International Labour Organization

Evaluation Office

i-eval Discovery

Better Work Programme in Pakistan - Pilot Phase Independent Final Evaluation

QUICK FACTS

Countries: Pakistan

Evaluation date: 30 November 2025

Evaluation type: Project

Evaluation timing: Final

Administrative Office: ILO - Islamabad

Technical Office: BETTER WORK

Evaluation manager: Kavunga Kambale

Evaluation consultant(s): Ruth Bowen and Faaiz Irfan

DC Symbol: PAK/21/03/PAK

Donor(s) & budget: Economic Development Fund, Pakistan (USD 3,000,000), European Commission US 1,200,000), Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Australia (USD 600,000)

Key Words: Textiles, garment, supply chain, decent work, labour standards, gender, inclusion, occupational safety and health, fundamental principles

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT	
Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure	Better Work launched a programme in Pakistan as a pilot phase in 2022, as one of 13 country programmes under the global programme. The initiative was founded in the Government's aim to strengthen the labour standards reputation of Pakistan's textile and garment export industry and secure international buyers. The overall objective of Better Work Pakistan (BWP) was to improve textile and garment export enterprises' compliance with national labour laws and international labour standards, and to promote business competitiveness in the sector. The Programme sought to achieve two outcomes by 2024 (extended by no-cost extension to December 2025): • Better Work Pakistan will have facilitated improvements in working conditions and enhanced business competitiveness in at least 120 factories (150 with the no—cost extension) • Better Work Pakistan will have strengthened overall labour market governance including sectoral social dialogue, in the textile, clothing and footwear sector. The programme implemented the Better Work factory engagement model among subscriber textile and garment factories in Punjab and Sindh provinces, providing labour standards advisory support, training and factory compliance assessments through ILO Enterprise Advisors. Towards the second outcome, BWP aimed to facilitate a stronger enabling environment for labour standards compliance among factories in the sector by supporting national policy development and enhanced capacity to promote labour standards among the tripartite constituents, in coordination with the ILO Country Office.
Present situation of the project	Better Work in Pakistan was initiated as a 3-year pilot phase in January 2022. Since programme funds remained, a no-cost extension was granted by the donor until December 2025.
Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation	The final evaluation aimed to assess the progress, achievements and challenges of the programme over the full course of its implementation with a view to informing future Better Work programming and a potential second phase in Pakistan. It also addressed BWP's relevance, coherence, efficiency, emerging

	impacts and sustainability prospects. The evaluation clients are Better Work Pakistan and Global, the ILO Pakistan Country Office, tripartite constituents, and industry stakeholders.
Methodology of evaluation	The evaluation applied the OECD-DAC criteria and complied with the ILO Policy Guidelines results-based evaluation (2020) as well as UNEG Ethical Guidelines and Norms and Standards in the UN System. The evaluation drew upon mixed methods data collection and analysis using desk research, in-person and remote interviews, factory focus groups, and a stakeholder workshop. The evaluation team consulted with over 100 stakeholders from the ILO, tripartite constituents, Better Work member factories and brand partners.

MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS	Overall, Better Work Pakistan's pilot phase successfully established a model of advisory support to build labour standards compliance in textile and garment export factories, demonstrating the viability of the approach for consolidation and expansion in Pakistan. **Relevance:** The Programme was closely aligned with national development policies and interest to build a textile and garments sector meeting international and national labour standards, and secure export markets. Under implementation, the factory level interventions remained highly relevant from the perspective of tripartite stakeholder representatives, but **industry and government** representatives were less satisfied with the focus on large factories and limited inclusion of SMEs. **Trade union** representatives support the programme in principle but have had limited opportunity to be involved and would like to see stronger support to freedom of association and collective bargaining. **Factory managers** generally value the holistic Better Work advisory approach, while they hope to see further reduction in brand audits. **Workers** attested to the programme value in helping them to raise their voice and contribute to improvements as members of workplace committees. **Brand partners** highly value the role of BWP in helping their suppliers adhere to labour standards, and trust the Better Work advisory and assessment model, while they find that factory transparency and hence the reliability of the compliance reports needs to be strengthened.

Coherence: BWP coordinated with related country projects and jointly implemented some activities under the guidance of the Country Office, amplifying the results. This aligned with Better Work's growing emphasis globally on a ONE-ILO approach recognizing that BW is integral to the larger ILO effort. Nevertheless, key informant interviews suggested that BWP's contribution to common efforts could have been stronger.

Effectiveness: BWP has established a solid footprint of engagement at the factory level, reaching 129 factories, and supported by 19 buyer partners and 37 brand subscribers. The programme has demonstrated early signs of improvement in a variety of working conditions and international labour standards. Among the key achievements, social dialogue in the participating factories is improving through active and well-functioning bipartite committees, while the consistency of compliance assessments remains to be strengthened. There is evidence of some audit reduction by brands, which supports the business case for the programme, although some buyers continue to cross-check better Work assessment findings.

