

Strategic Management Role in Startups of Cooperatives as Factor of Success

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Abstract

Original Research Article

Cooperatives constitute a recent movement introduced in Burundi by the state in order to build social cohesion and foster economic development with the participation of all active and working population. However, as startups, most of them fail at their early stage. As a matter of fact, contemporary business environment is changing rapidly and requires for-profit organizations quick adaption of their business model to the current course. Strategic thoughts and actions are increasingly leading to the continued viability and effectiveness of organizations of all sorts. Without strategic management it is unlikely that organizations will be able to successfully meet the numerous challenges that face them. Startups theory, strategy theory and innovation theory were assessed during this research. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the role played by strategic planning and management in success of cooperatives. Participants were the case study made of CUSABU employees, educational managers for schools with canteens in partnership with CUSABU, retailers and family members who provided us with information on planning, implementation and results of well applied strategies to achieve goals of the case study organization (CUSABU). Data were collected from semi-structured interview to get primary data. Secondary data were obtained from documents consulted during the period of this research.

Keywords: Strategies, Strategic Process, Strategic Planning, Strategic Management, Nonprofit Organization, Profit Organization, Start-ups, Cooperatives.

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INTRODUCTION

Servant Leadership is a pillar scholars considered as important for the health of nonprofit and for-profit organizations in all their forms whether charities, churches, corporates, SMEs, start-ups etc. Sendjaya (2008), postulated this style emphasizing employees' needs, establishing fair treatment and demonstrating compassion. The result is huge and in several employee outcomes, such as employee performance, turnover intention, loyalty and discretionary effort (Huning, 2020); (Mcquade, 2020); (Shah, 2019). Indeed, a leading current doctrine in commercial enterprises stresses the prominence of treating all employees as "compensated volunteers." Gerald E. Bates (2003) puts it that in the intense competition of the market place the quality of leadership makes the difference between survival and failure.

However, recent researchers proved organizations cannot stand for success on merely influencing employees and staff. In fact, leadership is more and exclusively concerned with relationships, motivation and well-being of employees. Empirical

evidence on employee outcome is growing, but less is said under what factors leadership can impact workplace outcomes (Huning, 2020). As a matter of fact, enterprises got bankrupted and collapsed despite inspiring good leaders at their top. Contemporary business environment is changing rapidly and requires for-profit organizations quick adaption of their business model to the current course. Bryson (1988) put strategic thought and action are increasingly important to the continued viability and effectiveness of organizations of all sorts.

Without strategic management it is unlikely that these organizations will be able to meet successfully the numerous challenges that face them. Apart personal traits required for an effective leader, organizations' viability needs management skills to maximize performance levels and efficiency (Senyimba, 2020).

Building on the rising number of studies examining the impact of strategic management on enterprises' results, our study grounded its research on the strategic managerial role for the success of cooperatives. A study of Cooperative United Stars Agro-

Business (CUSABU) was carried out. The choice of this specific organization was motivated due to it fitting into the type of collective for-profit organizations known as cooperatives. Amongst cooperatives we have collections of groups or shareholders like production, commercialization and consumption (wholesale or retailers), loan and Savings, services, mining and multi-services (Law N°1/12, p. 2). It is noticeable cooperatives are formed because of a common and business-related interest. From initially being seen as only community social cohesion platforms, cooperatives have developed to operate as business entities within economic conditions striving to achieve financial goals. Although today business environment is harder to operate in, successful cooperatives are finding ways to cope with the challenges. The study supports laying strong and solid-based strategic management foundations to uphold cooperatives whole business system, market research and innovation planning and management, setting and working on rigorous resource management and measurement mechanism that are well set and established play a key role for cooperatives' business success. Cooperatives are collectives of legal or natural persons based on principles of union and solidarity and mutual self-help, whose members joined together voluntarily to achieve economic and social goals (Law N°1/12, pp. 4). The government and financial institutions inserted lot of finances in cooperatives. Unfortunately, most of them failed to run and sustain their businesses. The study poses the why question as the failure was not probably due to finances, nor availability of human resources to pursue the business course set. The study seeks to survey and check through case study the strategic management in the realm of cooperatives and how it impacts their success.

