Business Development Services (BDS)

“[BDS] has been absolutely invaluable. You wouldn't believe how much [they have] changed the business. Our business is about systems: checking, and double checking. [They] have built systems now that anyone in the business can use.”

-- Avian Ventures sells day old chicks and quality chicken feed in Zambia. BDS worked with them to help reduce the amount of money lost by poor stock and quality control.

Mission

Business Development Services aligns enterprises, impact investors, and business consultants to drive sustainable change across Africa, believing that through the growth of socially conscious businesses, impact on small-holder farmers and front line employees can be both substantial and sustainable. By providing professional business development and capacity building services, BDS enables enterprises to scale up and improve their operations, ultimately preparing them for investment.

Why Business Development Services?

Across Africa, incredibly talented, motivated people have great ideas for social enterprises that not only make money, but provides social benefit to the world. These are social enterprises: businesses that embed in their models a way to earn revenue that is complementary to social or environmental returns.

Universally, social enterprises largely lack the support required to grow. The environment around them makes it challenging to secure funding, and they struggle with founders syndrome and under developed processes. The businesses BDS works with across Africa often face the additional struggle of hiring talented staff who are committed to a field job, often in rural areas.
In the last decade, there has been an increased interest in supporting social enterprises, but the focus of this growth has primarily been in providing finances. BDS complements this financial support by curating an ecosystem around which a social enterprise can grow.

Business Development Services also believes that there is a fundamental problem in the way that business is run - aiming for shareholder returns over returns for society as a whole. This has been the predominant paradigm for business since the Industrial Revolution, and BDS seeks to change it. The team believes that it is possible to see a paradigm shift towards understanding business as a tool to create large-scale social transformation.

The Approach

In their support of small and growing social enterprises, Business Development Services provides a variety of technical, human resource, and strategic support. Services are offered both to small and medium-sized businesses, and to pre-investment businesses. For the latter, this investment enables them to be ready for initial investment from impact investors.

Through their work, they have been able to identify some of the key challenged faced by social enterprises at these levels, and have developed specific services to address them, including:

- **Pre and Post-Investment Business Development.** Due diligence, financial analysis and projections, business model analysis, organizational analysis, product development, business modelling, and expansion strategy. All with objective, third-party feedback.
- **Management Capacity Development.** On-the-job training and coaching.
- **Market Research.** Assisting a business to understand farmer or customer needs, improving decision-making through market intelligence.

The key to understanding what BDS does is understanding how they do it. Four tenets of approach guide all of their work.

- **Long Term Professional Advice.** Experienced professionals embed in businesses for a year, giving them the greatest ability to understand the company, identify root problems, and have the time needed to implement, test, and adjust on solutions needed for success.
- **Reports Aren’t Deliverables.** Work doesn’t finish with a report of recommendations - they are put into action and evaluated in real time.
- **Ensuring Sustainability.** It is pivotal that businesses continue to thrive independently of the work of BDS staff, and so they work to ensure that the business has sufficient management and technical capacity to continue the work started.
- **Providing Functional Expertise.** A network of over 50,000 members is regularly drawn upon for resources and expertise - developing businesses with a full team, not just one consultant.

**Partners**

- Lundin Foundation
- CIDA
- Injaro
- AgBIT
- CClear
- Dunavant
- Schools Club of Zambia
- Taimako
- EcoHomes
- Asset Link
- National Housing Authority of Liberia
- UniBRAIN
- Forest Fruits, Zambia
- MRI AGRO Limited
- Musika, Zambia
- ASNAPP (Agribusiness in Sustainable Natural African Plant Products)
- BioCarbon Partners
- Imani Developments