

Uganda: Textile Giants Eye Uganda's Organic Cotton

By Joseph Olanyo

Renowned international textile firms are to step up importation of organic cotton products from Uganda, a move that is expected to boost the sector.

Textile importers from Germany, Denmark and other European countries, during a tour of Western Uganda Cotton Company (WUCC) in the south-western Uganda district of Kasese last week, said they were impressed with the quality of Uganda's cotton that they were receiving from the country.

"I import 500,000 T-shirts per year, but now I want to grow it to one million pieces annually next year 2018. When you ask me why, I will tell you it is because Uganda has good cotton with production facilities," said Joern Otto, the vice president for sourcing at Bonprix Company, which is based in Hamburg, Germany.

Otto, however, noted that Uganda's textile industry still needs more support.

"Uganda's textile sector looks good, but it needs more technical support in the form of training workers," he said.

The investors who were taken through the cotton ginning process by an official from WUCC, Walter Obonyo, also commissioned Hanne nursery and primary school in Nyamirangara, Kasese. The community-based school, which was started by cotton farmers, was named after one of the visiting investors, Hanne Gottorp Larsen, who is funding the construction of the school.

Jas Bedi, the director of Fine Spinners Uganda Ltd (FSUL), said he had come with investors from Europe to show them the kind of impact the trade in cotton was having on poor communities.

"I have come with my customers from Europe to see where the T-shirts come from and where the cotton for making T-shirts comes from. We also want our farmers to get a win-win situation," said Bedi.

Fine Spinners took over Tri-Star Apparel and recently Phenix Logistics garment industries. Bedi said a diagnostic study on revamping the productivity of the textile firm has been done.

"Our investment model in Uganda is based on a model of value addition on Uganda's cotton. Within the next three months, you will see a lot of activity," Bedi said.

Bedi said Fine Spinners is working with Cotton Development Authority to improve the cotton yields. Statistics show that cotton prices are rebounding. While commissioning the school, the resident district commissioner Kasese, Maj James Mwesigye, urged the German investors to come and invest in Kasese district.

Paschal Kilolo, the Kasese district assistant inspector of schools, said there are 240 acres of land at the Kasese industrial and business park that investors can apply for.

"We have salt, copper and cobalt here. We also have coffee and cotton. So, people should come and develop this land," Kilolo said.

Despite the unpredictable weather conditions that keep on affecting the yields, cotton prices have been on the increase. Farmers received Shs 2,500 per kilogramme this season compared to Shs 1,500 around the same time last year. The increase in prices and the introduction of the fast-yielding cotton variety, which takes four months as opposed to about seven initially, is encouraging farmers to grow cotton.

Uganda's Vision 2040 highlights the importance of manufacturing and value addition in enabling the development of an export-led and an internationally competitive economy, which is able to spur growth.

State minister for microfinance Haruna Kyeyune Kasolo said during the recent handover of Phenix Logistics to Fine Spinners that investors are expected to support government's efforts in promoting production of textiles using Uganda's organic cotton. This, he added, would increase Uganda's export earnings.

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