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### Members discuss possible cotton breakthrough ahead of MC14, World Cotton Day 2025

At meetings held on 14 May, WTO members reviewed global cotton market trends and exchanged views on a potential outcome on cotton at the 14th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC14), to be held in Yaoundé, Cameroon, in March 2026. Delegations stressed the vital contribution of cotton to international trade and its potential to foster sustainable development. The Chair of the agriculture negotiations, Ambassador Ali Sarfraz Hussain of Pakistan, reaffirmed his commitment to work with members to keep cotton high on the agenda.



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Deputy Director-General Jean-Marie Paugam, who chaired the 43rd Round of Consultations of the Director-General's Consultative Framework Mechanism for Cotton (DGCFCM), drew members' attention to the [latest meeting](#) of the Steering Committee of the “[Partenariat pour le Coton](#)” initiative, which built on a series of national consultations held last year in the Cotton 4+ countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Côte d’Ivoire).

The meeting took place at the headquarters of the [African Export-Import Bank \(Afreximbank\)](#) in Cairo on 28-29 April. Important suggestions were made regarding advancing the cotton development agenda in the C-4+ countries, and there was productive discussion on available financing options, including concrete proposals to support the cotton-textile-clothing value chain.

DDG Paugam stressed that, while it has been projected that US\$ 5 billion could be unlocked over the next 10 years under the framework of the “Partenariat pour le Coton”, this would require the C-4+ to act as the driving force and to adopt a regional approach to attract and sustain investment.

A [study](#) published in June 2024 highlights the potential of processing 25 per cent of C4+ cotton locally. Although this would require an investment of around US\$ 5 billion in facilities and workforce training, it could create 500,000 jobs, especially for women and youth, and would significantly enhance value addition within the region.

Acknowledging previous concerns about implementation, transparency, and commitment to the [Evolving Table on Cotton Development Assistance](#), DDG Paugam called for a dedicated meeting with donors to explore ways to enhance the effectiveness and impact of this tool. The Evolving Table contains project updates by a number of WTO members and by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

Chad, the FAO and the International Trade Centre (ITC) jointly announced that the 2025 [World Cotton Day](#) will take place on 7 October in Rome, which will coincide with the 80th anniversary of the FAO. The event aims to boost visibility and promote investment in African cotton through the work of the “Partenariat pour le Coton”, as well as to encourage discussion of climate challenges to cotton.

Afreximbank reiterated the importance of a harmonized project submission template for standardization, transparency, collaboration and monitoring of C4+ cotton projects and proposed joint financing initiatives, shared knowledge platforms, capacity-building, risk mitigation strategies and policy advocacy.

Members took the floor to share their experiences of activities within the framework of South-South cooperation. They also expressed support for the cotton industry, focusing on job creation, economic diversification, de-risking investments, tailored cooperation, regional strategies and enabling environments. Delegations also discussed industrialization, global value chain integration, investment clarity and progress on regional development projects in the context of the cotton industry.

On emerging challenges, members learned about the latest developments in cotton-producing countries, as well as new challenges facing the cotton sector in C-4+ countries. The [International Cotton Advisory Committee \(ICAC\)](#) shared a presentation about water use in cotton cultivation, which explained that it is a misconception that cotton — a semi-desert crop — requires large quantities of water for cultivation. Nevertheless, ICAC cautioned that climate change is affecting rainfall patterns, and that this is a matter of concern for cotton cultivation.

The DGCFMC also outlined key next steps. A technical online seminar on second-hand and recycling of clothing by Côte d'Ivoire is scheduled for 19 June. Other members were encouraged to coordinate with the WTO Secretariat to propose similar initiatives. A harmonized “Partenariat pour le Coton” project submission template will be created to enable C-4+ countries to present priority projects at an upcoming technical workshop. The WTO will support monitoring, evaluation and engagement with development agencies. Meanwhile, [FIFA's Football for Schools programme](#) will encourage the use of C-4+ cotton for apparel, to produce T-shirts and polo shirts in West Africa and distribute these items globally by the end of 2025.

In conclusion, DDG Paugam underscored the need to sustain and build on the current momentum surrounding cotton, especially given that MC14 is approaching. Progress made, consolidated synergies and promising prospects ahead call for redoubling efforts, he said.

Ambassador Hussain, who facilitated the discussion on addressing the trade aspects of cotton, gave an update on his consultations with members on the way forward for agriculture negotiations, focusing on cotton.

He noted that the C-4+ countries and other members had stressed the importance of cotton within the agricultural negotiations, and that members had highlighted the need to make significant progress on this issue at MC14, as this would resonate positively in Africa and benefit the WTO as a whole.

The C-4+ Group also suggested the possibility of decoupling cotton negotiations from the broader agriculture package to facilitate reaching a standalone decision on cotton at MC14. The Group, along with several other developing members, emphasized the importance of adhering to past ministerial decisions and called for progress to be made to reduce cotton-specific trade-distorting domestic support.

Ambassador Hussain urged members to engage actively in open dialogue, express their concerns clearly, and work together to bridge differences. He proposed to convene a “cotton quad plus” meeting in the coming weeks to facilitate honest and concrete discussions. The “cotton quad plus” forum involves the C-4+ countries and several major cotton players, including Australia, China, Brazil, the European Union, India, Pakistan and the United States.

The ICAC also provided an overview of the global cotton market for the 2024-25 season, forecasting a production increase of approximately 7 per cent compared to the previous season. World cotton consumption is anticipated to rise by 2 per cent in 2024-25, although trade projections have been revised downward to 9.45 million tonnes for the 2024-25 season. This adjustment reflects a decrease from the previous forecast of 9.94 million tonnes, as reported in April 2024. The ICAC also presented findings from a recent analysis on specialty cotton, which grows annually and currently accounts for about 31 per cent of total global cotton lint production. Specialty cotton, as defined by the ICAC, includes any long or extra-long staple varieties, as well as cotton from specific identity programmes encompassing various certification initiatives worldwide, such as “Better Cotton” and “Cotton Made in Africa”.

The International Trade Centre (ITC) provided an update on the [ITC Cotton Portal](#), a joint initiative with the WTO to consolidate cotton-related information. The portal, launched at the 11th WTO Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires in 2017, features three main modules: trade statistics, market information and learning. The ITC reported that the portal has around 3,000-4,000 users annually. Planned improvements include the integration of artificial intelligence (AI), additional languages, and better data on e-commerce and logistics.

The ITC Cotton Portal aggregates cotton-related information from the ICAC, ITC and WTO, as well as other sources. For instance, it features a live data feed from ICAC on cotton production, as well as direct links to essential tools that facilitate cotton trade, such as the [Export Potential Map](#).

The C-4+ agreed concerning the relevance of this tool in contributing to a more efficient cotton trading system by improving transparency and accessibility of trade-related information relevant for cotton producers, traders and policymakers. They called for more training to raise awareness of the platform in Africa and to increase its utilization, as this could help governments in making informed policy decisions. The ITC and the WTO expressed their readiness to pursue discussions with the C-4+ concerning ways to make the portal more accessible and as relevant as possible in developing economies, and especially in Africa.

The WTO Secretariat introduced a [revised background paper](#) compiling all cotton-related information available at the WTO, including members' notifications, replies to a questionnaire on cotton policy developments and information on tariff and non-tariff measures.

As part of Cotton Day at the WTO members attended the opening of an exhibition featuring a data visualization structure that consolidated and presented information on cotton-related activities, telling the story of cotton through interactive maps, infographics, images and dynamic graphics. The exhibition concluded with a reception hosted by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) at WTO headquarters.

