

# AAINews

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## Under the Bluest Sky of Zimbabwe

That endless, inviting blue sky was still there; the sky of Zimbabwe, which never fails to clear my mind. The source of the Zimbabwean's bottomless and timeless cheer must be this blue sky.

Last February I was given an opportunity to visit Zimbabwe for about two months, after an interval of one year away. This time I spent more than half of my visit going around the area surrounding the small asbestos mining town of Zvishavane, some seven hours travel by bus from the capital Harare.

Zvishavane, which belongs to the Natural Region IV-V, is a semi-arid zone with annual rainfalls of 400-500mm, which makes it one of the driest areas in Zimbabwe. Most of the people living in this area are engaged in cereal production and cattle farming, and they seldom get sufficient harvests as their agricultural activities are totally dependent on natural rainfalls. However, there are some people who have devised their own ways of securing and utilizing the scarce rainfall. Such diligent agriculturists, called 'Farmer Innovators' in the Zvishavane area, are managing their farming life in their own unique ways. Some of them have been doing so for decades. The scarcity of rainfall naturally means that there are various restrictions to their rainwater farming activities. But if the little rainwater can still be collected, reserved and utilized efficiently, it makes a significant difference in their agricultural productivity. It also frees women from the hard labor of carrying drinking water from wells several kilometers away. Although the term 'water harvest' is foreign to them, the Farmer Innovators are practicing it on their farms. Even the slightest rainfall upon their roofs is collected and stored in water tanks. Rainfall upon the ground is led into their fields through slopes or ditches. Creating shallow wells or small ground dams surrounded by mounds for rainwater storage keeps the ground moist at the same time. Such dams can also serve for fish farming, or for providing drinking water for cattle. With the water and moisture secured, it is possible to grow various plants and keep livestock, and to conduct organic farming without using chemical fertilizers. By storing and utilizing rainwater this way, the variety and productivity of the farmers' lives and natural environment can be enriched.

Some of the Farmer Innovators gained their agricultural techniques from what the Westerners had left behind, but there was nobody to instruct them or no textbooks to consult. Answering my question "Where have you got that idea from?" one farmer said to me, "It came from my need, my hunger and sense of crisis that I

must feed my family." People living in harsh climates or environments desperately seek ways for survival, and their needs may be the very source of their wisdom. The Farmer Innovators never hoard their own ideas, but have confidently been trying to spread their techniques, hoping that as many people can put their ideas into practice as possible. The only worrying thing is that most of these Farmer Innovators are elderly people while the number of young people is small.

Any way, the blue sky of Zimbabwe still finds children underneath, with their white teeth flashing in their full smiles.

(By Fuyuki KOJIMA, in Zimbabwe, June 1999)



**A 'Farmer Innovator' with  
his handmade water pump**