



COTTON

Review of the World Situation



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Special Report
World Cotton Day 2025 —
Celebration held at FAO
Headquarters, Rome, Italy
October 7, 2025

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ABOUT US

International Cotton Advisory Committee

The International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC) is an organization of member countries that share an interest in cotton and the textile value chain. Formed in 1939, it is the only intergovernmental body for cotton producing, consuming, and trading countries and is one of only seven International Commodity Bodies recognized by the United Nations.

ICAC acts as a catalyst for positive change in the cotton and textile value chain by helping member countries and stakeholders support and improve the global cotton economy. ICAC accomplishes its mission by providing transparency to the world cotton market by serving as a clearinghouse for technical information and analysis on cotton production, consumption, and trade and by serving as a forum for discussing and addressing issues of international significance.



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Special Report: World Cotton Day 2025

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Background

World Cotton Day (recognized annually on October 7) was launched in 2019 at World Trade Organization headquarters, where more than 700 people gathered for the inaugural celebration. In August 2021 — less than two years after it was launched — the United Nations reserved October 7 as World Cotton Day on its permanent calendar, as recognition of cotton's status as a global good. The conference has been held every year since the inaugural event in 2019, with the 2024 event in Cotonou, Benin, registering multiple “firsts”:

First time the conference was held in a country rather than at an international organization,

First time it was held in the Global South, and

First time World Cotton Day activities were held on multiple days (business forum and industrial park visit on October 8).

To see what types of events have been held around the world on October 7, please visit www.worldcottonday.com.

Opening Session

World Cotton Day 2025 marked the sixth global edition of the celebration, building on previous gatherings held in Geneva (2019), Rome (2022), Vienna (2023), and Cotonou, Benin (2024). Each of these milestones reflected the growing recognition of cotton as a driver of sustainable development, innovation, poverty alleviation, and inclusion. The 2025 celebration in Rome — hosted once again at the headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) — reaffirmed the collective commitment to the world's most important natural fiber, underscoring its potential to connect farmers, industries, and consumers in the pursuit of shared prosperity and environmental health.

The event — co-organized by the Government of Chad and the International Trade Centre (ITC) — brought together ministers, ambassadors, representatives of international organizations, and private-sector partners from across the cotton value chain. Interpretation in the six official UN languages allowed broad participation both in person and online, reflecting the inclusive spirit that has defined World Cotton Day since its inception.

The celebration began with a short film tracing cotton's journey from cultivation to



manufacturing, illustrating how a single fiber connects agriculture, industry, and consumers across the world. The film set the tone for the day's discussions, emphasizing cotton's versatility, the millions of livelihoods it sustains, and the growing importance of resilience and sustainability in global value chains.

Welcoming participants on behalf of FAO, Mr. Máximo Torero Cullen, Chief Economist, underlined that cotton is more than an agricultural commodity; it is a cornerstone of rural transformation. He recalled that the sector provides income and employment for hundreds of millions of people worldwide, often in regions where few — if any — other crops can thrive. Building resilience and enhancing value addition, he stressed, are not only economic priorities but social imperatives that contribute directly to poverty reduction and inclusive growth.

In a recorded message, FAO Director-General Dr. Qu Dongyu reinforced his organization's long-standing engagement with the cotton sector. He described cotton as integral to FAO's mandate and aligned with its “four betters”:

1. Better production,
2. Better nutrition,
3. A better environment, and
4. A better life.



Highlighting initiatives such as the +Cotton Project and the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, he reaffirmed FAO's support for member countries' efforts to strengthen sustainable cotton systems and integrate smallholders into markets.

Representing the host country for this year's edition, H.E. Guibolo Fanga Mathieu, Minister of Commerce and Industry of Chad, spoke of the crop's economic and cultural importance for his country. Cotton, he said, remains a pillar of national development and a source of livelihood for hundreds of thousands of rural families. The Minister underscored Chad's commitment to modernization through technology, improved seed systems, and climate-resilient practices that would enable the sector to continue driving growth and stability. His remarks also reflected the solidarity among African producers who view cotton as a shared regional asset.