METHODOLOGY

The worksheet is composed with questions resulting in meta-data (data that constitute additional information from respondents) and those generating research related data. The latter are mainly closed ended questions. Open-ended questions were not privileged as they diversify responses which becomes difficult to codify. However, as the research is qualitative type, those answers shed light on situations discussed. Asked questions have been designed according to the research question. Three sub-themes derived from the research question and each with 5 questions to get enough results. The researcher himself conducted the face-to-face interview on field by meeting board and middle managers, Education Officer, managers of schools supplied with CUSABU maize flour, retailers and family members that use the flour.

RESULTS

The results show that among 53 respondents representing 100%, none of them representing 0% is under or equals to 18 years, 15 respondents representing 28.30% are in between 19 to 36 years, 36 respondents

representing 67.92% are between 37 to 55 years and 2 respondents were null. From the analysis above, the researcher avoided to interview pupils in fundamental as they constituted last group that could be interviewed on quality of products by CUSABU. For ethical reasons, the researcher interviewed family members who could appreciate objectively quality, punctuality and other aspect of strategic foundations (vision, mission and core values) compared to what is really seen on field. Interviewees are mature enough to provide thoughtful responses to questions asked. 53 respondents representing 100%, none of them has experience with CUSABU and its maize flour of more than 3 years. 29 respondents representing 54.72% have experience of maximum 1 year. 22 respondents representing 41.51% have experience with CUSABU maize flour of no more than 3 years. 2 of respondents have not been identified and their results was null. The result above, from respondents (among whom a board member is of CUSABU founders), we notice CUSABU is a newly established cooperative as it does not have many years of existence. This comes to strengthen the reason why our research question is important because as startup, CUSABU has to lay down strategies that will help it sustain and expand its market share. 53 respondents representing 100% of informants, 45 of them representing 84.91% strongly affirmed CUSABU employees especially in the supply chain sector are punctual and regular, 6 respondents representing 11.32% stated CUSABU supply is not regular and punctual while 2 respondents representing 3.77% were null. By analyzing these data, we found that more than 84% testify that whenever they need CUSABU maize flour, they are served as wished. Among 6 respondents who said the supply is not regular and punctual are mainly school partners at schools with canteen who clarified the road to their school premises are not practicable especially during the rainy season. CUSABU employees fear vehicle may fall and deposit the supply afar and request schools to organize how to take it ashore. Another respondent posited the problem of fuel affected CUSABU personnel working in supply service and this could cause some delay of supply but not frequently. These respondents said, those are external factors that do not depend on CUSABU as supplier. It is very clear that CUSABU stands for its core values namely PUNCTUALITY. This also implies production management is well organized in a way consumers do not frequently observe stock shortage which would harm customer stability at the market place. Headmasters added that, CUSABU supply is regular and that it contributes to stability of pupils at schools as they know they are always served in canteens. The table and the graphic tell more about communication to middle managers as a strategy to achieve goal and be a successful startup. Among 53 respondents representing 100%, 43 respondents representing 81.13% uphold there is an impact of communicating foundations and strategies to middle managers to achieve startup goal, 8 respondents representing 15.09% do not support there is

an impact of communicating to middle managers foundations and strategies to achieve startup goal, 2 respondents representing 3.77% did not answer to our questions and their result was null. Communicating all necessary information to middle managers is a bridge to success. This is implementation phase and most involved actors are middle managers who must put onto motion employees as executor. So middle managers must understand vision, mission, and indicators of evaluation; brief, what the startup wants to achieve. Middle managers work tirelessly and this takes CUSABU to being ahead of its competitors in the industry of maize flour in terms of products and service quality. The provincial education officer as a key partner to CUSABU in the project with WFP supported CUSABU is ahead its competitors in the industry. He said “we had shared the supply requested by WFP to many cooperatives. Most of them failed to fulfill their agreed market. Wanting to avoid failure in our province, we called those cooperatives to sign agreement with CUSABU to take over their market and complete the supply requested at WFP. CUSABU succeeded its share to be supplied and covered the market shares other cooperatives failed to fulfill”. At factory a machinery manager told me when there is big supply, as our top leader told us the need to fulfill, we even do overnight work and grind all tons needed”. Communicating to middle managers vision, mission, core values and goals keeps CUSABU competitive on the market in the maize flour industry.

