

Mardia's Story: Journey to Becoming 'the' Vision - *Building Sheane Cosmetics*

Hi, my name is Mardia, and this is my story. I'm not usually good at talking about myself, but I'm great at observing and communicating about others. Still, I've learned that sharing your story matters, so here I am.

I'm originally from the northern part of Ghana, but I was born and raised in the south, in Accra. Most of my life has been in the south, though I moved between both regions as a child, staying with my grandmother, my auntie, and my uncle. Those transitions shaped a big part of who I am.

From as early as age 12, I knew myself as a co-breadwinner in the family. My mom has been a single parent, raising me and my siblings alone. There wasn't really anyone else to help, so I did, whether it was helping her sell food, fruits, or working with others in restaurants. I was always there. I was the firstborn. Sometimes that meant going to school late, but I appreciated the process. That foundation shaped my values, my resilience, and my ability to turn something small into something impactful.

Coming from the statistically poorest region in Ghana, where people rely mostly on subsistence farming and bushmeat, I often asked myself, *How are we surrounded by so many resources and yet not turning them into wealth or development?* That question stayed with me.

When I got the opportunity to attend the African Leadership University (ALU), my interest in business and entrepreneurship deepened. Before that, through hard work and perseverance, I was selected for the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) Program to the U.S. in 2018–2019, one of only 20 Ghanaians chosen nationwide. That experience broadened my perspective, especially around career discovery. In Ghana, many students choose careers based on society's expectations, "you're smart, so be a doctor." But where's the room for passion? For curiosity? For self-discovery?

When I returned in 2019, I had to redo my final year of high school in Ghana, even though I had already graduated in the U.S. That frustrating experience pushed me even deeper into youth advocacy, especially around career guidance, environmental activism, and entrepreneurship.

And then something unexpected happened.

In my first year at ALU, I realized that most people in Rwanda had never even heard of shea butter. This shocked me. Shea butter is everywhere in my home region, Damongo. How could people in the U.S. and Europe know more about it than other Africans?



(Mardia Adams, 2024)

That moment sparked **Sheane Cosmetics**

That first summer, I traveled home to northern Ghana, collected shea butter samples, and worked with local women to learn indigenous processing methods. I spent everything I had just to bring the butter back to Rwanda. I came back broke. I mean literally zero funds. But I had food and internet, so I could survive until the next scholarship stipend. Still, I needed money to start. So I borrowed about \$30 from a friend, bought some oils and mixing basins, and whipped the shea butter by hand using forks because I couldn't afford a hand mixer.

– It was a struggle. The texture wasn't perfect, but it worked. I got my first three orders. –

At the time, I had nothing else, no product labels, no packaging designs, just the ingredients. I repurposed an old advocacy Instagram page into a Sheane Cosmetics page and started posting. As soon as my stipend came in, I reinvested into Instagram ads. I kept reinvesting everything, no profit, just building.

Later, I started importing packaging from Kenya. My first import was carried in a friend's luggage. From there, Sheane grew slowly, step by step, order by order. I brought in interns to help, linking my passion for youth mentorship with the business. So far, **24 interns** have worked with Sheane across sales, marketing, research, and advocacy.



We've expanded into social impact too. Sheane has reached **over 700 women and youth** across **22 communities** in Ghana and Rwanda, through sustainability education, vocational skills training, and environmental advocacy. In Rwanda's **Bugesera district**, we ran a program with nearly 100 students. In Ghana, we partnered with youth leaders to pilot programs for over 150 primary school students.

Right now, we're focused on measuring Sheane's **carbon footprint** and raising funds to **scale production** and grow our **social impact arm** supporting climate advocacy, reproductive and mental health education, and public health research. We're also building a research team to strengthen our work and expand our impact.

Sheane Cosmetics has been my **little-big baby**, run by me and other youth leaders since 2021. Every stage has been about learning, building, failing, and growing. And while I'm proud of how far I've come, I know there's still more to do.

This is me, Mardia, and join me in the next issue for more on **BECOMING THE VISION**. And this is the story of how Sheane Cosmetics came to be.

To be continued...

SHEANE COSMETICS

Vision Statement: "Bringing Africa back to its roots, and supporting health conscious cosmetic consumption"

Mission Statement: "To produce 100% natural plant-based products to relieve dry skin, pimples, skin blemish and promote hair growth - using indigenous locally sourced ingredients in Africa."