



# 74<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting of the INTERNATIONAL COTTON ADVISORY COMMITTEE

## MINUTES SIXTH BREAKOUT SESSION

### Empowering Women in Cotton

11:00 hr. Thursday, December 10, 2015

Chair: Naishadh Parkih, Chairman, Confederation of Indian Textile Industry (CITI)

#### Speakers:

Mr. Joseph Nkole, Cotton Association of Zambia, "Empowering Women Cotton Farmers Through Participation in the Cotton Value Chain."

Ms. Prabha Nagarajan, Organic and Fair Trade Cotton Secretariat, India, "Women in Cotton."

Ms. Adriana Gregolin, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), "Study: Gender and the Cotton Value Chain in Mercosur Countries."

#### **Strong Women, Better Outcomes, More Cotton**

Women provide an estimated 80% of the manual labor associated with cotton production, including the tasks of planting, thinning, weeding, and harvesting. However, in many cultures, women are prohibited from owning land and signing contracts. Consequently, women have difficulty gaining access to credit or even receiving information about production technology or market information. In many countries, economic power is monopolized by men, who make decisions about land use, crop selection and production practices.

Besides the obvious inequities of such cultural and legal patterns, the systematic denial of opportunities to women stunts economic growth, reduces productivity and often results in poor health and educational outcomes for children. Research indicates that women are more likely than men to invest surplus income in farm animals, such as goats and pigs, and agricultural inputs to boost earning power. Therefore, efforts to boost economic opportunities for women can lead to better long term economic outcomes in rural areas. Women also tend to be naturally inclined to save and share planting seeds and to protect biodiversity.

Sensitivity to gender issues can accelerate progress in the adoption of new cotton production technology. The identity cotton programs, such as Cotton Made in Africa (CmiA), certified organic cotton, Fair Trade, BCI, and E3, include women's empowerment in their production practices.

The Cotton Association of Zambia (CAZ) has formed women's Study Circle Groups, has assisted women to participate in the ownership in a cotton ginnery, is partnering with training organizations to expand knowledge of hand spinning and handloom manufacturing and weaving, and works to ensure that production equipment, such as backpack sprayers, are appropriate in size and handling for female operation. Approximately 300,000 households are registered with the CAZ, and 78 separate languages are spoken among cotton producing households in Zambia, making cultural change difficult. Therefore, customs involving the status and opportunities for women are changing, but slowly.

All countries face some issues involving female empowerment. In most countries, written laws provide for equality of treatment among men and women, but cultural attitudes do not always follow legal norms.