

Beyond the Fibre

Capturing cotton's full value in Africa



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Street address: ITC
54-56, rue de Montbrillant
1202 Geneva, Switzerland

Postal address: ITC
Palais des Nations
1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Telephone: +41 22 730 0111

E-mail: itcreg@intracen.org

Internet: www.intracen.org/publications

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About the paper

Cotton by-products – such as cottonseed oil and oilcakes – can contribute meaningfully to reducing poverty, creating jobs and increasing economic growth in Africa. These derivatives can represent up to 30% of the value of seed cotton. Yet oil and cakes have not been fully exploited, despite a potential of 400,000 tons of oil and 500,000 tons of protein – vital for the growing livestock industry. Stalks and other by-products have also been neglected.

This paper explores ways of capturing the full value of cotton in Africa. It illustrates the benefits of a more systematic way of exploiting the substantial untapped potential of cotton by-products.

Publisher: International Trade Centre

Title: Beyond the Fibre: Capturing cotton's full value in Africa

Publication date and place: Geneva, December 2020

Page count: 54

Language: English

ITC Document Number: SEC-20-56.E

Citation International Trade Center (2020). *Beyond the Fibre: Capturing cotton's full value in Africa*. ITC, Geneva.

For more information, contact: Matthias Knappe, knappe@intracen.org

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Foreword

Cotton is a strategic crop for many African economies, generating income and employment for millions of rural families, as well as export revenues for producing countries. Cotton is grown mainly for its fibre, the raw material to manufacture textiles and apparel.

Faced with low margins, high volatility in seed cotton prices and weather risks, farmers switch to and from cotton, depending on the previous season's price relative to other crops.

To grow cotton sustainably, farmers need year-round, income-generating opportunities. For example, they can use cotton fibre for hand-spun yarn, weaving it into fabrics they can use themselves, and also sell in domestic, regional and international markets. They can also add value to products stemming from the plant and the seeds, referred to as cotton by-products.

However, cotton stakeholders in Africa – from farmers to ginneries to regulatory bodies – lack vital information on ways to add value to parts of the cotton plant other than the fibre.

This publication provides an overview of uses for cotton by-products in Africa. It offers recommendations for cotton stakeholders, starting with farmers, to benefit from more systematic use of cotton by-products.

For example cotton plant biomass (mainly stalks) can be used instead of firewood, reducing deforestation. Cottonseed oil, oilcakes and meals have many uses.

In many African countries, the price farmers receive for their product, called seedcotton, is based on the fibre's value. With an increased value of the seeds, farmers could capture this value for an overall higher price.

There are activities that can raise value, boost awareness among private and public stakeholders, and increase transparency in the cotton sector. Financial and technical assistance from funders and partners is needed to promote this value addition. Support for businesses that process by-products is essential, along with building capacity to set up industry clusters and encourage South-South cooperation.

This report forms part of the International Trade Centre's contribution to the cotton by-product value addition in partnership with the WTO and UNCTAD. The initiative is a direct response to a request from the Cotton Four – Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali – and other African countries. The paper also underscores the International Trade Centre's close engagement with the Cotton Four and its goals to develop cotton in Africa.



Pamela Coke-Hamilton
Executive Director
International Trade Centre

Acknowledgements

ITC commissioned this report as part of its joint initiative with the World Trade Organization and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development to support the development of cotton by-products in Africa.

Gérald Estur, International Consultant, wrote this publication under the supervision of Matthias Knappe, Senior Officer and Programme Manager, Fibres, Textiles and Clothing (ITC).

We are grateful to the industry stakeholders, South-South cooperation partners in India and Turkey, and farmers and entrepreneurs in Africa and India who shared their experiences and lessons learned.

Special thanks go to Keshav Kranthi, Head of the Technical Information Section at the International Cotton Advisory Committee; Kris Terauds, Economist at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, for involving ITC in some activities related to its Promoting Cotton By-products in Eastern and Southern Africa project; and P.G. Patel, Director of the Central Institute for Research on Cotton Technology in India, with whom ITC has a long-standing collaboration on cotton development in Africa.

Jayna Kika, Senior Programme Assistant for Fibres, Textiles and Clothing (ITC), and Mariana Tavares, International Consultant (ITC), reviewed the paper in its final stages.

We would also like to thank Natalie Domeisen and Anne Griffin (both ITC), who oversaw the editing and production process; Jennifer Freedman, who edited the report; and Franco Iacovino (ITC), who provided graphic and printing support.

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