

2025 ANNUAL LEARNING EVENT REPORT



SHAPING THE BDS ECOSYSTEM
What we learnt in the last year?



Two Days

Local Experts

Global Impact



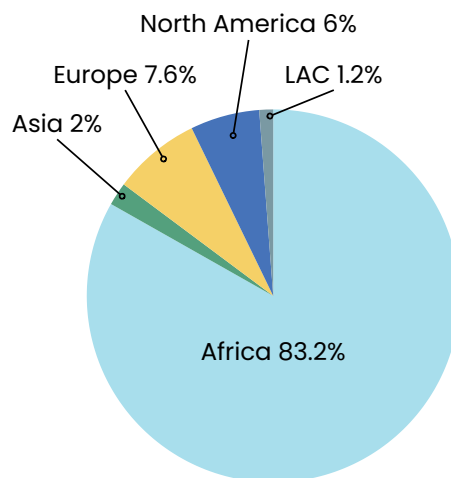
www.amea-global.com/ale25



AMEA's strategy focuses on transforming systems that support farmer organizations and agri-SMEs and we do this by supporting collective learning, innovation, and scaling up approaches.

The 2025 Annual Learning Event focused on Business Development Services (BDS) market systems transformation, featuring presentations from government officials, BDS providers, donors, and technical experts. The event emphasized the critical need for systemic approaches to improve BDS quality and coordination across Africa, with particular attention to accreditation frameworks, government regulation, and innovative service delivery models.

257 Event Registrants



Regional Breakdown for Annual Learning Event 2025

"We need to focus on the effectiveness of BDS to transform food systems, deliver inclusive growth and achieve sustainable outcomes."

Mark Blackett
AMEA Network Director

"We cannot afford to continue operating without proper governance mechanisms. The time for action is now."

Edmond Ringo,
Matchmakers Associates

DAY 1

OPENING SESSION

National BDS Accreditation Frameworks

Harrison Kaziro opened up the discussion by presenting National BDS Accreditation Frameworks as being essential for improving BDS service quality. He outlined the fragmented nature of current BDS delivery and proposed a systematic approach to standardizing and coordinating services. A tiered BDS certification system backed by sustainable financing was proposed. This system should be developed in phases based on the available resources and capacity.



Harrison Kaziro
Uganda Local Network Facilitator
AMEA

"If we want to have a system, then we have to bring everyone on board."

Harrison Kaziro,
AMEA Uganda



Access Opening Session Replay & Slides

www.amea-global.com/ale25-dlos-national-bds-accreditation-frameworks/

DAY 1 | TOPIC 1

Government Led BDS Quality Assurance

The vital role of Government was highlighted and this led on to a session examining Uganda and Tanzania's work on BDS certification. This work is anchored in key Ministries, backed by research which confirms the weaknesses of BDS markets. The Governments' response includes the development of **BDS Strategic Frameworks, BDS Guidelines** and **draft Certification systems**.



Harrison Kaziro
Uganda Local Network Facilitator
AMEA



Johnson Abigaba
Assistant Commissioner
Ministry of Trade, Industry & Coops



Siraji Nalikame
Manager Bus. Dev. & Facilitation
Prime Minister's Office NEEC

"Most of these [BDS] services in Tanzania were related to training... the diversification of the services is critically low."



Siraji Nalikame
Manager Bus. Dev. & Facilitation, NEEC



Session Resources

www.amea-global.com/ale25-dlt1-government-led-bds-quality-assurance/

DAY 1 | TOPIC 2

Beyond Regulation Sustainable BDSP Associations

It is clear that **Government plays a critical enabling role** where they can jumpstart processes, but BDS markets cannot be solved by Government alone.

The next session examined **Beyond Regulation: BDS Associations**. The mismatch between SME demand and BDS supply were highlighted and that poor governance of the BDS market results in a lack of credibility, especially in the Agriculture sector. Emerging initiatives in West Africa were presented as sources for inspiration, such as Impact Investing ESO initiatives in Ghana and Nigeria, which are using the SCALE approach to improve quality. The session concluded with the proposition of a **demand driven three-pillar approach** which expands the pool of high quality BDS providers:

1. **Professional organizations** with self-governance and peer review
2. **Certification systems** building from EAC and Uganda standards: NWIP BDS Internal Capacity and NWIP BDS Service Delivery.
3. **Tiered categorization** with higher-tier providers mentoring lower-tier ones



Edmond Ringo
Managing Partner
Match Maker
Associates Limited



Olufunmi Adepoju
Chief Investment Officer
PearlBridge
Capital Managers

"Imagine if you need heart surgery, but there is no way to know if your surgeon was qualified. That's exactly what the situation facing millions of agribusinesses across Africa when they seek BDS services."

