

## **Product Description 2: Internet based BDS Information and Learning Platforms**

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### **1. Summary**

Different BDS and business information media - such as Internet BDS Portals, CD-ROM BDS Portals, Email based BDS newsletters and printed handbooks - provide the necessary background information for business counselling, strategy discussion, experience exchange and networking on meso level. They complete the Business Development Services (BDS) of public and private BDS providers on enterprise level.

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### **2. Basic features**

**Target groups** are not in first line the final beneficiaries, the micro and small entrepreneurs, because often they do not dispose of Internet connection and even not of computer facilities. Target groups are the intermediary public and private SME development structures and their business advisors involved:

- BDS facilitators, business consultants and business advisors using the information on enterprise level. Background information, formats and templates, e.g. business plan templates, cash book formats, cost calculation procedures are downloaded and used for business counselling.
- SME development partner organizations, network members and representatives of business associations and chambers for experience exchange and strategy discussion.
- The international donor community for strategy, coordination, collaboration and replication.

**Different media for BDS dissemination and Business information are in use:**

- Internet based BDS Portals: Web pages including information on BDS strategies, lessons learnt, capacity building and networking of partner organizations, directory of SME development institutions, chambers and financial institutions as well as sector specific information on textile, leather, food, construction, equipment supply and business information services on business creation, women entrepreneurs, business planning, accounting and cost calculation, marketing, product development, trade fairs participation, import-export guide, taxation procedures, loan conditions of banks and micro finance institutions, laws and regulations, standards and quality, trade opportunities, vocational training. Library with sector studies, monitoring and evaluation, toolkits and handbooks etc. for download. (see [www.bds-ethiopia.net](http://www.bds-ethiopia.net), [www.ghanabusiness.org](http://www.ghanabusiness.org), [www.senegal-entreprises.net](http://www.senegal-entreprises.net), [www.start-your-business.net](http://www.start-your-business.net), [www.srp-quinee.org](http://www.srp-quinee.org), [www.ageval.org](http://www.ageval.org)).
  - CD-ROM: Even BDS facilitators often do not dispose of Internet connection. That is why, the BDS and business information portal including the webpage, handbooks, formats and templates is half-yearly updated and copied on CD-ROM and distributed to partner organizations.
  - E-mail based monthly BDS newsletter: A monthly e-mail based BDS newsletter is sent to more than 500 members and resource persons of the BDS network including updated information, events, strategy discussion and presentation of BDS tools as well as reminding the BDS Portal address (see newsletters on [www.bds-ethiopia.net/news.htm](http://www.bds-ethiopia.net/news.htm)).
  - Business Information Handbooks: The most important business information services developed within the webpage development are revised, printed, published, distributed to partners and sold in the national book shops, thus creating an income generating activity for the national Chamber of Commerce or other partner organisations (see handbooks on [www.bds-forum.net/handbooks.htm](http://www.bds-forum.net/handbooks.htm)).
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### **3. Benefits, impact, scope**

- BDS information and learning platforms centralize all scattered business information and SME development information thus creating a national database of all private sector development relevant information and activities in the respective country in a sort of a "**virtual first stop shop**".
- BDS portals provide the necessary information for all kind of SME development on the ground, e.g. business counselling, value chain development, clustering, experience exchange and networking, import-export and supply facilities etc.

BDS Portals and learning platforms can be transferred wherever SME development partner organizations are willing to collaborate and share information. If partner organizations work together for a BDS portal development then you are already running a sort of networking activity.

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#### 4. Implementation process

You need:

- Commitment of involved SME development partner organizations and willingness to share information.
- Existing implementation of experienced SME development structures with business counselling on the ground delivering interesting practice relevant information and using the background information offer.

