



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

## SUMMARY

### FIFTH OPEN SESSION (World Café)

#### Implementing the SEEP Guidance Framework on Measurement of Sustainability

Tuesday, December 8, 2015

Facilitators:

- Allan Williams, Cotton Research and Development Corporation, Australia
- Francesca Mancini, FAO
- Soren Moller, FAO

The Fifth Open Session involved over 100 participants. Utilizing the world café format, groups discussed aspects of the SEEP Guidance Framework as a means to enhance the sustainability performance of the cotton sector. The session featured lively discussions and was characterised by a high degree of participation and interaction. Some of the prominent themes are listed below in response to each focus question.

#### ***Who should be involved in developing and monitoring sustainability indicators?***

- It was widely agreed that all stakeholders and actors in the cotton supply chain should be involved in developing and monitoring sustainability indicators (from farm to fabric).
- The specific institutions to be included and their role depend on the structure of the cotton sector in a given country.
- If it does not yet exist, a multi-stakeholder platform/taskforce could be created. Ideally, it should involve:
  - Producers and their representations (cooperatives, associations);
  - Cotton companies (public/private);
  - Government (ministries and cotton boards/associations);
  - Researchers and extension services (especially because some indicators are very technical);
  - Civil society, NGOs, international organizations can contribute specific expertise;
  - Financial organizations (their exact role needs to be defined)
  - Brands that operate there especially retailers
  - Transparency Organizations
- Including all stakeholders is important to increase acceptance and ownership of a framework of indicators.
- Farmers and cotton companies should be placed at the centre of the process.
- Farmers may need support to keep accurate records. Examples were cited where provision of extension services, training on best practices and collection of data have been successfully combined.
- Certain indicators are scale dependent – this will impact the level, and most appropriate actor to collect them.

- There is a need for an institution (e.g. steering committee/clearing house) to play a role in coordination, compilation, evaluation and dissemination of the data that is collected.
- There were different opinions on the role and responsibility of governments – some participants suggested a larger role while others emphasized the shared responsibility among all stakeholders.
- A public-private partnership model was proposed to share the cost burden but also to promote a joint ownership of the process.

***What are the potential benefits for different stakeholders?***

- All stakeholders can benefit from a framework of indicators to support sustainability efforts:
  - Cotton companies can produce more, with better quality, while ensuring continuity of raw materials;
  - Farmers can improve their livelihoods/conditions of living. Increasing resource-use efficiency can reduce costs of production providing an economic incentive;
  - Spinners are able to meet supply chain/retailer demands (e.g. no child labour or prohibited chemicals);
  - Retailers face pressure from consumers – they need “a story to tell”. They can gain a market advantage by proving their sustainability credentials;
  - Countries maintain the competitiveness of their sectors, diagnose potential threats to sustainability, promote social development, reduced need to subsidise production;
  - Societies and future generations benefit from decreased burden on the environment;
  - Other shared benefits include increased investment in cotton sector and textile industries and creation of new jobs. Potential increase in demand for cotton, especially from young customers;
- Some of the benefits of enhancing sustainability require a long-term perspective.
- Harmonization will avoid costly duplication of efforts and reduce confusion.

***What do countries require to implement a framework of sustainability indicators at the national level?***

- National/regional adaptation of indicators is an essential step (balanced with harmonization).
- The objectives, expectations and outputs of a system need to be defined in a transparent and participatory process. Inclusion of partners (especially farmers) in the decision-making process is important for acceptance/ownership and ultimately impact. Stakeholders need to agree upon and make visible minimum commitments. There should be a definition of responsibilities.
- An initial analysis is important to take stock of the data that is already collected; map the institutional structure; gain a common understanding of key issues and potential benefits; prioritize indicators to that are most relevant.
- Use data that already exists if it can be demonstrated to be accurate and neutral.
- Pilot scale projects can test the framework (e.g. based on an agro-ecological zone).
- Implementation will require investment in the form of financial and human resources.
- Farmers may need training/support and incentives to participate (need to make the business case).
- There needs to be political will and commitment to support the process.
- Need for sensitization or education about sustainability and its importance.

- Necessary to ensure accountability, plausibility, transparency and accuracy of data.

***What are the key challenges for implementation?***

- Sharing information with confidence – farmers may be concerned about the motives behind requests for data (especially for economic indicators); countries may be worried about comparison of their results versus other countries.
- Careful not to add more demands on farmers.
- Who pays the costs of collecting/analysing/verifying data? Burden cannot only be on farmers.
- Positive impacts for farmers/societies may take time to materialize.
- Motivating stakeholders, communicating the potential benefits can be difficult.
- “Collecting data for a few indicators is already difficult, getting to 68 seems far away.”
- A lot of data are already collected – they need to be consolidated/coordinated/rationalized. This involves many actors and may require significant work (e.g. over a series of workshops).
- Ensuring the transparency/credibility of indicators is a critical challenge.
- How can other crops in rotation be integrated – monitoring should try to assess the full system.
- The way in which existing sustainability initiatives can be integrated with the SEEP Framework needs to be defined.

***What are the opportunities?***

- Tools such as the Guidance Framework can assist actors in the supply chain to cooperate – by improving sustainability performance and demonstrating progress to consumers, the cotton sector as a whole can become more competitive (focus on competitiveness).
- A common methodology and reference point increases harmonization between indicators. This can allow for benchmarking and impact assessment on different sustainability issues. Joint solutions can be found to highlighted threats. Countries can learn from one another.
- Possibility of better managing risks at various levels.
- In cases where the supply chain is well organized/integrated, from producers to national inter-professional bodies, this provides an advantage in implementing a framework of sustainability indicators.
- Sustainability is only growing in importance and it is better for all stakeholders to be involved in ‘setting the rules’ rather than joining later and not having the opportunity to shape the process.
- Identifying sustainability challenges and measures that can be taken to address these at the ‘village level’ can foster local ownership and empowerment.
- Consider instituting “Sustainability Awards” to drive forward the process (this has worked well in other sectors).