

RLG Project Report

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| Project Name | RLG FBA Performance Enhancement Project | | |
| Project Goal | To improve the livelihoods of smallholder farmers by ensuring that they receive goods, services and advice in a sustainable manner from private sector extension agents | | |
| Project Purpose | Develop and train 200 Farm Business Advisers (FBAs) in iDE operational areas capable of serving smallholder households | | |
| Type of Report | Monthly Progress Report | | |
| Period | Feb to April, 2012 | Date submitted | 06/05/12 |

Background and Overview:

iDE has been awarded a grant by RLG International and the Rudy & Alice Ramsey Foundation to implement a project develop a sustainable cadre of private sector extension agents, referred to in the project as Farm Business Advisors or FBAs, in iDE Zambia operation areas deriving an income from providing advice, goods and services to smallholder farmers. The project is for a period of 5 years beginning February 2012 to January 2017.

The RLG FBA Performance Enhancement Project commenced on 1st February 2012 and will be accomplished by developing and training 200 FBAs in iDE's existing areas of operations (Copperbelt, Lusaka, Southern and Central provinces) who are capable of serving 16,000 smallholder households representing approximately 96,000 people.

Activities and milestones:

Output 1: Curriculum and training materials developed for FBAs.

In order to develop the curriculum and training materials for FBAS effectively, a training program cycle was drafted to follow a logical building process.

1.1 Training needs analysis for FBAs

The following have been done in the analysis stage:

a. Assessing Competence and Potential of FBAs

The 200 FBAs intended to participate in the training program have been identified and their ability based on the FBA appointment criteria and potential of irrigated agriculture in their respective catchment areas. Several meetings have been held between FBAs and iDE field staff in their respective areas to detail their roles and responsibilities and signed up Memorandum Of Understanding.

b. Identifying Skills Gaps (FBAs and iDE Field Staff)

A quick review with the help of iDE field staff was done to assess extension and mobilization skills of some FBAs during the annual planning meeting. This process revealed broadly FBA capacity areas needing enhancing being extension, input supply, market facilitation and credit linkage support services.

A Training Needs Assessment for FBAs has been conducted using a tool designed to assess FBA entrepreneurial, business management and marketing skills. The self-assessment tool was administered to 60 FBAs, representing a 30% sample of the targeted participating FBAs. The previous meetings with FBAs and the signing of MOUs facilitated well for FBAs quickly identifying their strengths and weaknesses. It is envisaged the analysis of the questionnaires will provide an affirmative indication of FBA priority capacity areas needing enhancement and will guide the curriculum, training material development and method of training delivery.

To ensure effective training delivery, a training of trainers (ToT) particularly in facilitation skills has been incorporated in the training cycle. iDE field staff will normally provide training to FBAs and will therefore be the focus for the ToT curriculum. An electronic based TNA in training delivery and facilitation skills for iDE staff has been designed and about to be administered in tandem with the analysis of FBA training needs.

Next scheduled activities

Programming - Developing Training to Project Purpose/objectives

Complete Output 1:

- Review and synthesize existing relevant training curricula and materials (iDE and other sources - including existing training materials and practice in other iDE country programs)
- Develop FBA training materials
- Review and refine training curriculum and materials - incorporating comments from other iDE Africa country programs
- Produce and print FBA training materials
- Develop training methodology and training manual; Training session planning and facilitation

Accomplishments:

- Commenced implementation of the RLG FBA Performance Enhancement project
- Developed training program cycle
- Identified and sensitized FBAs to participate in the training program
- Assessed competence and potential of FBAs in providing advice, goods and services to smallholder farmers
- Conducted a training needs assessment for FBAs to assess FBA entrepreneurial, business management and marketing skills to aid development of curriculum, training materials and training delivery method
- Drafted a electronic TNA in training delivery/facilitation for iDE field staff
- Initial review carried out of existing training materials

Challenges and New Directions:

Despite advertising the position of Training Coordinator nationally, to date iDE has been unable to fill this post. Although a good candidate was identified through an interview process he turned down the offer for another job. The selection team considered that the next rated candidate was not of sufficient calibre to undertake this role. Given the importance of the project and to avoid any delay in project implementation, Kenneth Chelemu, the iDE Technical/Director of Programs is undertaking the lead role in this project in an interim basis until such a time when a suitable candidate is identified. He is being supported in this by the iDE Country Director and the Rural Marketing and Supply Chains Coordinator. iDE is continuing to try to identify a suitable candidate for the post and discussions have been held with the organisation Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) about an international volunteer filling this role.

Lessons learned:

It is clear that amongst the field staff there is a differing perception as to the role that FBAs can and should play in farmer interaction with some staff being slower than others in bringing FBAs to the fore to take up their positions and start providing advice, goods and services to smallholder farmers. iDE staff need to reduce their direct interaction with smallholder farmers to accelerate maturity of the concept supported by the RLG FBA Performance Enhancement Project.

Other important management information:

Given the importance of having professional training input into this process, contributing a substantive role in developing and delivering training courses in the agricultural or natural resources sector of the incumbent training coordinator, an understanding has been reached with a Zambian organization In-service Training Trust (ISTT) to support Mr Chelemu. ISTT, an offshoot of the natural Resources Development College (NRDC) in Lusaka is the lead Zambian organisation dealing in training and training of trainers in the natural resources sector and has extensive experience in in-service training in various fields to provide professional support at every stage of training program development.