



Better Work Phase IV Final Independent Cluster Evaluation (2017 – 2022)

QUICK FACTS

Countries: Cambodia, Jordan, Vietnam, Indonesia, Nicaragua, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Egypt, Haiti

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Evaluation type: Clustered

Evaluation timing: Final

Administrative Office: Better Work

Technical Office: Better Work

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Donor(s) & budget: United States Department of Labour, Australia, Denmark, European Commission, Germany, The Netherlands and Switzerland – 35 million USD.

Key Words: Capacity building, clothing industry, conditions of employment, decent work, freedom of association, gender equality, global supply/value chains, labour inspection, labour standards, occupational safety and health, productivity, social dialogue, workers' rights, working conditions.

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

The Better Work programme is a comprehensive global programme led by ILO and IFC, established at the global level in 2007 (following the example of Better Factories in Cambodia, established in 2001). The programme aims to address the issue of poor working conditions in the garment industry, which affects sixty million workers across the developing world who rely on this sector for their livelihoods, 80% of them female.

The Better Work interventions include activities at factory, sectoral, national and global level, aimed at supporting garment-producing countries to strengthen their policy and enabling environment for decent work, gender equality and competitiveness:

- At the factory level, Better Work assesses compliance with national and international labour standards and provides advisory and training services for managers and workers to support continuous improvements through equal representation and dialogue.
- At the sectoral level, Better Work collaborates with global brands, retailers, and manufacturers to improve business and purchasing practices that foster improved labour conditions across their supply chains.
- At the national level, Better Work reinforces public institutions, shares best practices with labour inspectorates, and influences policies that create an enabling environment for decent work and improved business competitiveness.
- At the global level, Better Work influences the global policy dialogue on decent work by providing credible data and evidence to influencers and policy makers concerned with decent work in global supply chains.

Present situation of the project

The programme operates in 5-year strategic cycles. Between 2017 and 2022, the Programme implemented its fourth phase at the global level, focusing on two main interventions:

1. Influencing business practices in the global garment supply chain.
2. Influencing and strengthening public policies, institutions, and practice at the national, regional, and global levels.



	<p>The strategy for this period focused on building on the lessons learned and experience to date to widely scale up the impact of the programme. Better Work is currently active in 12 countries – Cambodia, Jordan, Vietnam, Haiti, Indonesia, Nicaragua, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Egypt, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Madagascar.</p>
<p>Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation</p>	<p>This final independent cluster evaluation of Better Work Phase IV has a twofold purpose. For the purpose of <i>accountability</i>, the evaluation provides an overview of the main achievements and challenges of Phase IV. From a <i>formative</i> perspective, the evaluation provides recommendations for the ILO and Better Work’s staff to improve the Programme and increase the potential of its impact in Phase V.</p> <p>The evaluation covered 9 out of the 12 countries where the Programme is active, namely Cambodia, Jordan, Vietnam, Indonesia, Nicaragua, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Egypt. Haiti is also included as a country of focus, although less data collection took place there as another evaluation of Better Work Haiti was currently ongoing during this evaluation.</p> <p>Better Work’s staff are the primary clients and users of the evaluation. As a programme of ILO and IFC, various ILO and IFC departments may also be interested to learn how Better Work has contributed to their fields of expertise. Lastly, the evaluation will inform donors, partners, buyers and constituents on the progress made by Better Work during Phase IV, the main challenges faced, and recommendations for a way forward.</p>
<p>Methodology of evaluation</p>	<p>The evaluation used qualitative and quantitative data collection methods to ensure that information provided in the evaluation report is accurate all the while providing the opportunity to staff, constituents, partners and donors of the project to voice their perceptions and experiences regarding the Programme.</p> <p>The evaluation relied on desk research, including programme documentation and (cross-)national evaluations of BW carried out between 2017 and 2022. 69 Better Work /ILO staff were interviewed, as well as 46 constituents and beneficiaries. A global survey received 100 responses from ILO/BW staff, constituents, partners and donors.</p> <p>The evaluation team developed five case studies to gather more in-depth information on specific topics of interest to the Better Work team. The topics included i) gender equality, ii) COVID-19, iii) Occupational Health and Safety, iv) Social dialogue, and v) Sustainability.</p>



Due to many stakeholder consultations carried out already in 2022, the evaluation faced certain barriers to gather stakeholder survey responses and conduct extensive interviews with constituents..

MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

1. Constituents, as well as beneficiaries (factory managers and workers) find Better Work relevant to their needs and priorities as it addresses both workers' wellbeing as well as factory productivity. The Programme was able to adapt to not only the country contexts but also to the impact and challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. The design of the Programme contributes to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 1, SDG 5 and SDG 8, due to its focus on improving working conditions, gender equality in the workplace, promotion of decent work opportunities (and wages) and compliance with labour laws.
3. The cost-recovery system of Better Work is a key element contributing to its efficiency, but also contributing to the dedication of factories and buyers to the programme, and the potential sustainability of the programme.
4. Given the diversity of countries in the programme, and their different levels of maturity in the programme, Phase IV witnessed a shift in management approaches, leaving more autonomy to Better Work country teams to adjust the programme to national needs.
5. Better Work made important progress to its planned outcomes, by supporting visible improvements in working conditions of participating factories and increasing their compliance with national labour laws. The programme also enhanced capacity of constituents to engage in dialogue on labour policy development.
6. Most notably the biggest impact was observed in the improvement of working conditions, changed behaviours and practices in factories, and enhanced productivity and competitiveness. Impact was also visible in terms of improvements in gender equality. Difficult political contexts, the pandemic, lack of enforcement of compliance, and gaps in scalability of the programme hinder the long-term impact.



7. In Phase IV, Better Work introduced sustainability guidelines and increased attention to sustainability at the country level. However, stakeholders currently have limited capacity and ownership to embed the Better Work activities into national systems and therefore rely heavily on the presence of Better Work.

The Better Work programme has many positive aspects according to the gathered data as well stakeholder and constituent feedback. The programme plays an important and valuable role in the garment sector by bringing together constituents and stakeholders and improving various aspects related to the garment sector. Similarly, the design of the programme which relies to a large extent on fees from factories and buyers provides the important added benefit of cost recovery, which enhances factory and buyer engagement, efficiency, and opportunities for sustainability. The BW programme has achieved visible success in achieving expected outputs and outcomes, particularly regarding gender equality, while also creating signs of impact. Less achievements were noted, however, in other cross-cutting areas. It must also be noted that even in challenging contexts such as that of the COVID-19 pandemic, the staff managed to adapt their activities to address changing needs.

Despite these successes, certain challenges persist, mainly in the realm of sustainability. This is due to the lack of focus on capacity building of constituents, as the programme focused on other aspects such as assessment and advisory services over the years. This makes stakeholders dependent on BW's presence as they lack the needed capacities and ownership of the project. Another challenge relates to the focus of Better Work on factory services, meaning that achievements at factory level did not always translate into national level policies. The insufficient links between the Better Work programme and the work of other ILO departments also undermined sustainability and efficiency gains.

RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

Main recommendations

- Better Work should reallocate (some of the) resources from implementation of factory-level services to capacity building of constituents and stakeholders with the aim of enabling them to take over these activities.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Better Work should Enhance the alignment and coordination between Better Work and the ILO as a whole. - Better Work should increase attention to sustainability of the programme within its design, both in terms of its current results and in terms of continuation of its activities. - Better Work should continue enhancing the engagement of buyers in the Better Work programme, especially in terms of their capacity building and assessment of working conditions in factories outside the scope of Better Work. - Better Work should assess the opportunities provided by recent technological development and invest in updating BW technological resources and technological skills of staff. - Better work should explore the further integration of cross-cutting concerns in the design, implementation and monitoring of Better Work.
<p>Main lessons learned and good practices</p>	<p>Lessons learned</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The pandemic showed that Better Work had limited leverage to convince buyers not to suspend their contracts. There is a clear need to focus not only on factory compliance, but also on purchasing practices, accountability, and compliance with ILS by buyers and brands themselves. - The absence of a clear sustainability and exit strategy during the programme design phase has led to a disproportionate reliance of national stakeholders on Better Work to implement all factory services. As a result, there are no possibilities for the exit of Better Work in the programme countries, without undoing the progress that was made in the recent years. - Changes in donor priorities (e.g. due to current crises), fluctuations in the global economic situation, and shifts in programme activities (e.g. less factory activities so less cost-recovery) may affect availability of funding in the future. <p>Good Practices</p>



- The Global Gender Equality Strategy and targeted focus on female workers in the sector has visibly amplified the results of Better Work Phase IV for women, compared to the previous phases.
- Increased use of virtual tools in the Better Work programme can lead to efficiency gains and opportunities for programme sustainability.
- The ONE-ILO approach applied in some of the Better Work countries provided opportunities for better use of resources and more holistic support to the programme countries
- Better Work has achieved promising results to combine environmental sustainability with working conditions. Successful pilots on environmental sustainability in the garment sector (mainly regarding OSH) demonstrate that there is space in the scope of Better Work to include more activities on this topic.