Following the minister's intervention, Ms. Dorothy Tembo, Deputy Executive Director of the International Trade Centre (ITC), provided a global perspective on the cotton economy. She highlighted the success of ITC programs promoting climate-smart cultivation and smallholder inclusion, noting that productivity gains must be accompanied by local processing and entrepreneurship. She encouraged African countries to leverage the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to strengthen intra-African trade and create new market opportunities.

The opening session established a unified message: the cotton sector's future depends on innovation, cooperation, and inclusiveness. Cotton was presented as both an eco-



economic driver and a cultural connector, a fiber that sustains livelihoods, inspires creativity, and fosters global partnerships.

Country Statements

The next session brought together high-level representatives from key cotton-producing countries to share national experiences and priorities. Their interventions provided a global panorama of the sector's diversity and the common challenges uniting producers across regions.

Chad opened the dialogue by outlining its Vision 2030 strategy, which positions cotton as a cornerstone of national diversification efforts. The government is prioritizing



the development of improved seed systems, investment in irrigation, and partnerships with research institutions to enhance productivity and quality. Cotton, they stressed, is not only an export commodity but a foundation for industrial growth and community well-being.

Speaking on behalf of the Cotton-4+ group (Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Mali, joined by Côte d'Ivoire), Mali's Minister of Industry and Trade, H.E. Moussa Alassane Diallo, reiterated the C4+ commitment to fair and transparent trade. He recalled the long-standing dialogue within the World Trade Organization on reducing trade-distorting subsidies and called for translating political commitments into practical outcomes. His intervention underscored that for African producers, the cotton dossier is not merely technical, it is a matter of economic justice and development equity.

Benin's representative, Dr. Gomina Mama Fousseni, highlighted the progress achieved in national processing capacity and regional

cooperation. He spoke about programs supporting small producers, improving access to inputs, and stimulating the growth of local textile industries. Benin's strategy places people at the center of the cotton economy, viewing the sector as a bridge between rural development and industrial transformation.

Ambassador Carla Barroso Carneiro, Permanent Representative of Brazil to FAO, described his country's journey toward sustainability. More than 90 percent of Brazil's cotton is now certified under the Responsible Brazilian Cotton (ABR) program, aligned with Better Cotton standards. The ambassador explained that the sector's success rests on strong environmental safeguards, zero tolerance for child or forced labor, and continuous investment in innovation. She also underlined Brazil's role in South-South cooperation, sharing expertise with over twenty partner countries to help strengthen cotton value chains.

Ambassador Vani Sarraju Rao, Permanent Representative of India to FAO, presented a comprehensive overview of India's cotton sector, which combines a rich historical legacy with ambitious modernization plans. National programs such as the Mega Investment Textile Parks and the Kasturi Cotton Bharat branding initiative seek to enhance



traceability, promote organic and sustainable production, and strengthen India's position as a global textile leader. Her intervention highlighted cotton's enduring role in India's identity, culture, and economy.

Representing the European Union, Ms. Annette Schneegans, Deputy Permanent Representative to FAO, described the EU's commitment to promoting sustainability and transparency in global value chains. She noted that while cotton cultivation in Europe is limited, the region's role as a major textile importer carries significant responsibility. EU-funded projects across Africa are supporting organic and regenerative practices, improving traceability systems, and addressing child and forced labor through the CLEAR Cotton program. These initiatives reflect the EU's broader transition toward circular and sustainable textiles, reinforcing global demand for responsibly produced cotton.



Taken together, the national interventions demonstrated how countries at different stages of development share a common vision: to strengthen sustainability, inclusiveness, and value addition across the cotton value chain. Despite differences in geography and scale, all reaffirmed that cotton remains a vital source of income, employment, and opportunity, a crop with the potential to deliver tangible progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals.

African Cotton, Fashion, and the Next Generation

The midday session brought renewed energy and a different lens to the cotton story, focusing on culture, design, and education. Moving from trade and policy to creativity and identity, the session demonstrated how the cotton sector can inspire innovation across generations and continents. It was jointly organized by FAO and the Accademia Costume & Moda of Rome in collaboration with UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for African Innovation and Creativity, Mr. Sidahmed Alphadi Seidnaly, bringing together voices from education, fashion, and development.