To sum up on Sub-question one, setting strong and solid-based strategic management foundations is key to success of startups. For the effective implementation, board members must take care of communicating these foundations to middle managers as executors. Among 53 respondents representing 100%, 51 respondents representing 96.23% advanced CUSABU maize flour was excellent, none respondent contacted representing 0% said the contrary, 2 respondents representing 3.77% did not respond to our questions and of course their result was null. These results reveal a level of customer satisfaction towards quality of CUSABU maize flour. A school headmaster stated this is what we needed. Previously we had suppliers who could bring sour flour and pupils refused to eat. Now, the flour is of good quality. Another headmaster said “because the flour is good, pupils eat and because they eat regularly, they know the time of meal. They therefore attend classes regularly. This quarter (1st quarter) only 7 dropped out while 50 or 60 could drop out earlier”. A retailer said “If the grain is of best quality, the milling machine being of good quality, it is inevitable to have excellent flour”. Another headmaster reassured “no report back from pupils that the flour is bad”. Considering the table and graphic, amid 53 respondents representing 100%, 1 respondent representing 1.89% accept what they suggest to CUSABU was worked on for improvement, 50 respondents representing 94.34% said that they had never found it necessary to suggest improvement reason why they haven’t yet given feedback and said it was

improved or not, 2 respondents did not respond to our question, therefore their result was null. Normally, considering the result above, CUSABU is meant to bring innovation to satisfy its customers. In fact, its machinery is a sophisticated one and the production perfect (see picture in appendix on pag91). However, the trade manager acting as a respondent said “we always welcome feedback and work on them. Before we launched our maize flour, we made product test and few customers (as pilot test team) graded the taste as an excellent one”.

In short, though it is still early, they do market research, get feedback from customers and innovate what strengthen success and competitiveness in CUSABU. Considering the table and graphic, amid 53 respondents representing 100%, 1 respondent representing 1.89% accept what they suggest to CUSABU was worked on for improvement, 50 respondents representing 94.34% said that they had never found it necessary to suggest improvement reason why they haven’t yet given feedback and said it was improved or not, 2 respondents did not respond to our question, therefore their result was null. Normally, considering the result above, CUSABU is meant to bring innovation to satisfy its customers. In fact, its machinery is a sophisticated one and the production perfect (see picture in appendix on pag91). However, the trade manager acting as a respondent said “we always welcome feedback and work on them. Before we launched our maize flour, we made product test and few customers (as pilot test team) graded the taste as an excellent one”. In short, though it is still early, they do market research, get feedback from customers and innovate what strengthen success and competitiveness in CUSABU.

DISCUSSION

Regarding researcher question, under its 3 sub-questions, it was found that:

Under Sub-question one: 53 respondents representing 100% of informants, 45 of them representing 84.91% strongly agree CUSABU employees are punctual and regular when they supply maize flour to customers what implies they use a strategic approach in supply chain. Among 53 respondents representing 100%, all 51 of them contacted representing 96.23% recognize existence of other kinds of maize flour at the market place what means staying competitive, CUSABU must tirelessly assess regularly external environment as part of strategic planning. Among 53 respondents, all 51 respondents representing 96.23% said CUSABU activities align with its strategic foundations which means decision making within CUSABU are strategically taken and avoid unrelated activity. Among 53 respondents representing 100%, 48 respondents representing 90.47% confirmed customers’ needs are met, what shows that customers meet excellence (the latter being one of the cores values) at CUSABU. Among 53 respondents representing 100%, 43 respondents representing 81.13% uphold there is an

impact of communicating foundations and strategies to middle managers to achieve startup goal, it underscores all employees develop ownership of the foundations (vision, mission and values) which keeps CUSABU competitive in its business industry.

CONCLUSION

There is a strong shift in current business environment even in worldwide economies. For-profit organizations must perform quick adaption of their business model to the current course. In Burundi, Cooperatives were introduced to support community members' initiatives for development. June, 2017, a state agency called ANACOOOP was instituted by Presidential law N° 1/12 issued on June 28th, 2017 to ease registration, monitoring-evaluation and regulation of all existing and newly created cooperatives activities. With its 12 missions, the 6th mission states that ANACOOOP should elaborate supporting program and capacity building of cooperatives in collaboration with the national frame overseeing cooperative movement in general (Law N° 1/12, pp. 106). The same law underscores ANACOOOP is responsible for updating national statistical data regarding Burundi cooperative movement (ANACOOOP law, 9th Mission, p. 7).

