CottonConnect’s new gender mapping of cotton production in India and China shows how crucial women are to cotton production and how challenges and opportunities vary across regions.

In many growing communities, women play key roles in planting and harvesting that determine the quantity, quality, and sustainability of cotton farming. Yet, too often, women’s contributions to cotton go unacknowledged. An effective response to strengthening women’s roles in cotton requires a nuanced understanding of how gaps between men and women manifest across different communities. However, to date few attempts have been made to conduct a detailed gendered mapping in cotton.

Building on the findings of its previous report, “Planting the Seed: A Journey to Gender Equality in the Cotton Industry”, CottonConnect conducted a detailed gendered value chain mapping in six communities in China and India. The organization’s research revealed substantial differences in women’s roles and responsibilities that allowed the identification of targeted responses in each location. For instance, in India CottonConnect developed a course on financial literacy whereas in China the organization developed a partnership to support women’s communication and negotiation abilities. This briefing outlines key findings from four communities and shows how gender mapping can form the basis of solutions to empower women, support growing communities, and build a sustainable cotton value chain.

“We at CottonConnect have consciously focused on women in the cotton supply chain. We now have almost 24,000 women enrolled across our REEL, BCI and Organic programmes. Our goal is that by 2020 30% of the farmers in our programmes will be women. Our principle is to improve gender balance and rights in our interventions by balancing local knowledge with international expertise.

We also want to encourage the sector to consider how some of the great work undertaken in the factory sector can be used in agriculture and agricultural processing. Early this year we worked with Hua Dan to use their expertise in participatory drama with a group of women in North West China; and last year we started our first health and safety pilot in the ginning sector in India, and as part of this we developed a specific module aimed at women workers.

As ever our work on gender has to be forward looking, sensitive to cultural norms and of course truly deliver benefits to communities.”
Alison Ward, CEO, CottonConnect

ABOUT COTTONCONNECT AND OUR PARTNERS

Since 2009, CottonConnect has worked with brands and retailers to be commercially successful and environmentally and socially responsible in their business practices, by transforming the way they source cotton. Partnerships with companies and foundations like C&A, C&A Foundation, Burberry, John Lewis, Primark, Carrefour and Kering have demonstrated that a market-driven approach to creating ethical, sustainable and profitable cotton supply chains is possible. However, too often efforts to revitalise cotton supply chains have neglected one key stakeholder group: women.

CottonConnect’s “Women in Cotton” programme has identified ways to improve farmer well-being and livelihoods and to drive sustainable and efficient cotton production. The programme builds knowledge, strengthens livelihoods, and connects markets. Together, these programs provide the background in literacy, numeracy, rights and health to enable women to take advantage of increased livelihood opportunities, both within cotton and through supplemental income running their own enterprises. By building demand for sustainable cotton and strong supply chains, CottonConnect ensures that women and their families have access to a strong market.

SEWA: The Self-Employed Women’s Association represents the 93% of India’s female workplace that do not have formal employment.

Yoganjali Kelvani Mandal (YKM): Founded in 1974, YKM is an economic development organization working in rural Gujarat with a strong emphasis on women’s rights.

Hua Dan: Hua Dan uses theatre to develop worker creativity, team work and leadership and to deliver educational programming.
Regardless of how much time they dedicate to cotton production, women across countries generally report having little or no training in agricultural best practice. CottonConnect has found that without specific outreach efforts just 4 percent of women join any form of training programme that can assist them in their roles as farmers and champions within their communities. In addition, low levels of knowledge in literacy, health, and rights reduce productivity and undermine family well-being.

Where women already play key roles in cotton, filling these gaps with technical training can have direct contributions to strengthening cotton value chains. Where women are more marginalized, supporting their ability to take on higher-value roles empowers them, helping them to earn higher incomes and have greater influence over cotton production. However, identifying an appropriate response requires a detailed understanding of the local context.

“\’We need women to make farm innovation work. Women farmers often contribute a lot and play an important role in cotton cultivation. We need to build on their knowledge and experience to find and implement new solutions for sustainable cotton.\’”

Hardeep Desai, Farm Innovations Director, India
As CottonConnect’s mapping in China and India shows, challenges and opportunities for women can vary substantially, even within a fairly limited geographical area.

**GENDER MAPPING IN CHINA AND INDIA**

The following charts highlight key differences in women’s roles in cotton in Xinjiang, China; Hebei, China; Gujarat, India; and Madhya Pradesh, India.

In Hebei, China, for instance, women dominate most roles, whereas in Xinjiang, China the opposite is true. Even when women lead production activities, they may or may not hold decision making authority around when to plant, how to care for the crop, what equipment to invest in or how to spend profits.

In Hebei, CottonConnect’s research shows that women were often the lead decision makers even when the labour was joint or male-led, whereas in Madhya Pradesh, India many fewer women have control over agricultural or financial decisions than those who are responsible for carrying out the work. This means women may have more, or less, influence over cotton outcomes than may be initially evident, adding to the importance of gender mapping to understand market dynamics within cotton value chains.

This mapping also enabled CottonConnect to identify specific opportunities to drive women’s economic empowerment. For instance, in India, women are less likely to take decisions on key purchases like inputs and equipment and less likely to be participate in key decisions around sales. This suggests that supporting women in cotton requires not only supporting their technical knowledge but also building skills such as negotiation and communication that shift power dynamics in their favour. Additionally, labour in cotton is highly seasonal, reinforcing the importance of building additional income streams, such as micro-businesses and self-help groups, that can provide more consistent income.

