

Japan Supports Sesame Farmers in Mwenezi

Today, a handover ceremony was held in Mwenezi district, Masvingo province, to officially commission one (1) newly constructed steel shed and five (5) freshly installed containers for sesame storage, supporting financially vulnerable small-scale farmers. The Ambassador of Japan to Zimbabwe, H.E. Mr. Shinichi Yamanaka, attended the handover ceremony to mark the completion of the project. The project was funded through the Grant Assistance for Grassroots Humanitarian Projects (GGP) programme with the amount of US\$ 71,942 and was completed by Sustainable Agriculture Technology (SAT), a local non-governmental organization (NGO).

The district has long faced challenges stemming from poverty and a semi-arid climate. To combat these issues, SAT launched an initiative in 2022 to introduce sesame cultivation and provide training to local farmers, recognizing the crop's drought resilience and market potential. The organisation has also established a sesame processing center for value addition, aiming to enhance income generation. However, a critical gap remained: the absence of proper storage facilities. Without secure storage, farmers were forced to leave harvested sesame outdoors until it could be sold. This exposed the crop to theft and led to significant post-harvest losses—up to 60%—due to rainfall and prolonged sun exposure. In an attempt to avoid these losses and secure some income, many farmers resorted to selling their sesame to informal middlemen, ultimately reducing the farmers' earnings.

The completion of the sesame storage project has marked a major turning point. Five (5) new storage containers placed in rural areas now allow 4,800 households of small-scale farmers to securely store their sesame, protecting it from environmental damage and reducing reliance on unreliable intermediaries. It is expected that the loss of sesame will reduce from 60% to 20%. These facilities preserve product quality and enable farmers to access formal markets offering better prices and fairer terms. A newly constructed steel shed at the sesame processing center now functions as a central collection hub, ensuring the safe storage of processed sesame.

This initiative is part of a broader project supported by the World Food Programme (WFP), funded through a contribution of ¥792 million (approximately USD 5.2 million) from the Government of Japan. The program aims to promote climate resilience and sustainable agriculture among 37,000 smallholder farmers across five districts in Zimbabwe. SAT serves as an implementation partner, and the value-added sesame is expected to be exported to Japan. A key player in this value chain will be ITOCHU Corporation, a Japanese trading company, which is anticipated to take on the role of an off-taker—facilitating the export and international marketing of Zimbabwean sesame to Japan.

Speaking at the handover ceremony, Ambassador Yamanaka commended SAT for successfully completing the project and expressed his excitement over the new steel shed and five (5) containers. He urged the organisation and the community members “to continue working for the community so that small-scale farmers will have better livelihood, with the skills in their hands.”

Over the years, communities around Zimbabwe have benefitted from the support provided by the Government of Japan under the GGP scheme. It provides support to improve social and economic conditions at the local level, in the fields of education, health, food and nutrition security, WASH, and support for vulnerable groups. It was launched in Zimbabwe in 1989, and 162 projects have been implemented so far throughout the country, with total funding of over US\$ 16.5 million.