

Zim: USAID launches agricultural support facility

HARARE: The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Standard Chartered Bank of Zimbabwe (Stanchart) have signed an agreement to enable the bank to expand its lending by US\$20 million over five years. The program, made possible under USAID's Development Credit Authority, is targeted at the agricultural sector and will allow Stanchart to increase the number of loans it makes directly to farmers and enterprises.

The ultimate objective is to provide inputs and technical assistance to small holder farmers that will allow them to increase productivity and production.

"The credit authority is being established as one of several assistance programs, above and beyond US humanitarian aid to Zimbabwe, which have come about because of President Obama's commitment to provide agricultural and other assistance to the people of Zimbabwe. The president made this commitment to Zimbabwe's prime minister, Morgan Tsvangirai, during the prime minister's June 2009 visit to Washington, DC. The assistance demonstrates the will of the American people to assist Zimbabwe to restore its once vibrant agricultural sector," said Donald Petterson, Chargé d'Affaires at the US Embassy.

Stanchart head of origination and client coverage, Samuel Nhakaniso signed on behalf of Stanchart while USAID was represented by mission director, Karen Freeman. The ceremony was also attended by senior US Embassy officials and representatives of Stanchart.

Freeman also announced that USAID will separately provide approximately 13,000 vulnerable households with seeds and fertiliser for the coming agricultural season through US\$1.7 million in funding to the Food and Agriculture Organisation and NGOs.

For more information about USAID and its Zimbabwe programs, go to www.usaid.gov.