

AGRA Impact Series



Supporting women to streamline agribusiness operations through ARISE Program

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Ebun Feludu from Nigeria is one of the beneficiaries of the African Resilience and Investment Series for Women Executives (ARISE) program aimed at supporting women smoothly recover from the impact of COVID-19 pandemic.

The new initiative unveiled by the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) together with its partner RENEW LLC targets agribusinesses registered within the sub-Saharan region.

Women who participated in the program were selected based on factors such as having a business with an annual turnover of \$5,000 and above for either 2018, 2019, or 2020. The

women had also showcased the urge to grow their businesses.

In the course of the ongoing pandemic, agribusiness under women's leadership needed technical support as part of the recovery path. To achieve this mandate, the ARISE program offered business planning support, investment seminars, business leadership skills, pitch



coaching, emotional support and networking.

Ebun notes that following the training, several aspects of her business have improved. One undoing that she feels derailed her business is lack of delegation. Following the input of ARISE, she has realized the importance of hiring the right people in various positions. One of the key takeaways from the program is helping her business have a structure with a clear definition of multiple roles.

“I was falling short since some aspects of my business needed improvement. I felt like every department needed restructuring including HR. I have been wearing too many hats and it is time to start removing those hats and assign/hire for those roles. The program guided me on how to create an organogram, identify key performance indicators (KPIs) and standard operating procedures (SOPs) in addition to assigning roles for the different positions within the organization”, says Ebun.

Ebun has benefitted from three ARISE programs, including accelerated women executives’ training, peer to peer support session, investment preparation training and pitch coaching sessions.

Sourcing of funds remains one of her top priorities, and the pitch training has been beneficial. Initially, she had fears in handling some aspects of the business. However, the training has offered confidence to market the business to the world.

Despite undergoing the training, there are some barriers stopping her from implementing what she learned. For instance, she needs an extensive staff to help execute multiple aspects of the business. Worth noting is that she discovered the need to digitize her business, and how to go about it remains a challenge.

“I have a lot of information and I need a small execution army since I have everything in my mind. One of the things that struck me was digitalization. How can I digitize this business? how can I be the Uber? how can I reach millions? or how can I integrate everything into a brick and mortar business? I have the vision, but I need people to execute this vision”, posed Ebun.

Ebun is, however, banking on the network of peers gained from the training to guide her navigate the obstacle. It is critical to highlight that the need for business digitization emerged amid the pandemic, with most entities shifting their operations to online platforms.

Another barrier according to Ebun is that most businesses are not developing quality products from the beginning of the value chain. Ebun believes in quality products/brands that gets customers committed. She notes, at the end of the value chain is distribution and most businesses can’t distribute their products in a way that they can scale. A lot of women don’t have access to pitching to major retailers and wholesalers and that is the life and death of a business sometimes.

She also appreciates that the ARISE program allowed her to widen her horizon and understand what she could achieve. Ebun now has ideas that can take her business to the global scene while identifying the type of markets she could reach.

To ensure she sticks to the lessons learned from the training, Ebun is now searching for an accountability partner who can point her in the right direction and offer her support when things don’t go right. She now feels more resilient, especially after learning the importance of building a system for a business and according to her, the business now has direction.

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted many businesses globally, and for future survival, entities need to overcome barriers that come with such a significant economic slowdown. Ebun states that most women are faced with the challenge of understanding the entire value chain. For example, she believes that business owners do not have the skills to pitch their products to major retailers, which means they might miss out on potential markets that can lead to the collapse of the business.