The first cooperative generation was called "SANGWE Cooperatives" that mainly focused on farming (agriculture and livestock). They got funded BIF 10,000,000 each from the State. Most of them failed despite availability of funds. Hence, the government fashioned "PAEEJ" Program to ensure management of the funding through financial and technical support to youth cooperatives. BIJE as a bank partnered with FIGA that operates as guarantee on behalf of youth so that BIJE provides to the youth loans with small interest rates and cover any insolvency that would occur for any cooperative funded through the bank. Few of them succeeded, others completely failed despite all those facilitations and availability of funds.

Due to long procedures and little chance to be selected, other cooperatives searched for other financial institutions and issued for loans therein.

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Competing interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Contributions from authors

All the authors contributed to the conduct of this work. They also state that they have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Research questionnaires

General question “Does strategic management play a key role in success of cooperatives?” split into 3 specific questions administered to the interviewees stated earlier:

Specific question 1: To what extent does laying strong and solid-based management foundations contribute to success of cooperatives?

Specific question 2: Do market research and innovation plan play a significant role in cooperatives success?

Specific question 3: Does setting and working on rigorous resource management and measurement mechanism lead to cooperatives success?

Interview worksheet guide paradigm

Inform of the purpose of the research and state that their identities will be kept confidential and result will be anonymous. Check for recording Allowance.

Generality (Meta data) BM/MM=Board Member or Middle Manager; PEO/HM/HT/CM=Provincial Education Officer/Headmaster/Head teacher/Canteen Manager; R=Retailers; FM=Family Member (consumer). Gender: M F Age: Nationality: How long have you been working with (or at) CUSABU? : How long do you know CUSABU maize flour? : If you are of CUSABU, what department do you work in? : What is your role in CUSABU? : What are your main responsibilities? : How do you see you in 5 years? Still at CUSABU? Yes No What is your role in the organization- collaborator of CUSABU? : What are your main responsibilities? :			
CUSABU VISION: Nearest farmers' coach in order to boost agrarian and livestock production in general, maize production and pork farming in particular. Its aim is to contribute to GDP growth, improve population nutrition and pull in foreign currency. CUSABU MISSION: Intensify maize farming in Burundi, couple it with raising pigs, transform raw production from both activities, merchandize it locally and export CUSABU CORE VALUES: Integrity, Excellence and Punctuality			
General theme: Strategic management plays a key role in success of cooperatives			
Questions to board and middle managers (1+4)	Questions to schools supplied (36.12+1PEO)	Questions to retailers (5) & families (5)	What is tested in 53 respondents
Sub-theme 1: Strong and solid-based strategic management foundations leads to success			
1. CUSABU puts strength and effort in strategic planning and management which results in permanent stock, punctuality True/False	CUSABU supply is regular and punctual True/False	CUSABU supply is regular. We regularly found CUSABU maize flour available True/false	Test they plan supply that results in punctuality
2. Are there other kinds of maize flour at the market place? Yes/No	Do you see other kinds of maize flour at the market place? Yes/No	Do you see other kinds of maize flour at the market place? Yes/No	Test existence of competition
3. Does CUSABU have and work on its strong vision, mission, cores values reason why it is succeeding on its market place? Yes/No	Does CUSABU support building infrastructures and personnel payment at schools with canteens? Yes/No	Is CUSABU flour more liked on the market than flour of competitors? Yes/No	Test decisions align with vision, mission, values (Excellence)
4. Customers' needs are met even exceeded by CUSABU True/False	Regarding CUSABU Vision, Mission, our needs are met and exceeded True/False	Regarding CUSABU Vision, Mission, our needs are met and exceeded True/false	Test excellence
5. Thinking ahead and communicating regularly our vision and mission to middle managers helps us keep competitive on the market in our industry True/False	CUSABU flour is ahead of its competitors in the industry of maize flour (product quality, service quality...) True/false	CUSABU flour is ahead of its competitors in the industry of maize flour True/False	Test planning and implementation Discussion for strategies setting (communication to executors= middle managers)
Sub-theme 2: Market research and Innovation planning and management plays role on its success			
Most of CUSABU services take long time, done on time as agreed, are never done (choose one)	Most of CUSABU services take long time, done on time as agreed, are never done (choose one)	We wait weeks/It does not take long to get CUSABU flour at the market place (choose one)	Test customer satisfaction: punctuality
CUSABU maize flour is excellent True/False	CUSABU maize flour is excellent True/False	CUSABU maize flour is excellent True/False	Test customer satisfaction: quality
If not, what's wrong? Package... smelling. Taste/ flavor. other: Comment:			
Customer service standards are assessed regularly and constitute CUSABU strength True/False	We regularly suggest to CUSABU what to improve True/False	We regularly suggest to CUSABU what to improve True/False	Test listening and collecting customer feedback
CUSABU works on customers feedback in order to innovate its products, its marketing process, its	We see improvements after we suggested stuff to be fixed	We see improvements after we suggested stuff to be fixed	Test working on feedback to fix stuff: innovation