Edmond Joseph Ringo,
Matchmakers Associates



Session Resources

www.amea-global.com/ale25-dlt2-beyond-regulation-sustainable-bdsp-associations

DAY 1 | TOPIC 3

Local Market BDS Development

The next session considered Local BDS Market Development. It is clear we share the same problem analysis and to some extent we know what we need to do. We should therefore have a shared vision for a mature BDS market and shorter-term investment priorities that move the local BDS market in this direction.



Hayden Aldredge
Strategy & Finance for Global Mkts
ISF Advisors



Hedwig Siewertsen
Head Inclusive Finance
AGRA

Vision for a Mature BDS Market:

1. Market-driven demand with clear return on investment (ROI) for agribusinesses
2. Interoperable shared data infrastructure
3. Coordinated, specialized service delivery
4. Government coordination and buy-in
5. Sustainable funding models with financial sector participation

"The tension between delivering on the ground results, showing companies that have improved their performance needs to be balanced with the longer term development of bankability metrics, accreditation systems, etc."

Hedwig Siewertsen
Head Inclusive Finance, AGRA

It is therefore important that organizations that approve new projects incentivize BDS to deliver quality as well as scale; and that projects contribute to system development. AGRA shared a useful list of DO's and DON'Ts that they use to guide investments. This included developing capacity of local BDS providers and using segmented databases to enable matching of SME demand and BDS supply.



Session Resources

www.amea-global.com/ale25-d1t3-local-market-bds-development/

DAY 1 | TOPIC 4

Developing Service Coalitions

IDH demo-ed their Innovation Platform on each day, with a focus on **Developing Service Coalitions** and **Gender Business Model Transformation**. In terms of Service Coalitions the benefits were clear, especially where there is complementarity and synergy, however the development of a coalition takes time and upfront investment is needed (Donors take note!). This development phase must ensure the right partners are selected and this process is often under-estimated, with stumbling blocks often being around data sharing and other intellectual property issues.



Kafui Adjogatse
Senior Innovation Manager
IDH

The Innovation Library... creates a platform where users are able to navigate to certain innovations based on their objectives.

Kafui Adjogatse
Senior Innovation Manager, IDH



Session Resources

www.amea-global.com/ale25-d1t4-developing-service-coalitions/

DAY 2

OPENING SESSION

The Business Case For Data Systems

Day 2 started where Day 1 left off by urging participants to move from a project mindset to **systems building through strategic data sharing**. The example of a 7 year project to support Nigerian input suppliers was provided where initial skepticism was overcome through:

- Building relationships through development of a shared vision
- Building in incentives where added value to each participant was clear
- Providing technology to enable participants to easily share data
- Guaranteeing confidentiality through Non-Disclosure Agreements and transparent data usage protocols

The result was a sustainable data sharing platform which the private sector co-invested \$100,000 to maintain.



Beverley Hatcher-Mbu

Director of Policy

Development Gateway: An IREX Venture

"Many implementers and even private sector actors are hesitant to share data with each other, and especially with government, because we fear what it might reveal."



"Sharing data doesn't mean losing competitive advantage. It means creating the conditions for smarter investment, better targeting, and new partnerships."

Beverley Hatcher-Mbu

Director of Policy, Development Gateway
An IREX Venture



Session Resources

www.amea-global.com/ale25-d2os-the-business-case-for-data-systems

DAY 2 | TOPIC 1

Segmenting and Tailoring BDS for the SME market

Data is also valuable for Segmenting and Tailoring BDS for the SME market. The Agri-SME Learning Collective (ASLC) has proposed moving beyond use of traditional business size/stage criteria to include:

- 1. Legal Form:** Private enterprises, social enterprises, cooperatives, unregistered organizations
- 2. Value Chain Position:** Within value chain vs. serving value chain
- 3. Management Capacity Levels:** Basic, Proficient, Advanced

ASLC then propose a rough categorization of BDS that is suitable for different SME segments. [The full paper can be found here.](#) It was then interesting to contrast this approach with a large-scale approach to segmentation by ATI Ethiopia which is shown in the graphic below.



