

Uzbekistan: Sustainability and Value Added in the Cotton Economy

Part of the Global Programme “Sustainability and Value Added in Agricultural Supply Chains”

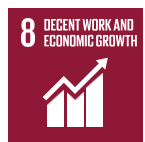
The global programme promotes sustainability in agricultural supply chains. It aims to make these fair, sustainable, and free of deforestation. For this sake, the programme cooperates with market drivers mainly in cotton, coffee, cocoa, natural rubber, palm oil and soy supply chains. Together with global companies, international standards organisations and national partners it implements project activities in several partner countries worldwide).

The challenge

Uzbekistan ranks among the world’s largest cotton producers, cultivating more than three million tons annually across approximately one million hectares. Consequently, cotton is crucial for the nation’s economic and social progress, as it employs a large part of the workforce and contributes about 18 per cent to the gross domestic product (GDP).

However, years of extensive cultivation have led to various social, environmental, and economic challenges. These include large-scale farming of the same crops, expanding farm sizes, unstable crop prices, forced and child labour, poor soil health, and water overuse in regions already scarce in this resource. These mistakes in farming methods have promoted climate change, increased the risk of social conflicts and directed Uzbek cotton to markets with low claims on sustainability and responsible production, hindering any change towards the better.

Title	Sustainability and Value Added in the Cotton Economy in Uzbekistan
Financed by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Implemented by	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)
Regions	Tashkent region, Samarkand, Navoi, Jizzakh, Ferghana Valley, Bukhara
Partners	Ministry of Agriculture, Uzbekistan; Textile Association Uztextilprom
Duration	September 2019 - March 2025



The global programme is part of the BMZ’s special initiative “Transformation of Agricultural and Food Systems” (SI AGER). The special initiative helps strengthen rural development, which is also the basis of food security, by:

- contributing to global structural policy at the multilateral and international level;
- promoting gender equality;
- developing and piloting innovative approaches and promoting applied research and integrating the special initiative into existing cooperation with partner countries - to foster the development of sustainable agricultural and food systems even more.

The programme will contribute to achieving the sustainable development goals on the right.





Following a change in government in 2016, authorities initiated a complex and ambitious reform plan aimed at improving social and environmental practices within the cotton industry - from production to the final product.

These reforms strive to prepare the industry for new market exports and to generate new employment opportunities. As a positive result, independent third-party monitoring by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) confirmed that systemic child labour as well as forced labour have been eradicated during cotton harvests. Nevertheless, challenges remain. One of them is adhering to international environmental and social standards.

Our approach

The GIZ project supports this process in cooperation with partners from civil society, the economic sector and state ministries. The project is a multidimensional programme that aims to promote sustainable progress in the social, environmental, and economic aspects of the cotton and textile economy in Uzbekistan. It provides support to its local partners in three overlapping areas:

1. **Primary cotton production:** Increasing the proportion of sustainable cotton cultivation.
2. **Local processing in textile clusters:** Improved working conditions (“decent jobs”) along the entire value chain.
3. **Integration of the Uzbek cotton and textile sector in international trade:** promoting Uzbekistan’s export potential and helps achieve internationally recognised quality and environmental standards.

Workshops on sustainable cultivation methods, better working conditions, and employee rights, directly address decision makers and those affected by the sector. Internationally recognised certifications and standards, both environmental and social, leverage access to new and more sustainable markets.

The introduction of innovative technologies (e.g., digital methods) to improve irrigation systems, soil and field analysis, and pest monitoring simplifies field work, protects the environment, and improves fibre quality.

Likewise, an export promotion programme simplifies the integration into new markets, which require higher sustainability standards.

Results in figures

Until the end of 2023, the project was able to support its partners in achieving the following outcomes:

- The acreage in the selected regions where cotton is grown in accordance with internationally recognized sustainability standards (organic and Better Cotton) increased by 42,000 hectares.
- Over 1,500 people were trained by the project in implementing social and environmental sustainability standards as multipliers, working for example in HR management in private enterprises or as trainers in the sector. As an indirect result of the activities, over 160,000 people working in the cotton and textile sector were reached.
- Nine sustainability innovations were introduced in the cotton and textile sector. One example is the introduction of the Better Cotton Principles and Criteria.

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