

Summary

The Organic Exchange regional supply chain meeting in Africa, hosted by Organisation Beninoise pour la Promotion de l'Agriculture Biologique (OBEPAB) and sponsored by ICCO and GTZ was held in Cotonou, Benin, on July 18 and 19 2006, at the CODIAM centre and with a field visit to Mangassa village, where there are many dynamic organic farmers.

65 people took part in the morning from 18 countries, representing African farming groups, textiles companies and designers from Africa, Europe and Taiwan, African and international NGOs, donors, the Beninese government and the media.

Presentations covered a diverse range of subjects, beginning with the Organic Exchange Farm Development Programme, and then a presentation on organic cotton in Benin and in Africa. The second session then looked at strategies to involve conventional sector organisations in organic cotton, a new initiative to sue organic cotton to provide a chemical free buffer zone around one of Benin's UNESCO rated wildlife reserves, the status of organic cotton in Uganda, and a comparison of organic cotton farming in India.

After a discussion session that covered the benefits of joint Organic-Fairtrade certification, the need for lobbying for organic cotton in Africa, managing supply and demand, increasing organic textiles processing in Africa, the group broke into five workshops

- The group looking at rotation crops suggested that while it is important to add value to organic cotton farms through marketing rotation crops, the role of these crops in the farm management system also needs more research, and to take into account the need to provide food security.
- Group 2 suggested the need for a regional centre in Africa to work on organic cotton, building on the existing groups in various countries. The group also called for an 'Organic Africa' brand.
- Group 3 discussed how to improve participation by national organisations and institutions in organic farming, and called for more involvement by research institutions, producer groups and others.
- Group 4, on sustainable business models, suggested a strategy of starting with fibre export with some local processing and consumption aiming towards eventually more local processing and consumption and also export of finished products.
- Group 5, on certification and standards, called for a reduction in confusion among labels and standards as well as the development of an African organic standard. Standards could also add things like soil fertility standards to create a higher, stronger standard to set them apart

Finally, the workshop broke up with agreement and volunteering to continue working on action points:

1. Founding a continental centre on organic cotton
2. Organic standards for Africa and 'Organic Africa' brand.