Moderated by Ms. Kimberly Sullivan, the session explored how design and creative industries can support value addition while giving visibility to African cotton. Around the hall, an exhibition showcased garments produced by students of the Accademia as part of a two-day masterclass led by Alphadi and the Academy's President, Mr. Andrea Lupo Lanzara. The initiative combined African cotton fabrics and artisanal techniques with Italian craftsmanship, illustrating the transformative potential of cross-cultural collaboration.



Mr. Lanzara introduced the Academy's long-standing commitment to sustainability in fashion and education. He explained that the institution's partnerships with more than 160 Italian manufacturers allow students to experience the entire production process, from design to ethical manufacturing, while integrating new materials and approaches that respect both the environment and cultural heritage. For him, the collaboration with FAO and African cotton-producing countries offered students a rare opportunity to connect creativity with global development goals.

Mr. Alphadi followed with a passionate reflection on the need to transform Africa's raw materials into finished goods within the continent. He observed that while Africa grows a substantial share of the world's cot-

ton, most of it is exported before it can generate local jobs or inspire local industries. Education, he argued, is central to changing that reality. By training young designers and technicians, and by strengthening regional textile industries, Africa can not only produce but also design, brand, and export fashion "made in Africa." Alphadi's message resonated deeply with the audience: true sustainability requires both self-reliance and creativity.

The garments displayed around the conference room were tangible expressions of that vision. The students' designs reflected a meeting of worlds, African textures reimaged through Italian tailoring, indigo-dyed fabrics from Mali paired with minimalist silhouettes, and handwoven cotton from Benin transformed into contemporary ready-to-wear collections. Each piece told a story of cultural exchange, of heritage meeting modernity.

As participants toured the exhibit, the link between agriculture and artistry became clear: every roll of fabric had begun in a farmer's field. The session showed how cotton, beyond being a commodity, could serve as a bridge between producers, artisans, and consumers, uniting different sectors through shared values of sustainability and creativity.



In his closing remarks, Alphadi called for continued collaboration between African and European institutions to expand training opportunities and support creative entrepreneurship across the cotton value chain. His appeal underlined that cultural industries are not peripheral to cotton's future, they are essential for redefining the fiber's global image and increasing its value.

The session closed with renewed recognition that education, design, and cultural exchange are vital components of a sustainable cotton economy. Together they ensure that the story of cotton includes not only production and trade, but also creativity, identity, and the aspirations of new generations.

High-Level Panel on Cotton Value Addition

The afternoon session brought the focus back to policy, investment, and industrialization with a High-Level Panel on Cotton Value Addition, moderated by Mr. Frank Van Rompaey, UNIDO Representative in Geneva. The panel gathered senior representatives from international organizations to discuss how the cotton sector can capture greater value within producing countries through innovation, partnerships, and sustainable industrial development.

The conversation opened with Mr. Jean-Marie Paugam, Deputy Director-General of the World Trade Organization (WTO), who emphasized the need for fairer market conditions and stronger global partnerships. He reaffirmed the WTO's ongoing engagement with cotton through trade negotiations, technical assistance, and investment facilitation. Paugam also recalled the Partnership for Cotton, launched at the Thirteenth WTO



Ministerial Conference in Abu Dhabi, as a collective platform bringing together agencies to mobilize resources for cotton-producing countries and enhance competitiveness across the value chain.

Building on this perspective, ITC's Ms. Dorothy Tembo highlighted the crucial role of small and medium enterprises in value addition. She noted that productivity gains alone are not enough; competitiveness requires coherent trade policies, skills development, and access to information on sustainability standards and market requirements. Tembo encouraged African producers to capitalize on the opportunities offered by the African Continental Free Trade Area, which can help integrate cotton production, processing, and trade across regions.

From the perspective of agricultural development, FAO's Mr. Máximo Torero Cullen discussed the link between productivity, sustainability, and industrial growth. He underlined that adopting climate-smart practices, such as integrated pest management and efficient irrigation, enhances both resilience



trade, labor, and industrial policy. Together, the speakers painted a picture of a sector in transformation: one that can deliver prosperity when economic, social, and environmental dimensions are advanced in tandem.

Technical Session: Partnerships and Local Perspectives

The afternoon technical session focused on strengthening the links between cotton production, textile manufacturing, and apparel trade under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Moderated by Mr. Matthias Knappe, Head of Fibres, Textiles and Clothing Unit at ITC, the discussion examined how regional integration, private-sector partnerships, and investment in value addition can help African countries capture more benefits from their cotton sectors.

