

# Farm Business Advisors

**No Handouts. No aid.  
A simple, but sophisticated  
approach to tackling  
rural poverty**





# RLG & iDE: Development of a Farm Business Advisor Network in Zambia

**Zambian Context:** In Zambia, agriculture employs 60 percent of the population but represents less than one fifth of national GDP. Smallholders account for 85 percent of households employed in agriculture and typically cultivate fewer than five hectares of land earning an average of \$92 per person annually. While the challenges to reducing this persistent poverty are complex, a low agricultural productivity is a universally acknowledged driver. Constraints to improving productivity include low-quality, inaccessible or expensive inputs restricting accessibility, and thus productivity, for all but the wealthiest farmers. Similarly, lack of knowledge about effective farming techniques among smallholders reduces yields, deters private sector interest in working with them, constrains smallholder bargaining power, and reduces food security.



In response iDE Zambia has been working in partnership with RLG International to implement the **FBA Performance Improvement Project** which aims to develop and train a sustainable cadre of 250 private sector extension agents, or Farm Business Advisors (FBAs) in iDE's existing areas of operations (Copperbelt, Lusaka, Southern and Central provinces). The model, adapted and refined from the award winning Cambodian FBA model, involves FBAs being paid on a commission basis by private sector retailers, suppliers and micro-finance organisations to generate the demand for and facilitate the sale of a range of appropriate inputs such as chemicals, fertiliser, seeds, micro-irrigation technologies (MITs) and services including credit access. They also provide sales advice and support to ensure farmers get the best product for their particular situation and specific agricultural and business advice embedded in the cost of the product.

**The outcome? Profitable businesses are created for individual advisors hand in hand with lower cost and more sustainable services for small farmers leading to improving rural farmers' productivity and livelihoods.**

It is clear that to be effective FBAs must be recruited from within the communities which they are serving. They must be well organised, business orientated have the skills necessary to serve farmers in their communities. In 2012 with RLG's support iDE will be carrying out significant capacity building of FBAs in order that they can effectively fulfil this role and be capable of serving 16,000 smallholder households representing approximately 96,000 people by the end of 2014. iDE is also working to negotiate deals with private sector retailers, suppliers and micro-finance institutions (MFIs) to increase the commission based revenue streams available to FBAs thereby increasing their long term buy in and the provision of the last mile, supply chain extension and outreach services for smallholders.

## Fabian Amili - Farm Business Advisor

A recent iDE management trip to the Copperbelt highlighted some of the amazing work that FBAs are already doing, as well the challenges they face and capacity building areas that need strengthening. Fabian Amili, (picture right) 47, an FBA from Chiwara Village, Masaiti District has helped over 50 farmers access and buy treadle pumps, over 25 access motorised pumps and provided embedded horticultural and farm business advise. His services have been critical in raising agricultural productivity in his village. iDE has just signed an MOU with REA Enterprises, a MIT retailer in Ndola to ensure Fabian is financially rewarded for these services.

