

Viability of farming in Kisumu county is set to shift from rice to cotton in the next few months, thanks to interventions by key stakeholders.

Already 600 farmers from the region are fully putting their weight behind commercial and domestic cotton farming, they have also finalized documentation for their co-operative union registration.

The Kisumu East Cotton Cooperative Society has so far collected funds from members and other well-wishers amounting to 1.2M. In January, the cooperative gave 60 farmers credit, each member received Ksh. 20,000 for land preparation and cotton reduction to be deducted upon harvest and sale of cotton.

The Kenya National Pentecostal Congress is also set to fund women and youths to cultivate cotton in the county, and bring it back to the place it used to be a great contributor to the growth of the Kenyan economy.

This partnership scheduled for production of cotton took effect from March 2017 in the whole county starting with Nyakach sub-county. The project targets 10 clusters in Nyakach each having 35 farmers growing cotton in at least one acre i.e a total of about 350 acres targeted.

The once vibrant cotton industries collapsed in the 80's and with it went down five corporates, and ginneries. Farmers from Kisumu and the neighboring counties including Homabay, Migori, Siaya and Busia were forced to start transport lint to processors in Makueni, hundreds of kilometres away.

Cotton has remained undeveloped and its stores rendered dormant for decades, the very stores are being used for other activities.

Since the collapse of the cotton industry till 2012 there were only five (5ha), this has since increased to 300ha in. 16 tons of cotton were produced in the year 2016 and sold at KSh 42 per kg to Salawa ginnery.

Efforts by the Agricultural Sector Development Support Programme (ASDSP) has resulted into the revival of Kano Kajulu, Kimira, Nyakach, Seme and Nyando cooperative societies and initiation of Kisumu East and Muhoroni societies.

Under the same initiative and 70 members have been trained in cotton cottage industry and are making cotton products for sale at both domestic and international markets.

A ginnery has also been set up in Nyakach and plans are under way to revive the Ndeere, Kibos and Nyanza ginneries.

“Even though mobilization and sensitization of concerned parties in the cotton chain has been done, quality cotton seeds still remain to be a big challenge as they are not readily available” Mr Isaac Otieno dawo the ASDSP county coordinator says.

Mr Otieno adds that a cotton processing plant can also be put up to make it easy for the farmers to have direct access to the market for their produce rather than going through middlemen who tend to take much of their profits in the name of getting them market.

Interventions by ASDSP also registered increased income from nil to Kshs 650,000 in 2013 to farmers who engaged in cotton farming, seeds were also purchased from farmers worth Kshs. 210,000 for weaving while direct employment of 5 casuals at the Pendeza weaving cottage industry.

“We Partnered with Victoria Cotton Programme led by KALRO to produce certified seed cotton, this is ongoing it’s a Brazilian funded project.” Mr Otieno adds.

ASDSP’s mandate was to capacity build the value chain actors and farmers, organization of value chain actors into clusters, cooperatives and cottage industries as well as linking of farmers to markets or ginneries.

Cotton growing was abandoned by farmers for several years due to lack of market in Kisumu County, other challenges included high cost of inputs (fertilizers and chemicals), low quality seed, expensive land preparation, low cotton yields, and inadequate training to field staff.

The ginneries were obsolete and non-operational including KICOMI and those who were engaged in the process had inadequate skills in knitting, weaving and spinning, low volume of cotton produced lack of guaranteed premium price for cotton and consumer preference e.g competition from cheap second-hand clothes/synthetic fiber remained a challenge in the cotton industry all the years.