organizational and technological aspects I agree/I disagree	I agree/I disagree	I agree/I disagree	
Sub-theme 3: Rigorous resource management and measurement mechanism lead to cooperatives success			
Are resources always allocated considering your strategic priorities? Yes/No	Are there other activities CUSABU do here other than supplying maize flour? Yes/No	Are there other activities CUSABU do here other than supplying maize flour? Have you ever seen CUSABU agent doing here other stuff than supplying maize flour? Yes/No	Test misuse of resources
Your strategic plan establishes agreements around intended outcomes True/False	We are proud to be part of customers CUSABU supplies maize flour True/False	We don't complain with CUSABU price and its product True/False	Test no bad words of mouth or churn from customers
Are "Increase of customers, high demand, new market share..." your metrics to measure your performance? Yes/No	Would you suggest other schools be supplied by CUSABU? Yes/No	Can you recommend other retailers/families to buy at CUSABU? Yes/No	Test level of loyalty
Do you get trained in field you are responsible for? Yes/No	Does CUSABU organize capacity building training on canteen management or other field of interest? Yes/No	Does CUSABU train you on entrepreneurial aspect to be more competitive? Are you well informed on good reasons (nutrition for example) to take maize flour? Yes/No	Test non-financial KPIs in Robert Kaplan BSC are taken into consideration

Appendix B: Letter requesting Permission for research


Université Espoir d'Afrique
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 B.P. 238 Bujumbura, Burundi Tél: +257 22 23 79 73
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 Agréée sous l'Ordonnance Ministérielle n°610/1379 du 26 Septembre 2003

PROGRAMMES POST UNIVERSITAIRES

SUPERVISION DU TRAVAIL DE MEMOIRE

N/ Réf: PPU/ 056 /2024

Au Dr/ Prof. Dr. Jean Nshimirimana

Docteur, Prof Docteur,

Par la présente, nous avons le plaisir de vous désigner comme superviseur du travail de Mémoire de l'étudiant(e) Ba Kunduzze Audifax du programme de Master en NBA à l'Université Espoir d'Afrique.

Son mémoire est intitulé :

Strategic Management Role in Startups as Factors of Success: Case of Cooperative United Stars Agro Business COOPROSA

La soutenance est programmée aussitôt que le travail est prêt, pourvu que ça ne dépasse pas un délai de six mois depuis le jour de la signature de cette lettre ; cad du 20 /12/2024....

Dépasser ce délai, l'étudiant(e) se verra obligé (e) de renouveler l'inscription de son sujet de mémoire moyennant un paiement de frais de retard de la rédaction de mémoire équivalent à trois crédits de cours et seront payés chaque trois mois jusqu'au jour de défense et de réussite de son mémoire (catalogue 2007-2009, p.39).

