



IMPROVING ACCESS TO CERTIFICATION SERVICES

Supporting Rwanda agriculture exporters
to meet international markets' standards.

THE MARKET CONSTRAINTS

Rwandan horticulture exports are aggregated locally by a network of over 40 exporters and channeled through wholesale importers, with 80% sold in Europe (mostly to the Netherlands, Belgium, and France), 19% to the Middle East, and 1% to other countries. These exports represent a bulk volume, low margin business (about \$0.2 - 0.4/Kg). While retail markets would provide higher margins and opportunities for Rwandan horticulture exporters, very few are able to comply with the international standards required to access these markets. In order for Rwandan companies to sell into these higher value markets, they need to meet certifications such as Global G.A.P., Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP), British Retail Consortium Global Standards (BRCGS), and ISO 22000 among others. As the capacity of Rwanda's exporters to aggregate stable, larger volumes of high quality fresh produce increases, the business case for obtaining certification gains more traction. However, the very limited domestic expertise makes the certification process costly and inaccessible to many horticulture exporters but also cooperatives and farmers.

THE SOLUTION

IMSAR partnered with Control Union, a globally renowned testing and compliance company, to establish a cadre of independent national consultants that could assist exporters with pre-audit and audit services. By accessing pre-audit services delivered locally by national consultants, exporters are improving their capacity to comply with the audit required to obtain certifications. The availability of local consultants also reduces the cost associated with international consultants, making the certification process more accessible and affordable. Through IMSAR support, Control Union implemented the following:

- Conducted a needs assessment to help prioritise which standards to focus on. Inputs were gathered from 30 agriculture exporters, NAEB and other development partners, leading to the prioritisation of Global G.A.P, HACCP, and Organic Certification; Through an open call process 16 persons (14 men and 2 women) were identified and trained to become pre-audit certification consultants. Participants received a 10 days in-persons training and additional coaching over 12 months;
- Full and partial sponsorships were provided to the participants to incentivise participation and ensure inclusiveness;
- Provided First-come discounts (20%) for exporters to receive audit services;
- Invested in promotion and marketing of their certification services to agriculture exporters;

THE RESULTS

- Upon the training received from Control Union, the consultants have established a company called “Bridge to Rise”, providing pre-audit services for Global G.A.P, HACCP, Organic Certification, as well as for additional certifications that Control Union covered during the coaching, such as S-Mark, UTZ, Fair Trade and Coffee and Farmer Equity (C.A.F.E.) Practices.
- Up to March 2022, Bridge to Rise has provided pre-audit consultancy services to nine companies and has a pipeline of six more clients. Amongst the nine companies that received pre-audit services from Bridge to Rise, three were then audited by Control Union and obtained the certification they were seeking. In addition, Control Union has also provided certification services to four more companies
- Upon obtaining the respective certifications, all companies have secured higher prices for their produce, and some have already identified new clients.
- Control Union has recorded over RWF 50 million in sales of certification services, which they attribute to the marketing activities conducted during the intervention, and the ability of deploying Bridge to Rise consultants;

“My company was selling avocados at the local market for RWF 50/Piece; since we obtained the Global G.A.P. certification we are now selling to an exporter at RWF 100/Piece. The company has since grown – we hired 12 additional workers (of which 10 are women) and 2 full-time employees. I am happy I have a sure market and plan to start exporting myself in the near future.”

Gloriose Uwamezi, owner of Gloriose farm.

“Our company exports dried chilies to a buyer who recommended that we obtain the Organic certification. In June 2021, NAEB linked us with Control Union to audit us. We got the certificate towards the end of last year, and we are about to sell our first batch of organic certified chilies. The price will increase by USD 0.8 per kilo. Since we obtained the certification, we have hired 40 additional workers (of which 20 are women) and 10 full-time staff (five women). We are now working to get the Global G.A.P. certification too, to export fresh produce”

Paul Imulia, Managing Director, Got it

- Control Union has selected two consultants from Bridge to Rise and are providing them with the coaching necessary to become auditors and will pay for their accreditation; this is to respond to the higher demand for their service.
- Outside of the scope of the intervention, Control Union paid the training on the BRC certification for one consultant, since the demand for this certification is expected to increase in Rwanda and in the region in order to access the retail market in the UK and across Europe. Beyond the NAEB packhouse, at least two more exporters intend to have their packhouse BRC certified.

"Since we started the capacity building intervention with IMSAR support, Control Union visibility has increased in the Rwandan certification market. We got a lot of new business from the marketing events we organised, and we are still gaining more clients. From that experience, we will organise other events to make our services known by a larger number of potential clients."

The consultants from Bridge to Rise are also contributing to the promotion of Control Union. Currently we have two members of Bridge to Rise who are undertaking more in-depth training and are already involved in audits, the company expects a lot from them. Moreover, we are expanding our business using the same business model in other countries. We are so grateful for the partnership with IMSAR and we hope that the impact will keep increasing."

Eric Matabaro, Country Representative, Control Union

KEY LEARNING

There is a strong shift in attitude from exporters in Rwanda, increasing the demand for certification services. Exporters are now more aware of the benefits deriving from certifications and are willing to pay for such services, which through Control Union and Bridge to Rise are now more accessible.

Promotion and marketing remain key for driving demand. Demand for certification services continues to build as Bridge to Rise promote their services directly to companies. Marketing events and promotion materials featuring clients' testimonials will be critical to continue to build awareness and increase the demand for certification services. The discounts appear also effective; in the future companies could be offered discounts against a bundle of services (e.g. combined pre-audit/audit support);

There is much potential to further increase the number and type of certifications available. Control Union and Bridge to Rise have already expanded their offer to include more certifications than those originally prioritised. While Global G.A.P. is still the main certification demanded, additional certifications and standards including social standards such as Global G.A.P. Risk Assessment on Social Practice (GRASP), Sedex Members Ethical Trade Audit (SMETA), Fair Trade and other specific standards for coffee such as Rainforest Alliance have high potential. Continuous dialogue with NAEB and exporters will help informing Control Union on new standards to be brought into its repertoire in Rwanda and to assess the need for training more consultants.

The certification service industry shows a strong gender gap. Despite Control Union's efforts to market and recruit for the training inclusively, only 2 of the 16 consultants trained are women. This is a consequence of the lower numbers of women studying agronomy and food sciences at university level, which are necessary pre-requisite qualifications. Market actors have a role to play in bridging this gap, providing opportunities for girls and women to advance in the sector.

funded by:



implemented by:



in partnership with:



www.thepalladiumgroup.com

follow us on 