

US Department of Labor, Office of Trade and Labor Affairs

Interim Evaluation of the Better Work Bangladesh (BWB) Project



Period of Performance:

2017-2021



Funding:

\$1,656,274.50
(USDOL contribution 2017-2021)



Implementer:

International Labor Organization (ILO)

Objective: Based on a tripartite approach, the project aims to improve compliance with International Labor Standards (ILS) and national laws in the Bangladeshi garment export sector by offering advisory, training and compliance assessment services to factories and capacity building services to national constituents.

Key Findings

RELEVANCE & COHERENCE

BWB is responsive in adapting its services to stakeholders' needs, capacities, and motivations, within the ILO's normative framework and Bangladesh labor law.

EFFECTIVENESS

By Dec. 2020 BWB coverage (277 factories) is at 79% of its target. The program is on track in securing brand partnerships, and it has achieved improvements in member factory labor compliance. BWB plans to scale up its work by engaging non-project actors in supporting compliance in the sector. Around 10% of Bangladeshi garment export factories are BW subscribers.

EFFICIENCY

The quality of the project leadership, staffing structure, staff expertise and minimal turnover, and the blending of advisory and training roles support the expansion and quality of service delivery.

SUSTAINABILITY

BWB has made steady progress in building ownership and capacity among government, industry, buyers, and the social partners to adopt BWB advisory approaches and tools for compliance.

OVERALL IMPACT

BWB's advisory support contributed to significant improvements among participating factories regarding effective social dialogue between workers and management, as well as to women's empowerment.

Impact on Priority Target Groups:

IMPACT ON FEMALE WORKERS

- The project significantly improved women's empowerment through participation in worker/management committees and skills enhancement programs.
- Workers perceive BWB to be highly effective in improving working conditions and services to women (e.g., maternity, and reproductive health conditions and services).
- The project has helped improve women's access to promotion from the line to supervisory positions (e.g., through the Gender Equality and Returns initiative -GEAR) and promoted the women's voice in worker-management dialogue.

IMPACT ON TRADE UNIONS/ WORKER REPRESENTATIVES

- BWB has been providing capacity training to trade unions through the Workers' Resource Centre.
- BWB has helped improve the understanding and practices related to workers' rights, including freedom of association and collective bargaining, both among workers and managers.
- However, representatives of trade union federations do not fully trust BWB's role in promoting freedom of association. They feel it is more focused on supporting factory-level safety committees.

Achievements and Sustainability: Achievement of Project's Outcomes

Outcome 1: Core service delivery model applied (Output 5.1 in RMGP 2 results framework)

Outcome 2: Engaging stakeholders to contribute to responsible business practices (Output 5.2 in RMGP 2 results framework)

Components or Practices that are Likely to Remain Sustainable

1. Annual business forums and collaboration with the Sustainable Apparel Forum, bringing together government, factories, brands, trade unions and development organizations (Outcome 2)

2. Support to the effective functioning of Participation Committees, complaints mechanisms, and trade union rights and functioning through its advisory, training and compliance services (Outcome 1)

3. Expanded training provision to government and social partners through the Learning Hub launched in 2020 (Outcome 2)



RESPONSE TO COVID 19

The Covid-19 pandemic was a major setback to the industry and to BWB's services. Millions of dollars' worth of orders dropped during the period. The program adapted well to the Covid-19 context by transitioning to virtual service provision, especially for advisory and training services. BWB issued guidance documents and training for management and workers on health and safety guidelines. This included a Learning Hub offering training on Covid-19 response and on human resource management and productivity topics.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- BWB's advisory services support the effective functioning of the worker-management committees, helping improve social dialogue.
- Gender mainstreaming and the GEAR model demonstrate benefits for women's career advancement.
- Expanding initiatives for constituent and buyer capacity building, like the Learning Hub, to other types of training on working conditions and social dialogue.

LESSONS LEARNED

- There is a need for BWB to engage more closely with national tripartite constituents towards ownership and capacity.
- BWB needs to make concerted efforts to convince employers of the business case for subscribing to compliance services and adopting compliance with international labor standards.
- While compliance with ILS and national laws show improvements in some key areas (e.g., wage payments, wage information, welfare facilities and working time), persistent high levels of non-compliance are reported in some areas such as OSH standards.

RECOMMENDATIONS	USDOL	BWB/ BWG	ILO/ RMPG	TU/ EA	BAC/ PAC	Partner brands/ Subscriber Factories	GOB
1. Enhance BWB guidance to subscriber factories on industrial relations issues in the continuing Covid-19 context.		•					
2. Develop a roadmap for a return to a mix of virtual and in-person services when ILO COVID-19 restrictions allow.		•			•	•	
3. Enhance attention to FOACB compliance.	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
4. Conduct assessment of women's needs at home and in the workplace in the pandemic context in subscriber factories.		•				•	
5. Strengthen BWB and ILO communications with the tripartite constituents.		•	•	•	•	•	•
6. Expand tripartite constituent capacity building.	•	•	•				
7. Document a comprehensive BWB sustainability strategy and exit pathway for the forthcoming phase.	•	•			•		
8. Upscale initiatives for women's advancement and equality.	•	• ¹				•	
9. Increase management staffing.	•	•					
10. Improve the M&E framework for capturing stakeholder capacity and gender outcomes.	•	•					
11. Develop an appropriate results-based performance monitoring plan and performance indicators with USDOL support.	•	•					
12. Develop an advocacy and communications strategy on unethical brand purchasing practices.	• ²	•	•				
13. Strengthen donor influence on supply chain practices.	• ³						

¹ And IFC and UNICEF

² And other donors

³ And USDOS, other donor governments

