



**COTTON  
MADE IN  
AFRICA**



# **Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning System Report**

**for Cotton made in Africa (CmiA)  
and other Cotton Standards of the  
Aid by Trade Foundation**



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## Document History

AUTHOR	TYPE OF CHANGE	DATE	VERSION
AbTF	New document created	31.03.2022	1

## 1. Scope and Boundaries of the MEL System

Cotton made in Africa (CmiA) is an Aid by Trade Foundation (AbTF) initiative and an internationally recognised standard for sustainable cotton from Africa. Since its creation in 2005, CmiA has set itself the goal to protect the environment and help Sub-Saharan African smallholder cotton farmers improve their living and working conditions. To do so, CmiA relies on a strong collaboration with the CmiA certificate holders, the cotton companies (Managing Entities). Currently (2022), the initiative works with more than 20 cotton companies across the continent, and specifically with small-scale farmers contracted by these cotton companies, who cultivate rainfed handpicked cotton. A main strategy of CmiA is to support the cotton companies to conduct high quality trainings on the field and in the ginneries. This is enforced by the CmiA standard and the assurance system. In addition, CmiA engages with actors on the market to build a demand network and to facilitate the integration of CmiA verified cotton in the supply chains of brands and retailers. A detailed description of the results framework, including CmiA's inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts can be found in the [CmiA Theory of Change \(ToC\)](#).

CmiA has a robust monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) system in place, which is based on the ToC. Regular monitoring data is collected from all CmiA certificate holders in every country CmiA is active in. Managing Entities provide data in annual self-assessments, where they report about their activities both on the ginnery and the field level. This covers essential output indicators. However, many of CmiA's intended outcomes and impacts can only be thoroughly assessed through in-depth studies. Therefore, CmiA also commissions independent research in addition to its regular monitoring activities in order to capture the intended and unintended outcomes and impacts of the initiative.

For the supply chain, where CmiA offers traceability services and onboarding support, relevant outputs (e.g. traded volumes) are monitored.

## 2. Roles and Responsibilities

The Standard & Outreach team is responsible for Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) at AbTF. AbTF is committed to provide sufficient resources and capacities to implement the MEL system activities. These comprise data collection and analysis as well as MEL strategy considerations which are reconciled with the AbTF senior management team, and where necessary discussed with and approved by the Board of Trustees. In addition to dedicated MEL personnel, verification management of the Standard & Outreach team as well as the Business Development team also contribute data to the system.



### 3. Defining the Intended Change

At the impact level, CmiA seeks to achieve improvements in economic, ecological, and social areas:

Regarding the economic dimension, CmiA aims to support the cotton farmers in gaining higher incomes from cotton production and in increasing resilience against changes in the market. This is to be achieved by higher cotton yields, as well as lower input costs for the cotton production, and potentially also a more diversified crop portfolio, all of which are assumed to result from the application of improved farming techniques as well as basic economic skills both learned in trainings provided by Managing Entities or liaised third parties.

Concerning the ecological dimension, training application is expected to lead to an improvement and/or maintenance of soil fertility and a reduction of pesticide use. Thereby, CmiA strives to protect ecosystem services and to minimise the contamination of natural resources.

The impacts in the social dimension comprise both ginnery and farm levels. With regards to the ginneries, the main goal is to create decent working conditions for all staff in the ginnery, which are assumed to be in place after the ginnery management implemented the corresponding measures.

The overall objective of CmiA on the farm level is to contribute to improving the living conditions of farmers and farmers' families as well as supporting them to become more resilient to the effects of climate change. The underlying hypotheses implies that this will be possible due to increased farming expertise and higher incomes from cotton.





## 4. Performance Monitoring

Performance monitoring data is derived from annual self-assessments. Self-assessments cover data from the previous season, including important performance indicators such as training numbers and yield. In addition, Managing Entities provide self-assessments of their performance regarding the indicators of the CmiA standard. Their actual performance is confirmed by annual third-party verifications (alternating field and ginnery verifications).

In order to collect, store and analyse performance data systematically, CmiA has defined processes in place which are also closely connected to the initiative's Assurance System:

1. Annual self-assessment completed by each Managing Entity
2. Review of all self-assessments by AbTF staff
3. Assignment of third-party verifications for each Managing Entity (alternating yearly between field and ginnery audits)
4. Review of all CAP<sup>1</sup> Assurances by AbTF staff
5. Submission of a continuous-improvement plan by each Managing Entity

To facilitate data collection and analysis, AbTF has developed the **CmiA Assurance Platform (CAP)**, an online tool accessible for all parties involved. It enables Managing Entities to complete their self-assessments directly in the system and covers all steps of the verification, including the verifiers' findings from on-site verifications. The system provides tools for various types of analysis, which are available to AbTF staff, but can also be used by Managing Entities to analyse their own data over the years. In addition, the system serves as a learning platform, as it entails a resource library for CmiA partners as well as an online community to exchange experiences and learn from each other.

Data collected in self-assessments and verifications is analysed regularly by AbTF's Standard & Outreach team and compared over the years to identify trends. A detailed analysis of the verification results, also compared to previous seasons, is compiled in so-called Aggregated Verification Reports. The close monitoring of performance data helps to identify areas for improvement which need further support and training, and allows CmiA to steer its operations respectively.

<sup>1</sup> The CmiA Assurance Platform (CAP) is an online tool specifically designed by AbTF to capture the CmiA Assurance Process. It comprises all steps of an Assurance, including the annual self-assessments of the Managing Entities and the verification findings of the verifiers. Access to the platform is provided by AbTF Verification Management to both Managing Entities and assigned verifiers as needed.



## 5. Outcome and Impact Evaluations

In order to get an insight in CmiA's outcomes and impacts, in-depth studies by independent, competent parties are conducted to complement CmiA's broader MEL system. In terms of the ecological dimension, life cycle assessments (LCA studies) are commissioned at judicious intervals. In addition, further studies on environmental aspects are commissioned as required. Concerning the economic and social aspects, impact studies are being conducted by external experts as needed. In addition to these large-scale studies, smaller evaluations such as focus group discussions with farmers are regularly carried out by AbTF staff to shed light on specific fields of interest.

## 6. Improving the Effectiveness of the MEL system

Complementing the revision of the CmiA Standard in 2020, the MEL system was also revised. This resulted in more detailed number of performance indicators and the development of the above-mentioned IT system to collect and analyse data more systematically. Further learnings are derived from the Life Cycle Assessment and the above-mentioned impact evaluations (published in 2021).

## 7. Opportunities for Engagement

Aggregated verification reports, the CmiA LCA and other studies are accessible to the public on the [CmiA website](#). Stakeholders are welcome to give feedback on these documents and/or the MEL system in general. Feedback and comments are taken into account during any revisions and further developments of the MEL system. Any comments, questions about the CmiA MEL System may be submitted to: [standards@abt-foundation.org](mailto:standards@abt-foundation.org). Formal complaints may be submitted, after consulting the CmiA Complaints Procedure, via [complaints@abt-foundation.org](mailto:complaints@abt-foundation.org).