Mr. Ody Ahanoba, Director of SME Development at Afreximbank (virtual), opened the session by presenting the Bank's initiatives to promote regional industrialization through trade finance and investment facilitation. He outlined how Afreximbank's programs support textile and apparel enterprises, including facilities to finance working capital, modernize equipment, and encourage cross-border trade in finished cotton goods. He emphasized that access to finance

remains a major constraint and called for stronger cooperation among financial institutions, governments, and private investors to scale up production capacity in Africa.

From the manufacturing side, Mr. Matteo Marchi and Ms. Giulia Nani of Würth Modyf, Italy, offered a European industry perspective on sustainable sourcing and design innovation. They described how partnerships with African suppliers can integrate local cotton into high-quality apparel manufacturing. They underlined the importance of quality standards, logistics, and transparency in supply chains, noting that traceability is increasingly required by consumers and corporate buyers alike.



Ms. Lisa Barratt, Senior Operations Manager for Africa at Better Cotton, discussed the organization's ongoing work to promote responsible production and connect farmers with international markets. She highlighted how Better Cotton's field-level programs in Africa are helping producers meet sustainability standards that improve access to global buyers. Ms. Barratt noted that the AfCFTA offers an opportunity to strengthen regional value chains, as countries can trade semi-finished goods and apparel within the continent while aligning with environmental and social criteria.

Ms. Rasha Fahim, Executive Director of the Textile Export Council of Egypt (TEC), emphasized the importance of regional trade cooperation and infrastructure in linking African cotton producers with textile manufacturers. She presented Egypt's experience in modernizing its textile sector and attracting investment through industrial zones and export promotion schemes. Ms. Fahim underlined that African countries can learn from one another's experiences to develop a competitive and interconnected regional textile industry.

Mr. Ibrahim Malloum, Vice President of Cotontchad and Past President of the African Cotton Association, shared a pri-

vate-sector view from one of Africa's leading cotton-exporting countries. He stressed that while Africa produces significant volumes of cotton, most of it still leaves the continent as raw fiber. Encouraging investment in spinning and weaving mills, he said, is essential to keep value at origin. He called for harmonized policies under the AfCFTA to facilitate movement of goods, inputs, and skilled labor across borders.

Mr. Marco Egida, Chief Executive Officer of MTG Italy, spoke about technological innovation in textile machinery and the opportunities it creates for industrial upgrading in Africa. He noted that modernizing equipment can significantly improve efficiency and product quality, allowing African textile firms to meet international standards and diversify exports.

Concluding the panel, Mr. Hibret Lemma, CEO of the Hawassa Industrial Park Investors Association (HIPIA) in Ethiopia, presented Ethiopia's experience in developing integrated industrial parks dedicated to textile and apparel production. He highlighted how infrastructure, public-private dialogue, and investment incentives have supported job creation and export growth. Mr. Lemma encouraged replication of similar industrial models across the continent, emphasizing that African cotton can be transformed into globally competitive apparel if supported by coherent trade and industrial policies.

The session's discussions underscored that the AfCFTA is not only a trade framework, but a catalyst for industrial cooperation. Speakers agreed that connecting cotton to apparel through regional value chains requires three essential conditions: access to





finance, competitive logistics, and investment in skills and technology. Participants emphasized that the success of Africa's cotton sector depends on turning its comparative advantage in raw fiber into a competitive advantage in finished products.

Cotton Perspectives: Local Transformation in C4+ Countries

Following the technical discussions, the session on Cotton Perspectives: Local Cotton Transformation in C4+ Countries turned attention to community-level initiatives and the creative industries driving local value addition. Moderated by Ms. Marie Van Eersel of the Ethical Fashion Initiative, the session featured voices from Benin and Burkina Faso showcasing how small enterprises, artisans, and designers are contributing to the transformation of Africa's cotton story.

