

Relief and Rebuild: Making climate adaptation a long-term reality for farmers

Last summer's flood in Pakistan displaced seven million people, caused damages of an estimated \$30 billion, and resulted in a death toll of over 1,500.



As just one instance of the increasing number of extreme weather events caused by climate change, the floods demonstrated how vulnerable people in the world's poorest countries are suffering the most. Agriculture is one of the most at-risk industries from the climate emergency. As the global rise in floods, heatwaves, droughts, storms, cyclones, hurricanes and mudslides shows no sign of stopping, it is up to all of us working in the clothing sector to help farmers on the frontline. Farmers don't just need rescue aid in times of emergency; they need long-term support to rehabilitate their livelihoods for the future to continue growing cotton.

At CottonConnect, we have been working with cotton farmers in the Indian subcontinent for over ten years, helping them tackle and adapt to climate change crises. We have seen what's needed by communities overwhelmed by climate disasters, such as the Pakistan floods, both in the immediate aftermath of the emergency and as farmers and communities start to rebuild their lives. Working with local partners and providing emergency food packages and shelter tents and setting up mobile medical camps to support women and children, in particular, were some of the immediate interventions taken by us to support farmers after the Pakistan Floods.

In this paper we share our insights into what is needed to build resilience and safeguard the future of cotton production, which is critical to all of us working in the cotton supply industry.

Building Resilience

Long-term support for communities in climate crises has led to these findings on how best to target help after the most urgent needs have been met and communities are able to start rebuilding their lives and livelihoods. With local partners, we focus on helping in the following main areas – providing on-the-ground support; building farmer capacity; finding alternative livelihood options; supporting women through shifting gender norms; and promoting entrepreneurship.

ON-THE-GROUND SUPPORT

The impact of the climate crisis differs from region to region, and successful adaptation and resilience building depends on local knowledge and support. People on the ground know what the specific local problems are – and how to mitigate them. Over the last decade, we have worked to ensure that local knowledge underpins our initiatives. We have given thousands of farmers the training and tools that will boost their productivity, profitability and incomes. The key is to work with local partners along with agronomists and agri-experts, and stakeholders, including NGOs and government, to support farmers in building resilience toward climate crisis.

In response to the devastating floods across Pakistan, we worked with our local partners to help farming communities rebuild their lives. With their help, we carried out comprehensive needs assessments in different regions to establish tailored support required by farmers and their families. The aim wasn't just to ensure their health and safety in the immediate aftermath of the floods but to rebuild their lives and livelihoods for the long term.

BUILDING FARMER CAPACITY THROUGH TECHNOLOGY AND TRAINING

To recover faster from extreme weather events, like floods and droughts, it's essential that farmers have the right infrastructure, the latest information and the best tools. Weather advice from artificial intelligence, for example, can better prepare farmers, and training in soil health management and proper drainage systems can help remove water more quickly from fields in the event of flooding. Regular soil sampling can also help farmers take necessary steps to improve soil health. Farmers should also be trained for risk reduction as a part of disaster management.

It is also important to help farmers adopt new technology and scale these solutions. Climate-smart agricultural practices such as short-duration crop, intercropping, multi-cropping and agroforestry methods can help improve financial status to better deal with climate change. To ensure all this is possible, it is vital that training is tailored for each region and its farmers.

ALTERNATE LIVELIHOOD OPTIONS

These can act as a source of financial stability while farmers are working to rebuild and return to their usual farming activities. Reinstating livestock, such as goats and hens, not only serves as a great source of nutrition for the family but a good source of income by selling the surplus. Practical training in kitchen gardening for women farmers is one-way CottonConnect is able to support them, enabling them to provide chemical-free vegetables and fruits for family consumption and additional income when sold in the community.



SHIFTING GENDER NORMS

Women are often the most vulnerable to the impact of climate change, but conversely, the ones with the best knowledge of how to adapt. It is, therefore, crucial that we train both men and women in adaptation methods so that the responsibility to find solutions is shared, encouraging collaborative approaches that override gender norms.

PROMOTING ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Providing small business skills and training can help improve farmers' access to finance and larger markets. Such entrepreneurial training can also support farmers in generating additional income. By diversifying their economic activities, they can benefit from a more sustainable household income overall. Setting up and running sewing centres, beauty parlours and tuck shops helps in promoting economic and social equity, which facilitates self-fulfilment for women and improve the use of valuable human capital.

The climate crisis isn't just about reducing the impacts on the planet but also adapting to changing environmental patterns. Through these initiatives, CottonConnect is at the forefront of work to ensure longer-term survival and resilience building in the frontline farming communities, so that climate change adaptation becomes a reality for them.

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CottonConnect is a company with a social purpose to reimagine the cotton supply chains and help textile producers and farmers enjoy better livelihoods.

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