Mathilde Bauwin

Head of Knowledge Management
Appui au Développement Autonome



Solomon Legesse

Team Lead Agrihub
ATI Ethiopia

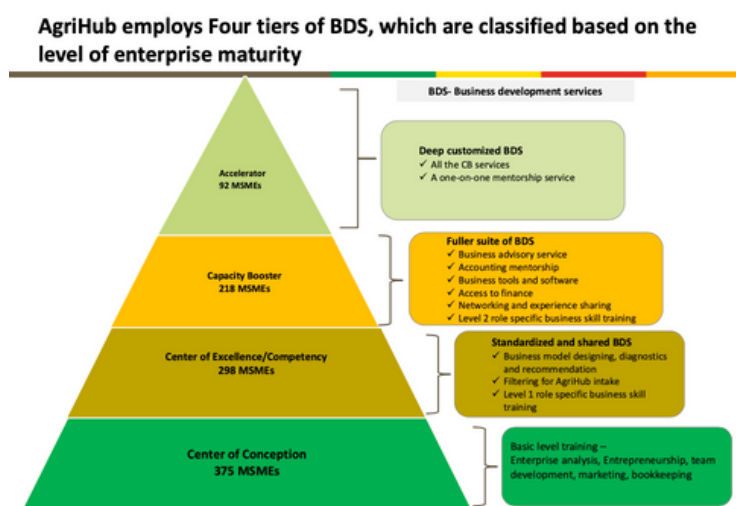
"A startup can already have an advanced level of management capacities. On the contrary, a cooperative existing for more than 10 years can still have a basic level of management capacities."



Mathilde Bauwin

ADA/SSNUP and BDS/TA Working Group
Co-Lead for the ASLC

ATI Ethiopia started with a 3 tier model but added the Centre of Conception as many SMEs were at a start-up phase. There were a small number of SMEs at accelerator level however it was difficult to find the right quality services for this tier. This approach will now be tested further in Ethiopia's Agriculture Commodity Cluster Phase 2 program.



Session Resources

www.amea-global.com/ale25-d2t1-segmenting-and-tailoring-bds-for-the-sme-market/

DAY 2 | TOPIC 2

Scaling Agri-BDS in the Ethiopian Barley Value Chain

We continued the Ethiopian theme as we launched the IFC-Soufflet Ethiopia Case Study, which documents the latest phase in IFC's decade long support to the barley value chain. IFC's Agribusiness Leadership Program was highly valued but it was the whole package of support that enabled the SMEs to rapidly grow their business.

This package, which included agronomy support and input/output financing, delivered \$27 of additional turnover for every \$1 invested. Coaching was especially valued and the next phase will use segmentation to ensure training and coaching is more tailored to specific SME needs. Interestingly SMEs clearly indicated their willingness to pay for BDS. IFC also needs to invest further in its' gender strategy and data collection processes in Phase 2.



Selamawit Tumebo
Operations Officer
IFC
International Finance Corporation



Guillermo Gonzalez
Senior Learning Manager
AMEA

"For Ethiopia, malt barley development... where the government is claiming 100% import substitution, it took almost 10 years."

Selamawit Tumebo
IFC Ethiopia



Session Resources

www.amea-global.com/ale25-d2t2-scaling-agri-bds-in-the-ethiopian-barley-value-chain/

DAY 2 | TOPIC 3

Digital/blended service delivery – is it delivering more for less?

IFC and ATI had both experimented with blended approaches which was necessary due to the COVID-19 restrictions. So we now asked: **Does Digital Deliver More for Less?** Africa Turnaround, African Management Institute and L-IFT presented different aspects to this question. We learnt about an **"Uber for BDS" Model: Concept** for certified BDS providers to build on and use existing content (rather than reinventing the wheel).



Naomi Kirungu
Lead Partnerships – SME
AMI
African Management Institute



Peter I. Nduati
Founder & CEO
Africa Turnaround Ltd.



Anne Marie Van Swinderen
Founder and Managing Director
L-IFT

"The outcomes we deliver for \$1,000 support to an Ag SME would be very different from one of \$10."

Naomi Kirungu
African Management Institute (AMI)



"How much are we losing in terms of time, money, and impact by each BDS provider having to try to build their own courses and delivery systems from scratch?"

Peter I. Nduati
Africa Turnaround Ltd.



L-IFT then presented their strong belief in the need for a "High Tech, High Touch" Model. Local community coaches are essential and are considered better than "expert" trainers. This allows for a gradual, "slow drip" learning approach and also creates local jobs.



Session Resources

www.amea-global.com/ale25-d2t3-digital-blended-service-delivery-is-it-delivering-more-for-less/

We learnt about **AMI's Omnichannel approach** which is being used to massively scale BDS to tens of thousands of SMEs and the necessary trade-offs that need to be acknowledged, especially by donors.

"The real content messages are going into the digital format and we've tried to make the whole program completely foolproof... even a fool could do it."

