

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **EMBASSY OF JAPAN**

#### **JAPANESE ASSISTANCE FOR SMALL-SCALE FARMERS IN LOWER GWERU**

March 4, 2013

Today, the Embassy of Japan in Zimbabwe through Japan's Grant Assistance for Grass-roots Human Security Projects made available USD 112,688 to HELP for 'The Project for the Improvement of Farming Skills in Gweru District'.

The Japanese Ambassador, H.E. Mr. Yonezo Fukuda and the Director of HELP, Mr. Christoph Laufens formalised the signing ceremony.

The project aims to enhance farming skills of the community members in drought-prone areas. The Japanese assistance will fund the introduction of drought friendly crops, including virus-free sweet potato in 200 model communal gardens in Lower Gweru. Each garden will be furnished with an irrigation piping and treadle pump, of which the maintenance is easy and low-cost. The beneficiaries, some 2,000 small scale farmers, will receive training in harvesting, storage and processing of the crops.

The increased productivity through these activities will promote food security and improve nutritional status of the local people. To ensure sustainability of the project, HELP will be collaborated with Agritex in every process of the project. With their assistance, the trained farmers will be expected to cascade their knowledge and experience to other community members.

At the signing ceremony, H.E. Mr Yonezo Fukuda referred to the historical experience that sweet potato was an essential nutrient during famines and the postwar Japan when food was in short supply. With the micro-irrigation system, it will help mitigating the influence of change in weather patterns. He expressed his sincere hope that the activities would produce positive outcomes through the strong local initiative.

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