

Cotton value chain revival on right track

By Evaline Namuwaya

Incomes for cotton farmers in Uganda are set to increase following the launch of a cotton value addition project.

The project seeks to develop the use of cotton by-products sub-sector through training and equipping farmers to fully exploit them.

Uganda is among the four African countries to benefit from the training that will equip cotton farmers with skills to explore the various economic opportunities in the cotton value chain.

The other countries are Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

According to Frederick Lugojja, the Market Information and Monitoring officer at the Cotton Development Organisation, the crop has two major components – lint and cottonseed.

Lint is transformed by the textile industry into yarn, textiles, garments and apparel, as well as into absorbent cotton wool.

Meanwhile, cotton seed is a by-product that can be transformed into four major products – edible oil, cotton seed cake, soap stock and cotton husks. Stalks are another cotton by-product which are rarely transformed, but rather used as wood fuel or burnt in the field to control pests.

However, most Ugandan farmers concentrate on the low-income generating lint.

Yanchun Zhang, the chief of commodity policy implementation and outreach section at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, said supporting the development of the cotton by-products sector has several benefits, including increased returns, employment and



A farmer in his cotton garden in Pader district

improved and stable farm gate prices.

Zhang told a consultative meeting in Kampala recently that creating a vibrant cotton by-products sector would reduce the high turnover caused by seasonality of producing the crop, promote import substitution and provide additional income for rural households.

Reducing figures

While cotton is still a strategic crop in Africa, especially for countries in Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA), production had dwindled in recent years, partly because of declining returns.

Zhang said enhancing cotton production would revive the cotton value chain in the four countries and the ESA region.

The executive director of cotton Development Organisation, Jolly Sabine, said with new technology being

developed at the Uganda Industrial Research Institute, the country would be able to meet the domestic market demand of cotton wool.

She said domestic demand for cotton wool was large, with main buyers and distributors being National Medical Stores and Joint Medical Stores.

BETWEEN THE LINES

■ The value addition of Cotton by-products in Eastern and Southern Africa project is being implemented by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in partnership with the UN Economic Commission for Africa and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa.

Sabine said existing local companies had the capacity to produce all the cotton wool

needed in Uganda if barriers related to the development of by-products were addressed.

Judith Agom, a leader in one of the women farmers' groups in Alebtong district, applauded the project funders, saying that the training would help them increase their incomes.

Alberto Ochom from west Acholi said many of his group members were contemplating quitting cotton farming due to the price fluctuations.

"We have been selling raw cotton and had no idea of any other product that can be got from it. I believe if we are well-trained on how to use by-products to provide an additional revenue stream, it will attract more farmers into the business," he said.

Uganda's cotton production fell over the past three decades. Production stood at 406,900 bales in 2015. Earnings have also fallen from \$85m in 2011 to \$31m in 2016.