

AGRA Impact Series




Women in agribusiness benefit from ARISE Program's mentorship to identify growth areas

January 2021

Meet Mercy Chatyoka, a co-founder and technical director of Pik It Fresh Farms Zimbabwe, an organization in the horticulture space. Like other businesses, her firm was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chatyoka participated in a training organized by the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA). The training under the banner of African Resilience and Investment Series for Women Executives (ARISE) Program is a continental COVID 19 response program implemented by RENEW LLC and seeks to offer a helping hand to women agribusinesses recovering from the impact of the pandemic.

Globally, the pandemic disrupted the value chains, something that was felt by Chatyoka. She notes if the knowledge gained from ARISE had been available earlier, her organization could have circumvented the pandemic's effects. According to the director, there was a need for remaining resilient strategically as it offers room for identifying the risks and how to mitigate them early on.



Coupled with the effects of the pandemic, her agribusiness suffered an array of challenges, with access to finance emerging as the main barrier. She cites a lack of knowledge on applying for grants and pursuing the right investors for her venture. However, the ARISE program guided her on how to run the business strategically.

ARISE offered several practical skills business owners can implement in their agribusiness ventures as part of the training. Chatyoka implemented the standard operating procedures (SOPs) entrenched in her organization's operations. Previously, she had an issue in managing the cash flow, and from the ARISE program she implemented the 13-week cash flow that guided clear tracking of payments.

"Finance area on 13-week cash flow. We never really knew anything about these things, and I am appreciative of it. In the old days, customers paid their dues anytime within the month, but now I follow up the payments knowing that if they don't pay on time, it will mess up my cash flow," said Chatyoka.

She gained the knowledge as part of the general objectives of the ARISE program that intended to build the capacity for women Agribusinesses for recovery and resilience from tough times. The program seeks to equip women in agribusiness with resilience to sustain shocks that come with aspects like the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I make sure that my team do not miss anything in production and if they do, I emphasize that they must follow SOPs to get things done correctly. I mention the consequences that they will face if we don't implement our SOPs and do things on time, though sometimes they are a bit resistant", she says.

Although Chatyoka is now best placed to understand how to manage her business, she still hopes to acquire more skills to pitch. For her, individual coaching will increase the chances of her pitches attracting the right partners. In

this line, the ARISE program also intended to offer networking opportunities with peers and emotional support for participants. This aspect ensures that trainees can still reach out to colleagues after the program, even in the absence of ARISE.

"I learnt that I had to be strategically and operationally involved in my business. Prior to ARISE, I didn't know which one was strategic and operational leadership. I didn't know how I could not be involved in day-to-day activities of my business and work on the business more", she says.

With a focus on helping business owners identify improvement areas in agribusinesses, Chatyoka notes that the ARISE program helped her prepare for indemnity better. The program has a section on investment preparation training that helped her bridge the gap between her business and the investor money.

"I learned to track the investment engagements I make and use of the daily tracking calendar. We used to harvest over ripe products since we didn't use the calendars. So, with the daily calendar, we now keep track of all the crop procedures within the farm", says Chatyoka.

She also learned about the checklists for ensuring that her pitches have a higher chance of becoming a success. She now appreciates that through the program, she can understand the criteria of applying for grants. Chatyoka admits that previously, the lack of knowledge in applying for grants saw her lose out on some investments.

It is general knowledge that there are a few support structures for women in business to survive extreme economic shocks like the pandemic. For instance, Chatyoka notes that if women had institutional support, managing such economic shocks would have been much easier. She recommends programs like ARISE to all women in business to run sustainable businesses in all conditions.