



# Evaluation Summary



International  
Labour  
Office

Evaluation  
Office

## *Better Work Global – Phase IV*

### *Midterm evaluation*

#### Quick Facts

**Countries:** Global

**Mid-Term Evaluation:** August -October 2020

**Evaluation Mode:** Independent

**Administrative Office:** Better Work

**Technical Office:** Better Work

**Evaluation Manager:** Tahmid Arif

**Evaluation Consultant(s):** Urs Zollinger

**Project Code:** e.g. GLO/17/55/MUL

**Donor(s) & Budget:** e.g. The Netherlands, Switzerland, Denmark, Germany, European Commission (US\$ 35 million)

**Keywords:** Working conditions, industrial relations, labour standards, global supply chain, garment industry, gender, COVID-19

<http://www.ilo.org/thesaurus/>

#### Background & Context

##### **Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure**

Better Work (BW), a partnership between the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC), aims at improving working conditions and boosting competitiveness in the global garment industry. Better Work's vision is a global garment industry that lifts millions of people out of poverty by providing decent work, empowering women, driving business competitiveness and promoting inclusive economic growth. BW has basically two areas of intervention:

1. Intervention area 1 focuses on influencing business practices in the global garment supply chain;
2. Intervention area 2 focuses on strengthening the enabling environment for decent work.

Better Work consists of a Better Work Global Programme (BW Global) and Better Work country programmes. The BW Global team, based in Geneva and Bangkok, acts as secretariat to the country programmes and is responsible for several global functions, including quality assurance and technical support for the delivery of factory services, training and capacity building, country expansion, research, development of key strategic partnerships, global stakeholder engagement and policy dialogue.

##### **Present Situation of the Project**

Better Work Global is in phase IV (July 2017 – June 2022). Currently, there are nine country programmes in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Vietnam,

Jordan, Ethiopia, Haiti, Nicaragua and Egypt. Better Work has 241 staff members of which 210 (87%) are at the country level and 31 (13%) at the global level of which 17 are based in Geneva and 14 in Bangkok.

### **Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation**

As this is a mid-term evaluation and formative in nature, the main purpose of the evaluation was to learn from what the Better Work Global Programme Phase IV (BW Global) achieved during July 2017 to July 2020 including the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The evaluation made recommendations to adjust the programme in order to increase the likelihood that it has achieved the objectives set out in 2017, adjusted to the COVID-19 crisis. The evaluation's recommendations also fed into ongoing consultations for the next BW strategy (phase V). The subject of the evaluation was BW Global Phase IV and the work of the BW Global team - i.e., the BW secretariat. The BW country programmes will be evaluated separately.

### **Methodology of evaluation**

The main approach for this evaluation was qualitative with a focus on stakeholders as key informants. Since this is an evaluation of BW Global Phase IV (not the country programmes), the emphasis was on global-level stakeholders supplemented with some national-level views. The main data collection method were semi-structured interviews relying on online tools (skype, facetime, zoom). Written questionnaires were also used. A remote focus group discussion took place with members of the BW Global team. In total, the evaluator received inputs from 56 persons. Primary data collection from stakeholders was supplemented by reviewing and analysing secondary data - i.e., BW documents and various websites.

Particular attention was given to Ethiopia because (1) the BW country programme was established during the period under review which was the responsibility of the BW Global team, and (2) Better Work in Ethiopia is adhering to a so-called ONE ILO approach.

Due to the COVID-19 crisis, this evaluation had to be conducted without any travel possibilities. Interviews and discussions were conducted virtually (phone, skype, zoom) which may have affected the richness of the interaction between the evaluator and the informants.

