

JICA-watered farms flourish

Japan to assist Zambia in its quest to attain status of a middle-income country by 2030

FRANCIS LUNGU
Mwense

BOMBOLO Ngosa, 40, is one of the over 1,700 small-scale farmers benefitting from the Japanese government-funded irrigation schemes supporting all-year-round crop cultivation in five districts of Luapula Province.

Ngosa of Munwa area, Mwense district, is a member of Buyantanshi Irrigation Scheme, which was formed in 2014 when Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) started constructing a weir carnal on Munwa stream in Mambilima constituency.

According to Luapula Province Ministry of Agriculture acting senior irrigation engineer Remmy Chibeyeye, who is working closely with JICA, a weir carnal is a mini dam constructed to divert water from a river or stream into a furrow to provide easy access to the commodity to support small-scale irrigation farming activities.

It is this initiative provided by Japan through JICA that has enabled Ngosa and many other beneficiaries to engage in diversification of crops as they now grow tomatoes, maize, groundnuts, bananas among others.



JAPANESE Ambassador to Zambia Hidenobu Sobashima (left) with his entourage inspecting one of the rice fields in Luapula Province.

PICTURE: FRANCIS LUNGU



MR Peter Mwape, wife Maureen and their children manually weeding their cabbage garden in Mansa district.

PICTURE: FRANCIS LUNGU

The weir carnal on Munwa stream, which became fully operation in 2015 under Buyantanshi Irrigation Scheme, stretches eight kilometres downstream on a utilised area of five hectares, although the project has the potential to cater for 20 hectares of land.

"My life is never the same as I am now cultivating different types of crops and raising about K10, 000 after selling my crops during the marketing season," says Ngosa, a father of seven, most of them school going children. "Much of the money goes to sort out school fees and other family needs."

Buyantanshi Irrigation Scheme chairperson Allan Kaunda, 52, has since managed to construct a molded-brick house with an iron sheet roof from the benefits of irrigation farming.

"I am now living in a better house. I had lived in grass-thatched houses all my life. We appreciate what the Japanese Government has done for us. They should now help with pesticides for our crops," he says.

Nonetheless, Mr Kaunda says farmers have challenges in terms of access to the market for their

produce.

The nearest selling point, according to Mr Kaunda, is at Mulundu market, which is about 15km away on the Mansa-Mwense road. Farmers mostly walk to access the market and others carry their produce on

"We appreciate what the Japanese government has done for us. They should now help with pesticides for our crops"

bicycles.

These challenges among others have led to a decline in

Buyantanshi Irrigation Scheme's membership from 29 to 17.

The Buyantanshi Irrigation Scheme is just one of the eight projects the Japanese government is supporting in Luapula Province under the Technical Cooperation on Community-Based Small Holder Irrigation (T-COBSI).

Other T-COBSI projects that are using the weir carnal method are being implemented in Kawambwa, Mwansabombwe, Chembe, Chipili, Milenge, Nchelenge and Mansa districts of Luapula Province, with a combined hectareage of 113 having been put under irrigation.

In Mansa, Mulundu Irrigation Scheme, which has been running since 2012 with slightly over 30 members, is supported by a 4km²-long weir carnal servicing about seven hectares of land.

Here, small-scale farmers have mainly concentrated on growing vegetables such as cabbage, rape as well as tomatoes because of the good market.

Forty-three-year-old Peter Mwape, his wife Maureen and their four children spend much of their time gardening under the Mulundu Irrigation Scheme.

According to Mr Mwape, who started gardening in 1990

using buckets to ferry water from Ifiyongoli stream, the irrigation project has changed his farming life.

"With the help of the Japanese Irrigation System, our production of cabbage is good. I am able to look after my family," he says in an interview while weeding his cabbage garden with his family.

Pests are a common feature in most of the T-COBSI projects in the eight districts of Luapula Province and farmers are appealing for help.

Japanese Ambassador to Zambia Hidenobu Sobashima, who was on a four-day tour of Luapula Province from October 29 to November 1, 2018 to inspect developmental projects supported by Japan, acknowledged the need for continuous help to the farmers.

Ambassador Sobashima said Japan attaches great importance to Zambia's agriculture sector as it is one of the three African countries in which T-COBSI is being implemented in partnership with respective ministries of agriculture.

Other countries in which Japan is cooperating and operating the T-COBSI are Kenya and Senegal. It is from this aspect that the

Japanese envoy says his country will assist Zambia in its quest to attain the status of a middle-income country by 2030 through implementation of diversified developmental projects.

Mr Sobashima says his country has been rendering assistance to Zambia since 1968 and that it would continue because of the good bilateral cooperation between the two countries.

"We would like for the Zambian people to achieve the middle -income status by 2030. Key to this is diversification of the economy from mining. Sound budgetary discipline is [also] very critical," he said when he paid a courtesy call together with his entourage on Luapula Province acting permanent secretary Royd Chakaba.

Mr Sobashima and his team of experts from the Embassy of Japan, toured projects in the province which included T-COBSI, Expansion of Community-Based Smallholder (E-COBSI), Kansai Plascon anti-mosquito paint project and the K55.5million Luapula Groundwater Development phase III among others.

The team was generally happy with the progress they saw.

The Luapula groundwater project, for instance, has since constructed 176 boreholes equipped with hand pumps and five piped water schemes benefiting over 83, 000 people.

Other T-COBSI projects

"With the help of the Japanese Irrigation System, our production of cabbage is good."

the Japanese government is supporting are being implemented in Northern and Muchinga provinces.

In Northern Province, six districts have benefited - Kasama, Luwingu, Mbala, Mporokoso, Nsama and

Mungwi - while in Muchinga the T-COBSI project is running in Isoka, Mafinga, Shiwang'andu, Mpika and Nakonde districts.

The T-COBSI project in all the three provinces has since trained 185 extension officers in smallholder irrigation farming and operation and maintenance of smallholder irrigation schemes.

Additionally, 158 extension officers have acquired training experiences on market-oriented agriculture and gender mainstreaming.

Mr Chakaba says the province had witnessed increased investment and cooperation in the agriculture sector from the Japanese government before and even after last year's Investment Promotion Expo.

He said ever since the Investment Promotion Expo, the province had resolved not to lag in tourism promotion and agriculture, where there were a few transportation hitches.

"Agriculture extension officers are hardworking but the challenge has been lack of transport. They need motorbikes to carryout their work effectively. Please help us," he appealed.