

African cotton sector to receive assistance from India

THE AFRICAN COTTON sector, which was ravaged by problems last year, is set to receive aid from India to recover from the crisis.

India has launched a US\$4.66mn programme to develop the cotton industry across the African continent.

The plan will initially cover seven countries across the continent. SK Makhijani, economic counsellor in the Indian High Commission in Abuja, Nigeria, told *IANS*.

The seven countries are Benin, Nigeria, Chad, Burkina Faso, Mali, Malawi and Uganda, Makhijani said, adding, "The entire project is valued at US\$4.66mn and it covers the period from January 2012 to December 2014."

Experts claim African producers have not been able to improve their production over the past few decades. Alejandro Plastin, an economist of the International Cotton Advisory Council (ICAC), said African cotton production declined from a peak of two million tonnes in 2004-05 to just a million tonne in the three seasons up to last year.

"African cotton accounted for seven per cent of world cotton production at its peak, while it accounts for only five per cent now," added Plastin. Notwithstanding the low production, he said,

"African cotton is perceived to be of higher quality than cotton from many competing origins and to have fewer neps because of hand picking. However, African cotton has a strongly negative perception for contamination and delays in delivery linked to poor roads, railroads and ports.

"Furthermore, most African cotton is still hand-classed, while competing exporters make full use of high volume instruments. However, the greatest challenge for African cotton is its declining international competitiveness due to declining yields," Plastin said.

Despite the increase in production observed over the last three decades, the total area under production globally always fluctuated around 33mn hectares.

"Consequently, increase in production was driven by increase in yields. In particular, increases in yields from the 1990s to the 2000s were driven by the adoption of better production practices around the globe and adoption of biotechnology in major producing countries. This is what kept Africa's production very low because it had not been able to keep up with the



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changes in the sector," Plastin added.

Last year, Payhounni Bebnone, vice president of the African Producers of Cotton Association (AProCA), said in a meeting of the Africa cotton producers in Cotonou, Benin, that the industry across the continent was "facing many different challenges. Efforts in some countries to find solutions have rather contributed to worsening of the situation." He identified access to land for production as one of the main problems. "Most of the land was leased and there was insecurity to tenure. This has affected programmes to promote better farming practices," Bebnone said.

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