## **Main Findings & Conclusions**

**Relevance and challenges:** Better Work is contributing to the strategic objectives of ILO's Decent Work agenda and the SDGs. BW phase IV is also seen as highly relevant by all stakeholders. Better Work has many strengths and several comparative advantages, including a good understanding of the garment industry, the credibility of ILO as regards labour standards, the holistic approach covering national, sector and factory levels, the trusted relationship with constituents, and the close collaboration with global brands. At the same time, Better Work faces many challenges in order to remain relevant, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the profound transformation of the global garment industry, the highly labour intensive factory assessments, a call for scalability, the challenges of climate change, and social protection.

**COVID-19 pandemic:** Better Work (Global and country programmes) responded immediately by supporting workers, employers and government partners in the garment sector. Most consulted stakeholders assess BW Global's response to the COVID-19 pandemic positively. Stakeholders particularly appreciated the support provided by BW Global for the COVID-19 Call to Action for the Garment Industry. The support provided by BW Global to BW country teams is also greatly appreciated (e.g. virtual training, guidelines). There is a consensus among stakeholders that the next two years (until the end of the current phase IV) will be about coping with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, new priorities are emerging, in particular productivity in order to make garment factories financially more resilient and social protection in order to support workers who might lose their jobs and incomes.

**Results reported:** It appears that BW Global is on track to achieve the outputs planned for phase IV. Achieving results at the impact and outcome-levels is less clear, partly because of limited systematic reporting. Donors appreciate the latest donor report (2019) and acknowledge an improvement compared to previous annual progress reports. At the same time, they would welcome further improvements, in particular with regard to the systematic comparison of baselines, targets and achievements of outputs and

outcomes at the global level in order to be in a better position to assess progress made.

**New Better Work country programmes:** BW Global is on track regarding the expansion to new countries if it can add one more country by 2022. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly slowed down the process. More generally, the establishment of new country programmes is a complex and investment-intensive process. And the selection of new countries is partly contested.

**Gender equality:** Having a gender strategy is widely recognised by all BW stakeholders as an important step. And while there is progress in implementing the strategy, the overall view is that even more could be done, for example with regard to female career development and gender outcome indicators.

**Participation of global business:** Overall, the participation of global business in Better Work is viewed positively and a major strength of Better Work. However, some also view the role of global business in Better Work with some reservation. The view expressed that the brands have too much influence and that Better Work tends to focus more on engagement with employers and the private sector and less with workers, their organizations and governments.

**Better Work Academy:** The Better Work Academy is seen as a cost-effective tool to scale up the outreach of Better Work. As such, the Academy is seen as contributing to amplifying impact. However, the Academy's strategy to further scale up is not clear. Moreover, several stakeholders would like to see an open Academy accessible for other stakeholders beyond the participating brands and their suppliers. Also, some stakeholders called for more investment in the Academy also from the BW Global budget.

**Coherence within ILO and the experience in Ethiopia:** BW Global has enhanced the coherence with ILO over the past three years, in particular also because of the joint approach tested in Ethiopia. For global business, the coherence and closeness of Better Work with ILO is seen as a main comparative advantage vis-à-vis other initiatives, as it allows BW Global to play a crucial convening role of different stakeholders. Still, both at country and global levels, efforts to further enhance coherence between Better Work and ILO were called for.

**Support for BW country programmes:** The support provided by BW Global to BW country programmes covers many areas and varies significantly among

country programmes. The support is largely appreciated by the country programmes. Especially useful in recent years were the support for implementing the gender strategy and the ongoing support to handle the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 crisis has strengthened collaboration between BW Global and the country teams. It is seen as a highly innovative period. Still, there is a sense that overall mechanisms to connect the work at global level and the countries could be further strengthened and that support provided could be better based on country realities.

**Resources:** BW Global is a labour-intensive programme and staff costs constitute the main cost of BW Global. While the budget structure follows ILO rules to present staff costs in a single budget line, it does not provide meaningful information on how resources are allocated to the four development outcomes. Still, most stakeholders are of the view that BW Global is worth investing. The strategic/optimal allocation of human resources is not uncontested. The difference between ILO Programme Support Costs and costs related to the “enabling outcome” is not very clear.

