

## Spotlight: World Cotton Day 2019

On 7 October, the WTO hosted the inaugural “World Cotton Day”, established to celebrate all aspects of cotton, from its qualities as a natural fibre to the benefits people obtain from its production, transformation, trade and consumption.

The event was launched by the WTO Secretariat at the initiative of the Cotton-4 group of African cotton producers – Mali, Benin, Chad and Burkina Faso, which are seeking official recognition for 7 October as World Cotton Day by the United Nations General Assembly.

### Facing the challenges

Organized in collaboration with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the International Trade Centre (ITC) and the International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC), World Cotton Day shed light on the challenges faced by the sector around the world, particularly in least-developed countries (LDCs).

**Chad's Trade Minister Achta Djibrine Sy addressing the plenary session of World Cotton Day.**

Eight ministers, senior government officials, representatives of international organizations, national cotton producers, textile industry professionals and private sector business executives attended the gathering. Events included a plenary session, thematic sessions on topics such as sustainability, technology and innovation, a partners' conference and a fashion show to display cotton fashion and the work of designers from Africa. It also offered cotton exhibitions, a cotton boutique and a photo contest.

### Addressing the challenges faced by cotton farmers

Addressing the plenary session, DG Azevêdo lauded cotton's central role in livelihoods, job creation and economic stability in several LDCs. He urged participants to heed the challenges faced by cotton farmers, including market access barriers, subsidies provided by some countries and supply-side challenges at home, which limited the competitiveness of export-oriented processing.

DG Azevêdo was joined at the plenary by WTO General Council Chair Sunanta Kangvalkij, Benin's Trade Minister Shadiya Alimatou Assouman, Burkina Faso's Trade Minister Harouna Kaboré, Chad's Trade Minister Achta Djibrine Sy and Mali's Minister of Agriculture Moulaye Ahmed Boubacar. Also present were Brazil's Minister of Agriculture Tereza Cristina Dias, India's Minister of Textiles Smriti Zubin Irani, FAO Director-General Qu Dongyu, then ITC Executive Director Arancha González, UNCTAD Deputy Secretary-General Isabelle Durant and ICAC Executive Director Kai Hughes.

### The importance of cotton

Benin's Trade Minister underlined cotton's substantial contribution to poverty reduction, education, health-care needs and economic growth. She also highlighted the huge social impact that cotton could generate along the value chain and beyond. It is often asserted that “when cotton is fine, everything is fine in the C-4 countries”, she said. Burkina Faso's Trade Minister noted that although cotton remains the country's main agricultural export and contributes more than 10 per cent of GDP, almost all production is exported without any processing.



The event included a display of cotton products and a fashion show to highlight the work of designers from Africa.



### Cotton in the WTO negotiations

In his speech, Minister Ahmed Boubacar drew attention to the issue of domestic support (subsidies) in cotton trade, which are the subject of long-standing WTO negotiations (see page 37). “African cotton is less than 10 per cent of world production. Despite its qualities, our fibre faces stiff competition, particularly from the estimated US\$ 5.9 billion in domestic support in 2017-18 some countries provided to their producers, resulting in the precariousness of our producers,” he said.

Minister Achta Djibrine Sy reaffirmed the C-4’s commitment to pursuing outcomes on cotton at the WTO. “We are committed to multilateral negotiations to find fair, balanced and sustainable solutions to this thorny issue of distorting subsidies,” she said.

### Developing cotton by-products

A partners’ conference brought together representatives from cotton-producing economies, donor governments and international development partners. It was organized to leverage resources and catalyse technical expertise for a new project on technology transfer for the development of cotton by-product value chains in eight African LDCs, namely Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. Moreover, Malawi and Togo officially requested to join the new project.

### Looking ahead

At the end of a special session entitled “The Road Ahead for the Cotton Negotiations”, which was organized by the WTO, ministers and high-level representatives from the C-4, Côte d’Ivoire, Brazil, China, the European Union, India and the United States issued a joint statement on the state of play in the WTO’s cotton negotiations.

“We will intensify our discussions on factors negatively impacting cotton trade and markets. We will continue our efforts aimed at enhancing transparency and monitoring of cotton-related trade measures affecting the global cotton market ... We invite all WTO members to work with us in the Committee on Agriculture in special session so as to make progress on this issue.”

