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Vitellaria paradoxa

[Synonyms : *Butyrospermum paradoxum* subsp. *parkii*, *Butyrospermum parkii*, *Lucuma paradoxa*]

SHEA is tree. Native to tropical northern Africa it has sweet-scented creamy-white flowers. It is also known as Butter tree, Emi, *Karite* (German), *Karité* (French), *Schibutterbaum* (German), Shea butter, and Shea nut.

Paradoxa means ‘unusual or contrary to expectation’.

‘Shea butter’ is not only used for cooking but also for body massage, for soap and candles and for medicine in parts of Africa especially the Sudan. In Sudan the tree and thus the supply of fat could eventually be under threat from two opposing attitudes in the population which are said to be a result of education or religious conversions. On the one hand there are those who wish to fell the trees for fuel and on the other range those who live in superstitious awe of seed-producing trees.

Yet it is striking to note reports that indicate how farmers cultivating sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor*) in some remote areas still allow African locust (*Parkia biglobosa*) and shea trees to grow among their crops even though sorghum yield is likely to be drastically reduced (70% by the former and 50% by the latter) as these trees’ fruit are considered to be far more valuable than the reduction in the harvest.