RUFORUM Alumni Impact: Entrepreneurial Agricultural Graduate Linking to Smallholder farmers

In January 2015, Titus Kisauzi graduated with a Master’s degree in Agricultural Extension Education (MSc. AEE) from Makerere University. His MSc training was funded through a RUFOURM Graduate Research Grant. The Project “Understanding the Gender dimensions of the impact of climate change on agriculture and adaptation among small holder farmers in Uganda.” Towards completion of the training program, he had been contracted as a National Agricultural Advisory Service (NAADS) Coordinator for Busukuma Sub-County in Uganda.

However, the contract was short-lived due to the government extension reforms in 2014 that led to the creation of the single-spine structure of extension services, hence the removal of all NAADS coordinators. This setback however presented an opportunity for exploring Entrepreneurial Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services to complement public extension.

In March 2014, Titus set up and registered AgroBasics (U) Ltd as a result of the need for innovative ways to solving the multifaceted challenges of farming communities that often limit the viability and commercialization of small-scale agriculture. Entrepreneurial extension services have become important due to low funding for extension, high unemployment of graduates and the inherent challenges of public service delivery related to poor accountability and slow response. In addition, the increasing commercialization of agriculture demands more services yet public extension has limited reach, and scope with regard to services such as input supply, market support and processing.

The need to treat farming as an economic venture affirms Titus Company’s mission to strike a balance between profit maximization and social impact so as to stay relevant to the needs of majority of smallholder farmers. The company aspires to be the leading private provider of innovative agribusiness support services in Africa by providing reliable comprehensive agribusiness support services collaboratively in a business mode.
The company offers a wide range of services including strategic business planning and management/leadership; farm start-up/turn-key projects; facilitation of linkages to input/produce markets and agricultural finance; facilitation of farmer organization and institutional development; agricultural land brokerage; and extension, training, research & consultancy.

To-date his company has set up an Agribusiness Development & Excellence Centre (ADEC) in Busukuma Sub-County, Wakiso district in Central Uganda, to engage surrounding communities in market-led agriculture. The information from a preliminary needs assessment is being used to assess the market potential of identified enterprises and the state of agri-markets to inform discussions on development of various innovation platforms.

His sustainability strategies for the company include setting up agribusinesses to showcase their viability especially of mushroom and poultry enterprises. Various collaborations are also being pursued for support in technology promotion, input supply, and value-chain development. Passion fruit and banana demonstrations are in their final stages of establishment.

Overall, small holder farmers have shown strong demand for providers of services especially market and credit access on a long-term basis. However, the expectation for free inputs is still high, requiring more sensitisation on farming as a business. The segment of clients who readily have the resources (from well-paying employment) to invest in agriculture offers good prospects for entrepreneurial services. Nonetheless, funding of entrepreneurial extension and advisory services, especially start-ups, is a major challenge since the concept is still new as well as access to agricultural finance, given the risks around agriculture ventures.

Efforts are underway to explore unconventional means of funding such as crowd-funding and investment groups. He is aware that it is critical to incorporate agricultural insurance and risk management in agriculture ventures so as to make them more attractive to funders.