Anne Marie Van Swinderen
L-IFT



DAY 2 | TOPIC 4

Gender business transformation models

Kafui presented IDH's five-component approach to gender-transformative business models that deliver both commercial viability and women's empowerment by addressing root causes of gender inequality. He conducted an interactive demo of IDH's Innovation Library tool, showing how users can filter innovations to address gender inequality while maintaining business benefits. The presentation emphasized intentional design over add-on approaches.



Kafui Adjogatse
Senior Innovation Manager
IDH



Session Resources

www.amea-global.com/ale25-d2t4-gender-business-transformation-models

"I think a lot of people will be familiar with the literature, which shows that engaging with women can result in lower credit losses also often see higher uptake of good agricultural practices, as well as some reduced risks for farmers and for women farmers."

Kafui Adjogatse
IDH



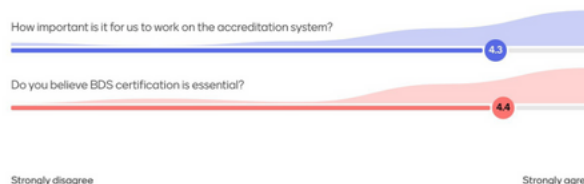
A FUTURE LEARNING AGENDA



AMEA has a 2023-25 Learning Agenda. The Learning Event was an opportunity to reflect on the strong consensus we have on the state of BDS markets and the following solutions:

1. Investing in accreditation frameworks

that enable BDS certification to be valued in the market



2. Investing in shared data systems and break the data silos.

3. Using data to segment SME and BDS markets and tailor services.

4. Testing approaches at scale, whilst consciously recognizing trade-offs between scale and quality/impact.

Participants supported the continued investment in Learning into Action case studies and National dialogues which focus on examining BDS cost-effectiveness and scalability of approaches. The following themes were highlighted for deeper learning:

1. **Segmentation of SME markets:** What approaches can be used at scale? Does this create efficiencies or just improved impact?

2. **Technology Integration:** How should digital and human delivery be blended in different contexts? What is the potential for BDS platforms? How do we manage the trade off between scale and impact?

3. **Data Sharing Platforms:** What are the best practices for developing effective data sharing platforms? What data is needed, how it can be shared, who hosts that data, and what incentives exist for everybody to engage in sharing and using data? How can this data incentivize improvements in BDS quality?

4. **Sustainability Models:** What are the best options for long-term financing and ownership structures for BDS ecosystems? Are there examples of successful cost share models?



Toolbox Guide 2025 Launch

AMEA ended the event with the launch of the AMEA Toolbox Guide 2025. The AMEA Toolbox is a collection of peer reviewed tools that are highly aligned to ISO 18716. These tools enable SMEs to build a performance track record which is useful to accessing new markets and new finance. The inter-operability of these tools has been developed and examples are included in the Guide.

The guide will be available next week and will be sent to everyone who attended the Annual Learning Event 2025.

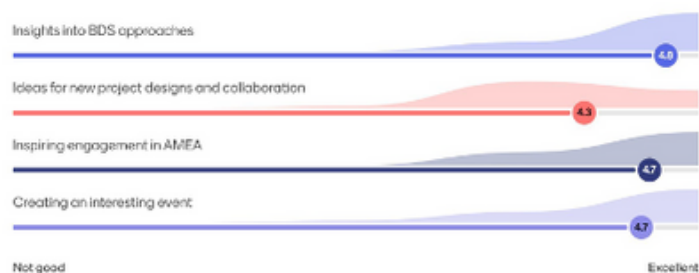


A Final Word Of Thanks

It was a great event. One of the best in my 6 years in this job! This is the result of members and partners investing their time and the participants clearly showed how they felt.

So, thank you to the participants and a special thank you to all the presenters from the organizations below.

How did we do?



Thank you to our contributing organisations



PEARLBIDGE CAPITAL MANAGERS LTD



Ministry Of Trade,
Industry and Cooperatives



If you would like to watch the replays and access the resources:

www.amea-global.com/ale25

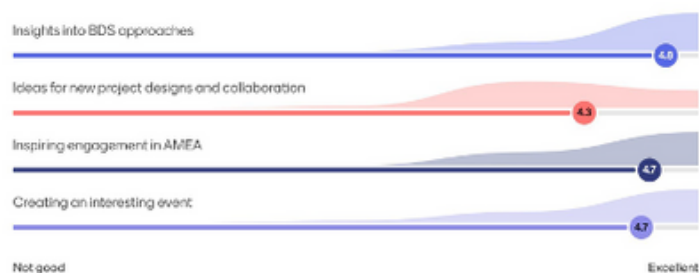


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