**Contribution to impact:** Stakeholders acknowledge BW Global's contribution to enhancing impact. Key contributions are, for example, the expansion to new countries, the work of the BW Academy, the dialogue at the global-industry level, and the use of digital technology. At the same time, stakeholders are aware of the overall limited impact of Better Work compared to the size of the global garment industry. The key challenge is seen in terms of scalability: How to go beyond BW participating countries and BW participating factories? Initiatives such as the Social and Labour Convergence Programme (SLCP) and “Building Bridges” are seen as promising approaches to expand impact within the garment industry.

**Sustainability:** BW Global has made an extra effort during the period under review to support country programmes in their sustainability efforts. However, the sustainability of results achieved still depends on the in-country presence of Better Work. It is the dominant view that over time the factory assessments and inspections should be handed over to national governments or non-government institutions. The shift of Better Work towards a more holistic approach with policy interventions in order to address structural challenges is encouraged and seen as key for sustainable improvement of working conditions.

Stakeholders also welcome BW Global engagement at the global-industry level as this is also seen as contributing to sustainability at the country level.

**Main conclusion:** Better Work is in phase IV undoubtedly a success story. Based on the findings of this mid-term evaluation it is fair to say that Better Work is still highly relevant. A next phase (phase V) is likely to be justifiable, not least because of the drastic consequences of the COVID-19-pandemic on the global garment industry.

However, what has been successful to date may not necessarily be successful in future. The global garment industry is undergoing a profound change not only because of the COVID-19 pandemic but also because of other fundamental and long-term factors such as the digitalisation of the industry, shifting supply routes, near-shoring, changing consumer behaviour and shifting priorities (e.g., climate change). These changes can potentially have a significant impact on the garment industry and on the work force in this industry. Accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, jobs are at risk. The fundamental assumption of Better Work - the garment industry is a growth industry that can create or sustain decent jobs - may be challenged. These broader trends may have drastic consequences also for Better Work. BW Global's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that it can react fast and in an innovative way. BW Global can play an important role in the garment industry at the global level.

## Recommendations

### Main recommendations and follow-up

R-1. Strengthen the role of BW Global as thought-leader in the global garment industry by deepening the analysis of the garment industry and the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and fundamental long-term factors on the workers in the garment industry; by considering how to give social protection of workers and climate change more weight in Better Work; by keeping a strong gender perspective.

R-2. Consider an alternative country expansion strategy ("BW second generation") which is nimbler and less resource intensive and less criteria for countries and factories to participate. Such a second-generation country expansion strategy may be largely virtual and/or in partnership with national partners.

And it should be pursued in close collaboration with other ILO departments and country/regional offices.

R-3. Enhance engagement with global business, in particular with European and Asian brands, large retailers and e-retailers as well as with global manufacturers, and enhance engagement with current partners, in particular at the country level.

R-4. Consider expanding the Better Work Academy and making it accessible for many more factories. For this, BW Global should prepare a strategy for the Academy.

R-5. Adjust the support provided to BW country programmes with regard to the engage with governments on policy dialogue and structural issues as well as development strategies for the garment industry; also enhance support between BW country programmes in this regard.

R-6. Accelerate a transition away from BW factory assessments, by investing in innovative tools to make factory assessments less labour intensive; by continuing supporting country programmes with their sustainability strategies; by exploring alternative certification mechanisms; and by emphasising vis-à-vis governments and global business that it is not the purpose of a UN programme to be a permanent service provider to a specific industry.

R-7. BW Global should prioritize the Social and Labour Convergence Programme (SLCP) with the objective to establish a common standard for the garment industry.

R-8. Enhance the collaboration between Better Work and ILO programmes/units in countries with ongoing BW programmes and in countries with no BW programmes.

R-9. Strengthen outcome-oriented budgeting and reporting by reporting more systematically at the outcome-indicator level and by allocating staff costs to the four outcome budgets.