External factors constraining progress at the factory level included political instability, floods, and geographical distances to reach factories. Internally, challenges included team initial inexperience, initial factory lack of trust in the compliance assessment process, and persisting legal grey areas for compliance assessment, while the revised provincial labour laws have not yet come into effect.

The programme contributed to improved labour governance through provincial law reform, jointly with the ILES project as part of the Country Office effort but provided limited support to constituent capacity building. Regarding tripartite partner involvement, the partners express strong continuing interest in the programme and participate in the Project Steering Committee, but BWP has not fully capitalized on this interest in its activities.

The factors constraining achievements at the labour governance level hinged on a lack of staff capacity to advance this work, especially in the prolonged period of absence of a Programme Manager. Aside from this, the expected results were not well defined and appear to have been ambitious given the need to focus on establishing the factory engagement. The programme and the country office also needed to follow the timing and readiness of the constituents to address the policy implementation.

Regarding cross-cutting issues in design and implementation, gender and disability inclusion are well integrated in BWP, and the progress made offers strong potential for more inclusion-focused advocacy and training initiatives.

Efficiency: The programme benefitted from multiple funding streams, including around 50% of the budget provided by the national Export Development Fund. It achieved a high cost-recovery rate from private sector contributions (brand and factory subscribers), reducing the dependence on donor funding.

The staff resources, structure and capacity were well suited to the implementation tasks, but the governance outcomes, partner liaison and communication tasks were under resourced, mostly falling to the Programme Manager. Enterprise Advisor roles are demanding, given additional focal point responsibilities, while M&E resourcing was limited.

Emerging Impact: Impacts are mainly visible in the participating factories, where key informant accounts point to changes occurring in systems for compliance with labour standards. However, many factories have only completed one advisory and assessment cycle, and it is early to expect to see wide-scale impacts on working conditions.
Analysis of compliance data from factories completing two assessment cycles indicates some areas successive improvements - on OSH, relating to handling chemical substances and worker protection; and in the areas of paid leave and overtime payments. Persistent areas of non-compliance also remain after two cycles, for example emergency preparedness compliance, while hiring people with disabilities remains a pressing challenge.

Sustainability: BWP has not developed a fully-fledged sustainability plan or long-term vision for the programme beyond ILO's role in

	direct factory engagement. These elements should be elaborated in the next phase. Institutional sustainability efforts envisaged through support to labour market governance capacity are at an early stage. The evidence is insufficient regarding which emerging factory improvements are sustainable without BWP support; however, progress on social dialogue mechanisms in the form of well-functioning bipartite committees and OSH committees appear likely to lead to a long-term culture of factory improvement.

RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES	
Main recommendations (In summary form)	1. Continue to expand the number of factories engaged in the full Better Work factory engagement model in the next phase to a feasible extent; and extend BWP's reach in the textiles and garment sector by facilitating access of SMEs to join the programme. 2. Accelerate BWP support to constituents in enhancing relevant policy frameworks and constituent capacity in a second phase, in coordination with the Country Office. 3. Ensure alignment between key project design documents. 4. Improve communications and systems for engaging effectively with constituent stakeholders, including national and provincial governments and the social partners. 5. In the next phase, strengthen the quality of factory compliance assessment and reporting to better identify critical non-compliance issues and strengthen the credibility of reports for brands' supply chain monitoring. 6. Strengthen BW Pakistan engagement with brands and buyers, as well as interaction between the brands, suppliers and constituents. 7. Explore the possibility of extending the scope of coverage in the textiles and garment sector to reach factories in Balochistan and Khyber Paktunkhwa provinces. 8. Improve planning and actions toward sustainability of BWP results at the factory and the institutional levels. 9. With support from Better Work Global, enhance BWP's access to and use of compliance assessment data analytics. 10. Strengthen the Monitoring and Evaluation system in the next phase by developing a comprehensive performance

	monitoring plan. Given a ONE-ILO approach, ensure that this system is co-designed with the DWCP framework. Expand the human resources devoted to M&E and learning tasks. 11. Explore the potential and feasibility to expand the scope of BWP to other sectors such as sports goods and electronics, introducing a lighter engagement model. 12. Enhance Enterprise Advisor capacity in the BWP team to recognise and follow-up on gender-related risks.
Main lessons learned and good practices	**Good Practices** • Strengthening workers' role and voice in factory improvement initiatives through activating bi-partite workplace committees. • ILO Pakistan Country Office and Better Work Pakistan followed a coordinated ONE-ILO approach to the extent possible to advance labour standards in the textiles and garment sector. • Strengthening compliance and transparency in wage and leave entitlement practices among participating factories through Better Work advisory services. **Lessons Learned** • In a new Better Work programme, it takes time and ongoing effort to build the trust of participating factories in the advisory and compliance assessment process and hence factory transparency in the assessment process. • Programme design ambitions need to be calibrated to staffing, division of labour and programme duration. • The Better Work MOU signed by ILO with government constituents was valuable in demonstrating mutual commitments, but its attached implementation plan was not feasible within the timeframe nor well aligned with other planning and monitoring documents.