

**Zimbabwe: Partner Development Focused NGOs - Govt (18 April 2012)**

GOVERNMENT has challenged business and funding agencies to partner development-focused non-governmental organisations and provide financial assistance to benefit small-scale farmers. Speaking at the launch of the Agro-Initiative Zimbabwe 2012 competition in Harare on Monday, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Minister Sithembiso Nyoni said Government's partnership with TechnoServe demonstrated its support of development partners that can address poverty.

"This partnership with my Ministry was born on May 24, 2011 when we signed a Memorandum of Understanding with TechnoServe Zimbabwe.

"Within this collaborative environment, in April of last year, TechnoServe successfully launched Agro Initiative Zimbabwe 2011, in an effort to revitalise the agricultural sector in Zimbabwe," she said.

Minister Nyoni said Agro Initiative Zimbabwe 2011 received many high quality applications, from which the top five innovative, far-reaching and ideas with impact were selected to receive the capital prize of US\$50 000 each plus TechnoServe's technical advisory support.

She said last year's five winners were currently working with 1 442 small scale farmers in areas such as Honde Valley, Matabeleland South, Bulawayo peri urban and the three Mashonaland provinces.

"It is assumed that by the end of three years those farmers will have earned over US\$10 million incremental income as a direct result of the competition," Minister Nyoni said.

The overall prize to winners of Agro Initiative Zimbabwe 2012 competition, she said, would address challenges faced by the medium scale businesses and the small-scale farmers.

Chief among the challenges, Minister Nyoni said, was access to finance.

She said Government believed Agro Initiative Zimbabwe would provide the spark required for the agricultural sector to flourish once again.

Besides financial support, Agro Initiative Zimbabwe provides technical assistance to help develop technical skills among business leaders, she said.

TechnoServe country director Margaret Rose said organisation was engaged in detailed business planning, financial modelling and scenario planning, investigating markets and company valuations. TechnoServe first came to Zimbabwe in 2010 and as a development organisation realised that there was vast human skills that could be utilised through support to development and business ideas hence the birth of Agro Initiative Zimbabwe.

Agro Initiative Zimbabwe is a business plan competition targeted at existing medium-sized Zimbabwean businesses with creative sustainable ideas in agriculture and agri-business. AIZ supports innovative ideas that demonstrate the inclusion of smallholder farmers or rural communities such as outgrower or contract farming models and have the potential to influence wider industrial development. Winners will receive between US\$25 000 and US\$50 000 capital prize to implement their initiative and a package of technical assistance tailored to the needs of their businesses.

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