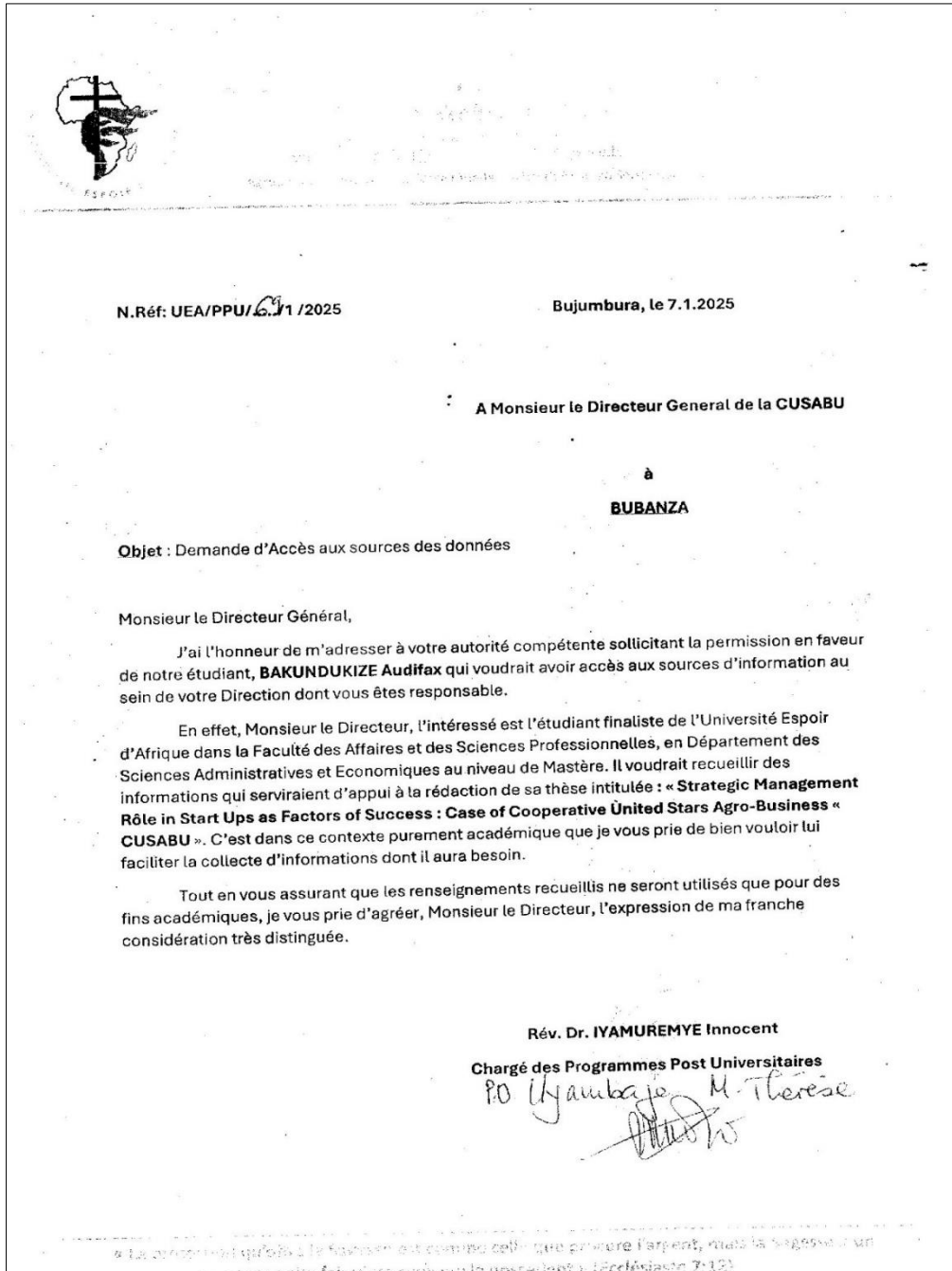
Recevez nos compliments anticipés pour la bonne réussite du travail et de la défense. Pour amples informations, veuillez contacter le bureau de la coordination des PPU de l'Université Espoir d'Afrique.

Fait à Bujumbura, le 20 /12/2024

Le Coordinateur des Programmes de Master

Rév. Innocent IYAMUREMYE (PhD)
P.O. Uyaubaye H. Theres

Appendix C: Letter for Permission of research



Appendix D: CUSABU's logo



Appendix E: Pictures



Picture 1: Pupils taking meal at Mukungu II Fundamental School, Musigati, Bubanza.

Source: Research on field. At this school only 7 pupils dropped out while before they could record 50 pupils.



Picture 2: Pupils taking meal at Kivyuka I Fundamental School, Musigati, Bubanza.

Source: Research on field. Head teacher testified before they could wait weeks to get supply but with CUSABU, it is quick.



Picture 3: Interview session at MUYANGE Fundamental School with the head teacher, Musigati, Bubanza. Source: Research on field.



Picture 4: CUSABU milling machine with capacity of grinding 30 tons per day, Musigati, Bubanza. Source: Research on field