Seminar 1A: Expanding the Foundation for Cotton Production in Africa
21 October 2015, Azum Room in the Millennium Hall Conference Center, Addis Ababa

According to International Cotton Advisory Committee [ICAC], World cotton area in 2015/16 is projected down 6% to 31.3 million hectares, due largely to lower prices in 2014/15. In the face of the prevailing global cotton dynamics, Africa is still faced with the challenge of improving Cotton Production and Productivity and to ensure that cotton farmers remain motivated to grow cotton. This seminar highlighted various cotton production initiatives being undertaken across the region and their impact in addressing the existing challenges.

Session Chair: Jolly Sabune, Managing Director of the Cotton Development Organization, Uganda
Moderator: Terry Townsend, former Executive Director of the International Cotton Advisory Committee

Speakers:
Joseph Nkole, Board Secretary, Cotton Association of Zambia
Nick Earlam, Managing Director, Plexus Cotton Ltd.
Christoph Kaut, Managing Director, Aid by Trade Foundation/Cotton Made in Africa
Natalia Voruz, Commercial Lead West Africa at Monsanto Company

Summary:

World production of cotton fiber reached 26 million metric tons in the most recent season, and Africa accounted for 1.6 million of the total, or 6%. Cotton production across Africa was no higher in 2014/15 than it had been a decade earlier, despite receiving hundreds of millions of dollars of support since 2004 from multilateral agencies, bilateral aid projects and private sector initiatives in response to the Sectoral Initiative on Cotton under the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Joseph Nkole reported on the work of the Cotton Association of Zambia (CAZ) in training farmers, encouraging production of higher quality clean cotton, empowering women and ensuring contract enforcement. He noted that enter-exit-and re-enter the cotton sector from one season to the next depending on relative crop prices, preferences and input availability, thus inhibiting efforts at long term skills upgradation. He noted that 400,000 households produce cotton in Zambia, making farmer outreach and communication very difficult.

Nick Earlam emphasized the need to protect investors by ensuring contract compliance. He noted that long term development of cotton production requires patient capital investment, which simply will not materialize in an environment in which investors are scapegoated and farmers are encouraged not to fulfill commitments. Nick encouraged the development of cooperative farming models oriented around large demonstration farms as a means of facilitating enhanced productivity and greater farmer incomes.

Christoph Kaut reported on the ten-year history of Cotton made in Africa (CmiA). In the most recent season, 770,000 farmers in eleven countries representing approximately one-third of small holder cotton production in African were CmiA verified, with farmers experiencing increased yields, lower input use and consequently higher incomes. Christoph reported on progress in developing the cotton value chain in Africa beyond farm production, with several spinning, knitting and printing operations now working within the CmiA system in five African countries.

Natalia Voruz reported on the current level of adoption of biotechnology in Africa, including countries now completing regulatory protocols preparatory to commercial adoption, Nigeria, Kenya, Malawi and Ghana, and countries that are now starting the process of developing biotech regulatory systems to allow for future adoption, Mozambique, Togo and Ethiopia. She noted that, while yield increases had been reported, the reduction in applications of insecticides and concomitant reductions in labor engaged in spraying activities were the chief benefits to farmers of utilization of biotech events in cotton. The technology fee for biotech events in Burkina Faso ranged between US$30 and $39 per hectare between 2010 and 2014, while farmer benefits in the form of reduced insecticide applications ranged between $67 and $138 per hectare, depending on cotton prices and insect pressure each season. In addition, the number of cases of poisoning associated with cotton production had dropped from 80 to 32 per year, out of a population of 350,000 households.

Biotechnology events in cotton can increase the competitiveness of cotton relative to other crops grown by farmers and relative to polyester. However, there were concerns raised about negative impacts of biotechnology on fiber quality. Ms. Voruz emphasized that adoption decisions are being made on a country-by-country basis depending on local conditions.

In conclusion, Jolly Sabune noted that technology adoption, input supply and capital investments were all needed if cotton production in Africa is to rise substantially from its current level. She emphasized that farmers need to receive remunerative prices if their interest in cotton is to be maintained, and she noted that CmiA served as a workable model of successful cotton development that will hopefully continue to expand and involve more farmers in more countries.