Implementation procedure:

- The BDS, business information and learning platforms are implemented in collaboration with SME development partner organizations coming together in national SME development networks.
  - Information needs are identified and data collection agreed.
  - National consultants together with partners are assigned to collect information for specific issues, e.g. taxation, business registration or loan conditions:
    - Contact respective institutions (tax authority, import-export agencies, marketing structures chambers of commerce), explain your purpose and get data.
    - Look for documents and publications.
    - Make a country specific Internet research on private sector development issues.
  - International consultants supervising the contents development, designing the BDS portal and training local staff finalizing the BDS portal. Publishing of handbooks is based on the website content: first publish website content, then improve content and then finalize for printed publications.
  - Because of sustainability, the webpage design should be based on a simple webpage code without any “Gimmicks” in order to enable simple low-cost staff to update the BDS portal even after project’s end; e.g. our former project secretary has been taken over by the Ethiopian Chamber of Commerce and been trained for updating of all web pages of the national BDS network.
  - One of the partner organizations should be trained and assigned as “webmaster” and be responsible for further webpage development.
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#### 5. Costs

- 4-6 weeks consultancy for webpage design and implementation including content development, data collection and revision together with project staff and partners.
  - Costs for webpage hosting are not important - about 20 Euro per month.
  - If the webpage design is simple and adapted to local capacity, the update can be assured by local partners without using professional web page designers - thus running costs are low.
  - Web page hosting and low-cost staff can be financed by income generating advertising - see advertising companies on the homepage of [www.ethiopianchamber.com](http://www.ethiopianchamber.com) financing the BDS network web pages.
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#### 6. References

BDS portals, CD-ROM based business information and printed business information handbooks have been standardized and implemented in different countries:

- [www.bds-ethiopia.net](http://www.bds-ethiopia.net) BDS and business information portal together with the Ethiopian SME development organizations. The BDS portal has more than 20,000 visitors per month (50% Ethiopia, 50% from abroad); various templates like business plan templates and cash book formats are downloaded and in use. The Ethiopian business information handbooks are sold in national book shops (see [www.bds-forum.net/handbooks.htm](http://www.bds-forum.net/handbooks.htm)).
- [www.senegal-entreprises.net](http://www.senegal-entreprises.net), a new BDS portal in Senegal (French language). One of the most comprehensive national portals worldwide together with the Ethiopian portal. Directory of support institutions and finance, strategies in private sector development, microfinance and vocational training, business information services (trade fairs, marketing, business planning, bookkeeping...). 2,500 visitors in the first month, upward tendency.
- [www.ghanabusiness.org](http://www.ghanabusiness.org) BDS and business information in Ghana together with the national network of small business consultants.

- [www.mali-business.com](http://www.mali-business.com) Business information together with the national Federation of Artisans and Crafts of Mali.
- [www.ageval.org](http://www.ageval.org) Information and learning platform for business consultants and evaluators in Guinea Conakry with manuals for M+E of World bank, GTZ, ILO, UNDP and others for download (see [www.ageval.org/docs.htm](http://www.ageval.org/docs.htm)).
- [www.srp-guinee.org](http://www.srp-guinee.org) Information portal on Poverty Reduction Strategies in Guinea Conakry.
- [www.start-your-business.net](http://www.start-your-business.net) CEFE and ILO based learning and training modules on business creation.
- [www.bds-forum.net](http://www.bds-forum.net) New international portal on SME development strategies and business information dissemination. 7,000 visitors per month in the beginning, upward tendency.

More details:

- Powerpoint presentation on “Impact and Sustainability of ICT based BDS Portals” for download on [www.bds-forum.net/bds-portals.htm](http://www.bds-forum.net/bds-portals.htm)
- PDF-file, German language: “Wirkung und Nachhaltigkeit von BDS Portalen” for download on [www.bds-forum.net/bds-reader/start.html](http://www.bds-forum.net/bds-reader/start.html)
- [www.bds-forum.net](http://www.bds-forum.net) all about BDS portals, e-mail based BDS newsletters and business information handbooks.

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## 7. Contact

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