“Too often, companies overlook the opportunities that empowering women can lead to—whether in strengthening supply chains or opening new markets. By putting gender equality at the centre of its value chain development strategy, CottonConnect helps its partners identify and build on these opportunities.”

Alexa Roscoe, CSR Strategy Advisor
WHAT DO WOMEN’S ROLES IN COTTON LOOK LIKE ACROSS CHINA AND INDIA?
KEY FINDINGS FROM COTTONCONNECT’S GENDERED VALUE CHAIN MAPPING.

**Xinjiang, China**
Larger plot sizes and more formalized production make cotton more profitable and thus more appealing for male workers. As a result, women take part in simple farm work such as sowing, weeding, and harvesting. However, women in villages with long-standing CottonConnect programming have stronger involvement than villages where the program is newly established.

**Gujarat, India**
High availability of migrant workers reinforces gendered division of tasks. As a rule, male workers support roles requiring heavy physical labour and women, who are perceived as having a stronger attention to detail, are given responsibility for jobs that require this. Decision making is generally led by male farmers.

**Hebei, China**
Small plot sizes mean that farms cannot support large families, leading younger family members to migrate to cities and making women’s labour more valuable. Women lead most cotton production activities and are actively engaged in decision making on the farm, even when they are not themselves carrying out the relevant tasks.

**Madhya Pradesh, India**
In remote areas of MP, farms are scattered and relatively little outside labour is available, so in comparison to Gujarat men and women farmers are more likely to participate in joint tasks at all stages of cotton production.

“Increasingly, cotton standards look to certify that human rights standards are met at all stages of production. This means that the rights of women, as well as of men, need to be respected. However, without specific focus, women too often get left behind. Integrating gender issues in value chain analysis helps ensure this doesn’t happen.”
Colleen Theron, Human Rights and Business advisor
## Gendered Division of Labour in Four Cotton-Producing Regions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value Chain</th>
<th>Hebei Province China</th>
<th>Xinjiang Province China</th>
<th>Gujarat India</th>
<th>Madhya Pradesh India</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soil Preparation</td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Female-led: 31% Joint: 64% Male-led: 5%" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Female-led: 7% Joint: 63% Male-led: 30%" /></td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Female-led: 0% Joint: 30% Male-led: 70%" /></td>
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<td>Seed Sowing</td>
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<td><img src="image6" alt="Female-led: 4% Joint: 77% Male-led: 19%" /></td>
<td><img src="image7" alt="Female-led: 61% Joint: 29% Male-led: 10%" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>Irrigation</td>
<td><img src="image9" alt="Female-led: 33% Joint: 51% Male-led: 16%" /></td>
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<td><img src="image11" alt="Female-led: 4% Joint: 60% Male-led: 36%" /></td>
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INTERVIEW: COTTONCONNECT’S GENDER EXPERT

Rudrani Oza is CottonConnect’s resident gender specialist. She works with the company’s partners and local community members to build on opportunities to empower women in cotton.

Q: Why should companies care about gender gaps in cotton production?
A: Women play key roles in cotton crop cultivation and can support sustainability of cotton farming. However, their contribution goes unacknowledged and many a times they do not hold decision making power.

Q: What are some successful strategies that CottonConnect is using to help open up opportunities for women?
A: CottonConnect has adopted an integrated approach for gender related programs such as “Women in Cotton”, Sustainable Lives, and Farmer Business School programs combine capacity building in literacy, women’s rights and health as well as agriculture. Together, they support women’s livelihood opportunities in cotton farming and provide openings to start up their own village level microenterprises.

Q: Tackling gender gaps can represent a long-term challenge. Where should companies start?
A: We need to start with a collaborative approach. No one company can do it all. In order to reduce gender gaps, interventions from the companies are required with like-minded companies or organizations.

PROGRAM SNAPSHOT: BUILDING SKILLS THROUGH PARTICIPATORY THEATRE

CottonConnect works on and off the farm to close gender gaps in cotton. In order to lead in cotton production, women need both hard technical skills and soft skills such as communication, negotiation and problem solving. In Xinjiang, China, CottonConnect’s partnership with the Hua Dan theatre program uses engaging performance and improvisation techniques order to help women cotton farmers build the abilities they need to succeed and to grow their businesses.

Over the course of 11 days, women use role playing and performance to identify common problems related to education, health, and finances and to propose solutions. For instance, limited knowledge of Mandarin Chinese, rather than the local language Uyghur, had held back women’s ability to trade with outside communities and left them feeling overly dependent on their children, who had learned Mandarin. Improvising related scenes helped them realize what a common challenge it was, and led toward the impetus of starting part-time Mandarin classes for adults. This program also helps Hua Dan and CottonConnect better understand the gender dynamics of the region and to find to ideas to strengthen cotton value chains.

Women also built key soft skills. As a result of the Hua Dan program participants’ confidence in communication improved 19% and ability to speak out to suggest improvements improved 16%, and ability to problem solve increased 23%. Every participant reported improvements in her mental health to due improved ability to take charge of her own life.

“There is an incredible variation in women’s different roles and responsibilities across China. We need to develop highly individualized approaches in order to develop sustainable cotton strategies in each community.”
Tina Wen, Farm Manager, China
COTTONCONNECT IS AN ENTERPRISE WITH A SOCIAL MISSION PIONEERING A TRANSPARENT AND SUSTAINABLE COTTON SUPPLY CHAIN FROM RETAILERS TO FARMERS TO BUILD A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR THE COTTON INDUSTRY.

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