



## Rural Women Entrepreneurs Enrolment into Sustainable Supply Chain Networks: From Actor Network Theory Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

Rural women entrepreneurs in the West African sub-region are focal actors at the bottom of many commodity supply chains. The positions that they occupy in supply chain are susceptible to many forms of sustainability challenges that can obstruct and discourage them from efficiently participating in global supply chains. Despite the critical role of rural women entrepreneurs in the West African sub-region has been acknowledged by many, yet the majority of them have not been participated in responsible and sustainable supply chains. In view of these issues, multi-stakeholders are required to collaborate and intervene by developing processes of enrolling rural women entrepreneurs into sustainable supply chain networks. This study presents a case study related to an exploration of the enrolment process utilizing the four moments of translation of the Actor Network Theory (ANT) in the context of the shea butter industry with a cross-border supply chain network. The research found that the enrolment process is shaped by the collaborative relationships within the external context which comprises of several influential stakeholders. Sustainability standards are found to have great potential to serve as an obligatory passage point to transmit sustainability principles to the women within and outside the traditional supply chain networks.

**Keywords:** *Rural Women Entrepreneurs, Sustainable Supply Chain, External Stakeholders, Actor Network Theory, Sustainability Standards*

### INTRODUCTION

Researchers posit that stakeholders involved in the supply chain of agricultural commodities in the sub-Saharan Africa needs to respect and practice responsible and sustainable supply chains. This position is predicated upon the growing social, economic and environmental sustainability challenges found in the supply chains of the stakeholders (Schaffnit-Chatterjee et al., 2014; Anderson & Van der van, 2016; Adekunle et al., 2016). The African shea butter industry is one of such industries that is not without the challenges of sustainability. Hence, there is the need for urgent intervention strategies aimed at addressing these challenges especially for actors in the supply chains at the point of commodity supply (Carter & Rogers, 2008; Klassen & Vereecke, 2012). Additionally, it is posited that adoption, transmission and use of sustainability standards is the basis for achieving responsible and sustainable supply chain in a number of organised commodity supply chain networks such as the coffee, cocoa and shea butter (Gulbrandsen, 2008; Manning & Von Hagen, 2010, Elias & Saussey 2013). Nevertheless, the above submissions are not all-encompassing because not every actor or groups of actors who participate in commodity supply chain are actually and properly enrolled into sustainable supply chain networks (Manning & Von Hagen, 2010). More so, even though many researchers are of the opinion that responsible and sustainable supply chain is one of the prerequisites for poverty mitigation, respect