

West Africa's Rice Mills: Training and Support for Local Transformation



Small and medium-sized rice mills are vital to West Africa's food security, yet many operate with limited support. The Rice Miller Business Training (RMBT) program, a collaboration with industry leaders, is making these processors efficient, competitive businesses, boosting food quality and market access across the region.

Agricultural processors play an important role in improving food systems, particularly in the rice sector. Despite their potential to influence productivity, quality, and market access, small and medium-sized rice millers often operate with limited support and visibility. According to FAO, across West Africa, more than 10,000 such mills operate in a region where approximately 50% of rice is imported. Many millers face constraints like outdated machinery, insufficient financial systems, and weak links to both farmers and markets.

The **Rice Miller Business Training (RMBT) program** and **Business Development Support (BDS) program** were developed to address these issues. RMBT provides structured training to strengthen the technical and business capacities of rice processors, while BDS offers personalized coaching to help them apply what they learn in their daily operations. Together, these programs empower millers to transform from struggling operators into efficient, market-savvy businesses, driving local food security and economic growth.

Developed through collaboration between MOVE, Partners in Food Solutions, and Bühler Group, RMBT is structured around five core modules, delivered in English and French by certified local trainers:

- ⇒ **Business of Rice Milling:** Teaches millers to understand and manage operations better, covering cost analysis, process optimization, and quality management.
- ⇒ **Marketing Essentials:** Focuses on customer insight, branding, and sales planning, using the 6 Ps of marketing (Product, Place, Price, Promotion, People, Process).
- ⇒ **Finance Essentials:** Builds skills in budgeting, cash flow management, break-even analysis, and financial reporting to improve access to credit and informed decision-making.
- ⇒ **Developing Farmer Services:** Covers contract farming, extension services, and investments in inputs and technology to support consistent paddy supply and better quality.
- ⇒ **Milling Operations (by Bühler Group):** Offers hands-on training on machine maintenance and production optimization to reduce losses and improve product quality.



Each module responds to specific operational and strategic needs identified among rice processors. For example, millers seeking better financial management benefit from the Finance Essentials module, while those looking to improve rice quality and consistency are supported through Milling Operations.

Impact in Practice: Tamanaa Rice Mill's Transformation

Tamanaa, a rice mill based in northern Ghana, perfectly illustrates how RMBT contributes to operational transformation. Before participation, the enterprise struggled with financial organization, product quality, and commercial strategy.

After engaging in all five RMBT modules and receiving targeted Business Development Support (BDS), Tamanaa developed a marketing strategy focusing on product quality and local sourcing. The company organized its financial processes, leading to access to credit for equipment upgrade. Subsequently, they formalized supply agreements with paddy cooperatives, improving sourcing consistency and enhanced equipment maintenance and adopted quality control measures.

Today, the mill processes over **25,000 tons of paddy per month**, as compared to **12,000 tons** previously, tripling its annual revenue. The company has employed **38 new staff members**. Its successful model now inspires neighboring mills, which are eager to follow the same path.

The Role of Business Development Support (BDS)

BDS complements the RMBT by offering personalized coaching. This helps processors put their training into practice, ensuring they apply new knowledge to their work, continuously improve their processes, and turn their passion into a respected career. Key outcomes from BDS include:

Enhanced Knowledge Application: Millers apply marketing, financial, and technical tools more effectively. Mafa Rice Mill in Nigeria, for example, implemented RMBT strategies by opening new depots, improving social media branding, and introducing smaller packaging options.

Increased Confidence: Ongoing coaching builds confidence among processors to adopt change and refine business practices.

Improved Access to Finance: Through a combination of RMBT's finance essentials and additional initiatives, SMEs have pitched their businesses to financial institutions and secured financing for expansion.

A More Resilient Future for West African Rice

Together, the RMBT and BDS foster a more resilient and competitive rice processing sector in West Africa. Through investing in the operational and business capacities of millers, the joint approach promotes inclusive growth, increases employment opportunities, and contributes to long-term food security.

To scale this success, the program aims to broaden its reach to more mills across the region. Continued investment in tailored training and personalized coaching will enable more mills to follow Tamanaa's path toward growth.

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