAK's Chief Strategy & Sustainability Officer, added: "WISH is a ground-breaking partnership of stakeholders in the shea supply chain, combining the knowledge and influence of both the public and private sector. The potential for positive, sustainable transformation is huge, especially in light of the holistic, long-term, and practical approach being taken by all parties involved."

A public and private coalition of partners:

- **AAK** specializes in plant-based oils that are the value-adding ingredients in many consumer products. Through its unique co-development approach, the company solves customer-specific needs across many industries – Chocolate & Confectionery, Bakery, Dairy, Plant-based Foods, Special Nutrition, Foodservice, and Personal Care.
- **Mars Incorporated** is a global leader in the production of confectionery, food and pet care products, and investor partner in the Livelihoods Fund for Family Farming (L3F).

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- **The US Agency for International Development (USAID)** leads international development and humanitarian efforts to save lives, reduce poverty, strengthen democratic governance, and help people progress beyond assistance.
- **The Livelihoods Fund for Family Farming (L3F)** is an impact investment fund launched in 2015 together with Mars and Danone, and later joined by Firmenich and Veolia, designed to transform the supply chains of pioneering brands while improving the livelihoods of smallholder farmers.
- **CARE International** is the lead implementing partner for the WISH initiative and has been operating in Ghana since 1994. Currently, it works with more than 40 partner organizations to promote integrated program approaches to the fight against extreme poverty and social injustice.
- **Presbyterian Agricultural Services (PAS)** is a Ghanaian not-for-profit, non-governmental organization with over 50 years' experience of delivering agriculture advisory services to farmer organizations. More than 20,000 women working in the shea value chain have benefited from PAS interventions.

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About AAK

Everything AAK does is about Making Better Happen™. We specialize in plant-based oils that are the value-adding ingredients in many of the products people love to consume. We make these products better tasting, healthier, and more sustainable. At the heart of AAK's offer is Customer Co-Development, combining our desire to understand what better means for each customer, with the unique flexibility of our production assets, and a deep knowledge of many products and industries, including Chocolate & Confectionery, Bakery, Dairy, Plant-based Foods, Special Nutrition, Foodservice and Personal Care. Our 3,900 employees support our close collaboration with customers through 25 regional sales offices, 15 dedicated Customer Innovation Centers, and with the support of more than 20 production facilities. Listed on Nasdaq Stockholm and with our headquarters in Malmö, Sweden, AAK has been Making Better Happen for 150 years.