Ms. Christine Mintri, an artisan spinner from Benin, described her work promoting locally spun and woven cotton. She explained how small-scale producers, particularly women, are playing a crucial role in preserving traditional textile techniques while adapting them to modern markets. She stressed that investing in artisanal value chains not only generates income for rural communities but also strengthens cultural heritage and identity. Ms. Mintri noted that initiatives such as ITC's Ethical Fashion Initiative and FAO's +Cotton Project are helping artisans improve product quality and reach new markets.

Representing Burkina Faso, Mr. Jean Pierre Guinko, Permanent Secretary of the Liberalized Cotton Sector, discussed efforts to increase domestic processing and strengthen producer organizations. He highlighted new public-private partnerships that are creating jobs in ginning, spinning, and weaving, and emphasized that small-scale processing facilities can complement large industrial investments. Mr. Guinko also pointed to regional collaboration among the C4+ countries as a foundation for scaling up transformation efforts and promoting African cotton under a shared regional identity.





Ms. Rolande Chrystelle Bapina, fashion designer and founder of GAINGA in Burkina Faso, brought the perspective of the creative sector. She showcased how African designers are using local cotton fabrics to create contemporary collections that resonate both regionally and internationally. Ms. Bapina underscored the potential of fashion as an engine for value addition and youth employment, particularly for women entrepreneurs. She called for stronger collaboration between producers, designers, and industry associations to promote “Made in Africa” brands and strengthen the visibility of African cotton in global markets.

This session highlighted that transformation begins at the local level — through creativity, entrepreneurship, and community participation. The experiences shared demonstrated that cotton is not only a commodity but a source of inspiration, innovation, and identity. Participants agreed that empowering small producers and artisans complements industrial strategies, ensuring that the benefits of the cotton value chain reach all levels of society.

Key Messages and Closing Reflections

The celebration concluded with a synthesis of insights and priorities that emerged throughout the day, connecting global perspectives with local realities. Across all sessions, from trade and finance to fashion and community innovation, participants reaffirmed that cotton’s enduring strength lies in its versatility, its people, and its potential to drive inclusive growth.

A shared understanding emerged that Africa’s cotton future depends on linking production to processing and trade through the opportunities created by AfCFTA. Industrial partnerships, efficient logistics, and regional value chains were identified as key levers to convert Africa’s natural comparative advantage in cotton into a competitive advantage in textiles and apparel.

Speakers also emphasized that local transformation and creative entrepreneurship are essential complements to industrialization. Artisans, women entrepreneurs, and designers are bringing cultural and economic value to cotton by connecting it to fashion, heritage, and identity. Strengthening these community-based initiatives ensures that transformation is inclusive and that benefits reach rural and urban actors alike.



From these discussions, several key messages emerged:

- **Sustainability and Climate Resilience:** Cotton must continue evolving toward climate-smart and regenerative production systems that safeguard resources and improve farmer livelihoods.
- **Value Addition and Trade Integration:** Building spinning, weaving, and apparel manufacturing within Africa is vital to capture value at origin. AfCFTA provides a framework for regional trade and industrial cooperation.
- **Finance, Logistics, and Skills:** Access to finance, efficient infrastructure, and technical training remain the three most significant bottlenecks to competitiveness. Addressing them collectively will be central to the Partnership for Cotton's 2026 agenda.
- **Innovation and Technology:** Modernizing equipment and adopting advanced production methods can raise productivity and help African cotton meet international standards.
- **Cultural and Creative Industries:** Local craftsmanship, design, and youth entrepreneurship contribute to diversification, job creation, and social inclusion.
- **Social Responsibility:** Upholding labor rights, gender equality, and fair working conditions remain essential for sustainable sectoral growth.
- **Global Partnership:** Coordination among FAO, ITC, WTO, UNIDO, ILO, IAEA, ICAC, and national governments continues to be fundamental for coherent and effective cotton development support.

As the event drew to a close, participants agreed that the 2025 celebration in Rome had reconnected every link in the cotton chain

— from farmers and financiers to spinners, designers, and policymakers. It reaffirmed that cotton is not only an agricultural product or an industrial input, but a fiber that weaves together communities, cultures, and economies.

Looking ahead, the outcomes of World Cotton Day 2025 will guide ongoing collaboration under the Partnership for Cotton and inspire joint efforts in 2026 to address the sector's key bottlenecks and expand opportunities for sustainable transformation.

In every sense, cotton remains and will continue to be the fabric of our lives.

