Nestled in the heart of West Africa, Burkina Faso pulsates with the rhythm of cotton production. Lush fields stretching towards the horizon are meticulously tended by families whose lives have been interwoven with this precious crop, "white gold," for generations. Beyond its national pride, cotton is the lifeblood of countless rural communities, providing not just export earnings but a vital source of income and stability for millions. Recognizing this significance, the Burkina Faso government joined hands with the International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation (ITFC), the trade arm of the IsDB Group, to weave a remarkable story of partnership and progress.

While statistics boast of cotton as the nation's second-highest source of export revenue, a deeper look reveals the even more impactful human story. A staggering 15-20% of the
workforce relies on cotton, translating to millions depending on this crop for their very livelihood, considering many families have five or more members.

Despite its economic importance, the sector faced significant challenges. Delays in payments to farmers created financial insecurity and hindered investment in farms and families. Additionally, limited access to export markets restricted growth and development. The need for a comprehensive solution became apparent.

In 2006, a strategic partnership emerged as a beacon of hope. The IsDB Group, leveraging its trade finance expertise, joined hands for the first time with SOFITEX, the national cotton company. This collaboration aimed to address the sector's critical needs and unlock its full potential.

ITFC stepped forward, providing vital financing to SOFITEX, enabling them to purchase raw cotton from farmers at the point of harvest. This ensured a steady flow of income for cotton producers, alleviating financial strain and empowering them to reinvest in their farms and families. ITFC's support went beyond just funding; they also offered valuable technical
assistance, contributing to improved practices and increased efficiency within the sector.

The cornerstone of the cooperation was the ability of the different stakeholders to ensure the continuity of the partnership with ITFC. This enabled SOFITEX to consistently, season after season, purchase raw cotton from farmers, eliminating the delays in payments that had plagued the sector in the past. ITFC’s financing not only provided cash but also facilitated technical assistance programs designed to enhance SOFITEX’s operational efficiency.

While the partnership focused on supporting SOFITEX, the ultimate beneficiaries were the cotton farmers themselves. By ensuring prompt payments for their harvest, the project directly impacted the livelihoods of millions. This financial security allowed farmers to invest in their families' health, education, and future endeavors. The project also indirectly contributed to the development of rural communities by supporting the cotton sector, a vital source of employment and economic activity.

The ITFC's EUR 100 million trade financing agreement with Burkina Faso, earmarked for SOFITEX in the 2023/2024 cotton season, represents a strategic and multifaceted transaction. This deal significantly bolsters Burkina Faso's economy by supporting its vital cotton sector, a major contributor to the nation's GDP and a key source of foreign
currency. Beyond its direct economic impact, the agreement has a multiplier effect, enhancing related sectors like transportation and banking. It also demonstrates a strong commitment to inclusive employment, supporting 6,009 jobs at SOFITEX, including roles for women and youth. This initiative not only fosters economic growth but also contributes to socio-economic stability by ensuring income for rural farmers, a crucial factor in the current security context of Burkina Faso.

Burkina Faso's cotton story is not just a success story for the nation itself; it's a beacon of hope for the entire West African region. Recognizing the transferable nature of the project's model, ITFC has expanded its financing programs to other cotton-producing countries in West Africa, including Benin, Cameroon, and Côte d'Ivoire. As of 2023, ITFC's total support to the cotton sector across these countries exceeded US$2.5 billion, hence its nickname in the region: “The Cotton Bank of Africa”.