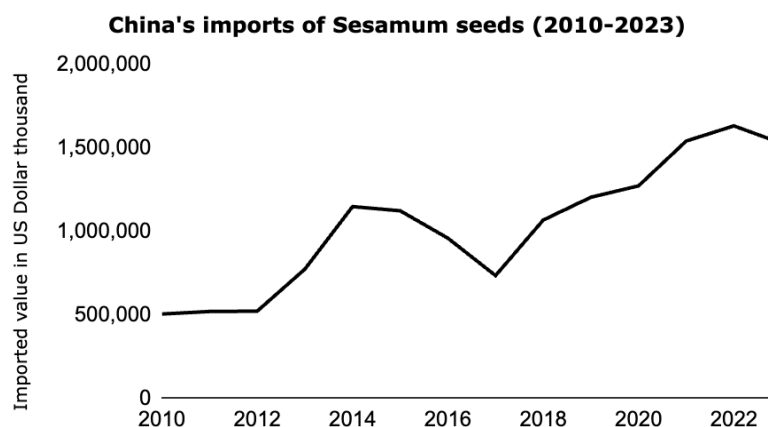


# China's Insatiable Demand for Sesame Seeds ( UGX 5.5 Trillion)

By  
**Aaron ECEL, Ph.D**  
 Department of International Business & Trade  
 Makerere University Business School, Kampala (UGANDA)

China's appetite for sesame seeds (colloquially known as 'simsim') has grown tremendously. In 2023, their imports were valued at \$1.5 billion (UGX 5.5 trillion), a staggering 203% increase from just \$500 million in 2010. As shown in Table I, the top suppliers are Niger (20.3%), Pakistan (19%), Tanzania (15.7%), Sudan (11.1%), and Mozambique (10%). Interestingly, Pakistan saw the fastest growth between 2019 and 2023, with imports surging by a remarkable 204%.



Source: International Trade Centre data / UNCOMTRADE statistics

**Table I showing China's imports of Sesame seeds**

Exporters	Value imported in 2023 (USD thousand)	Share in China's imports (%)	Quantity imported in 2023 (Tons)	Unit value (USD/unit)	Growth in imported value between 2019-2023 (% p.a.)	Growth in imported quantity between 2019-2023 (% p.a.)	Growth in imported value between 2022-2023 (% p.a.)
<b>World</b>	<b>1,527,605</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>912,815</b>	<b>1,674</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>	
1. Niger	309,515	20.3	192,530	1,608	11	6	-2
2. Pakistan	290,664	19	166,683	1,744	204	184	126
3. Tanzania	239,833	15.7	130,369	1,840	9	1	43
4. Sudan	169,905	11.1	104,439	1,627	-9	-12	-35
5. Mozambique	152,987	10	85,860	1,782	11	3	-11
6. Togo	143,451	9.4	91,464	1,568	-1	-3	-17
7. Myanmar	56,437	3.7	40,839	1,382	131	140	-61
8. Ethiopia	55,050	3.6	30,822	1,786	-25	-28	-57
9. Mali	27,646	1.8	16,867	1,639	-20	-24	-8
10. India	24,481	1.6	13,495	1,814	94	90	-37
11. Burkina Faso	21,587	1.4	13,336	1,619	296	277	-21
12. Bangladesh	10,671	0.7	9,660	1,105	6	12	41
13. Uganda	8,094	0.5	5,082	1,593	-8	-13	-55

Source: International Trade Centre data / UNCOMTRADE statistics

Uganda's sesame-seeds' exports to China have declined significantly in recent years, plummeting by 8% between 2019 and 2023 and a staggering 55% between 2022 and 2023. Despite possessing ideal growing conditions for sesame seeds, Uganda's share of China's lucrative sesame seeds' market remains below 1%.

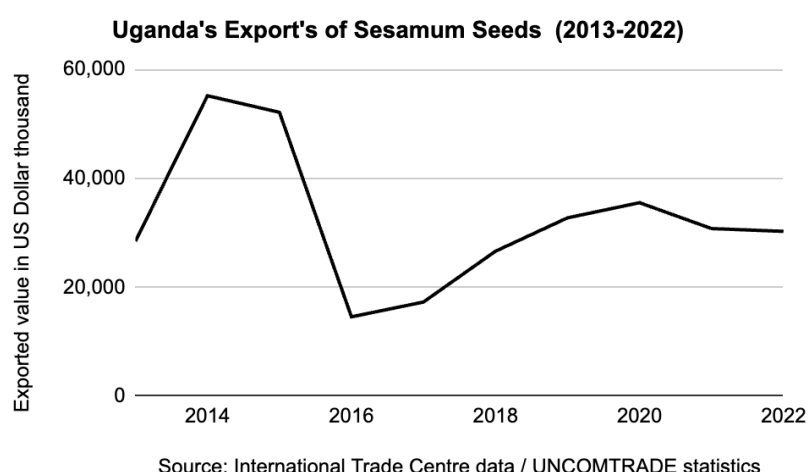


Table 3 highlights a substantial disparity between China's total sesame seeds' imports and the EAC's exports to the country, revealing significant untapped potential for the region. With a \$1.5 billion market for sesame seeds, the EAC is well-positioned to increase its export volume to China and capture a larger share of this lucrative market.

**Table 2: Uganda's Exports of Sesamum seeds, HS 120740 (2013-2022)**

Importers	Exported value in US Dollar thousand									
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
World	28,459	55,165	52,118	14,563	17,287	26,614	32,739	35,522	30,773	30,261
1. China	12,708	34,664	27,830	9,121	7,768	13,096	13,332	18,014	13,879	14,952
2. Netherlands	1,878	6,413	8,479	660	866	1,817	4,774	2,080	4,180	6,490
3. Germany	1,516	1,152	1,803	1,161	1,160	1,202	3,729	4,937	4,397	5,293
4. USA	-	-	-	-	-	-	118	350	160	1,211
5. Türkiye	1,839	2,240	791	602	1,719	3,819	3,926	4,409	2,809	701
6. Kenya	3,731	2,188	5,061	1,585	1,777	2,221	110	672	696	561

Source: International Trade Centre data / UNCOMTRADE statistics

Table 3 highlights a substantial disparity between China's total sesame seeds' imports and the EAC's exports to the country, revealing significant untapped potential for the region. With a \$1.5 billion market for sesame seeds, the EAC is well-positioned to increase its export volume to China and capture a larger share of this lucrative market.

**Table 3 showing the Existing and potential trade in Sesamum seeds between the EAC and China**

	Value in US Dollar thousand				
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
▪ The EAC's exports to China	165,085	144,779	141,026	133,305	196,242
▪ China's imports from world	1,203,987	1,272,440	1,541,153	1,631,958	1,527,605
▪ EAC's Market share (%)	13.7	11.4	9.2	8.2	12.8

Source: International Trade Centre data / UNCOMTRADE statistics

### Key Considerations for the Experts

1. What strategies can be implemented to significantly increase sesame seeds' production in Uganda, beyond the current output of 15,206 tons (2023), to meet the growing global demand, particularly from China?
2. How can sesame seeds' cultivation and trade be strategically integrated into Uganda's National Development Plan to maximize its contribution to economic growth, job creation?

3. What are the primary bottlenecks hindering the efficient production, processing, storage, and export of sesame seeds in Uganda, and what practical solutions can be proposed to address these challenges?
4. What are the key quality standards and certifications required by the Chinese market for sesame seeds, and how can Ugandan producers and exporters meet these requirements to gain a competitive edge?
5. How can partnerships between the government, private sector, and development partners be leveraged to build a sustainable and profitable sesame seeds' value chain in Uganda?

**END**