



BCI Continuous Improvement process (Producer Units)

January 2019

V1.0

Introduction

The concept of Continuous Improvement is at the heart of BCI's approach to increasing the sustainability of cotton farming. As participants in the Better Cotton Standard System (BCSS), Implementing Partners and Farmers commit to making ongoing improvements in field-level practices. One of the central levers of the BCSS for driving continuous improvement is the requirement under Principle 7 in the Better Cotton Principles and Criteria for Producers to have a Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP) in place.¹ In the context of smallholders and medium farms, the CIP is required at Producer Unit (PU) level.

The BCI CIP process document is a guidance document designed to support PUs to develop and implement an effective Continuous Improvement Plan. The BCI CIP process guidance document is complemented by an optional Excel template that provides PUs with a common structure for defining and operationalising their improvement goals.

The CIP Process and CIP template are integrated tools that enable PUs, with support from Implementing Partners (IPs), to:

- Define improvement goals across Better Cotton Principles 1 to 6
- Prioritise a limited set of 'Focus Areas'
- Plan and implement field interventions
- Monitor and review progress against annual and long-term targets
- Adapt and improve CIP implementation based on outcomes

The approach outlined through the CIP process and template reflects a balance of structure and flexibility, providing a clearly defined method for planning and implementation that also empowers PUs to tailor the CIP to their performance level and local needs.

¹ 7.1 The Producer must develop and implement a Continuous Improvement Plan. 7.1.1 A Continuous Improvement Plan is available, implemented and monitored according to the applicable BCI Continuous Improvement planning process, and reviewed annually.

1.) Continuous Improvement Planning Process

At the heart of the CIP process is a **step by step planning cycle** for the development and implementation of the plan. The steps outlined below aim to ensure that the CIP is well informed, locally adapted, sufficiently resourced, and monitored and improved over time.

Step 1: Scoping and Consultation at PU level

Timing: *End of season / post-season (in advance of year 1)*

Who: *Led by PU Manager, with support from the Implementation Partner (IP) Field or project Coordinator² and in collaboration with FFs.*

The starting point for a locally adapted CIP that accurately reflects the needs and priorities of farmers is to conduct extensive scoping and consultation at PU level. This step should be led by the PU Manager, with support from the Implementation Partner (IP) Coordinator.

Requirement

Scoping and consultation utilises and builds on the PU's existing Internal Management System and must include:

- Consultation and collaboration with Field Facilitators (FFs) to understand what FFs see as the biggest challenges for farmers in the PU, as well as the greatest opportunities for improvement, based on their ongoing interactions with farmers;
- A comprehensive review of PU documentation to identify strengths, weaknesses, risks, and opportunities;
- An analysis of the review and consultation findings to identify potential focus areas for improvement;
- The PU Manager sharing and discussing the outcomes of consultation and scoping conducted at field level with their IP/Project Coordinator

Guidance:

The documentation review should include the following records:

- Adoption records (from the PU's monitoring system for the adoption of practices)
- Internal assessment reports / self-assessment questionnaire
- External assessment reports and Corrective Action Plans
- Results Indicator data

PU manager should encourage FFs to host a participatory discussion with LGs to gain a deeper knowledge of field and farmers' challenges, expectations and areas of improvement. It is also an opportunity to better understand the relevance of their interventions such as training and collect suggestions.

The FF consultation should include Focus Group discussions.

Step 2: IP collaboration

Timing: *One month before start of sowing (latest)*

Who: *IP Field coordinators during Regional Workshop(s)*

IP/Project Coordinators² are responsible for liaising closely with PU Managers to report back the findings of the field-level review and consultation (STEP 1). Close engagement with the PU Manager prepares the IP Coordinator to identify and understand commonalities and differences among PUs within or across projects, and to provide PU Managers with advice and support in selecting priorities, defining specific interventions, and identifying resources to enable or strengthen implementation.

IP/Project Coordinators are then expected to engage and interact with other IP or relevant organisations in the region, in order to jointly discuss the critical sustainability challenges in their area and exchange ideas and expertise. As part of the CIP process, BCI in partnership with IPs will facilitate the coordination of group planning workshops for partners. On an annual basis, BCI may organise a full day planning workshop as an expansion of existing IP Training sessions.

Requirement:

IP Coordinators in a given region must participate in group workshops in order to:

- Jointly identify regional “sustainability hotspots”;
- Leverage expertise and exchange knowledge;
- Identify resources available and needed;
- Determine high-level ‘Improvement Goals’ at the project level for each production principle;
- Share and discuss outcomes from the group workshops with PU Managers, as part of supporting PU Managers during *Step 3-Completing the CIP Template*.

Guidance:

- The identification of regional ‘sustainability hotspots’ will support the identification of sustainability priorities in each region, enable IPs to pool resources to address common challenges, and cultivate a sense of shared responsibility in achieving improvements. At the regional workshops, IPs can share proven good practices, recommend specific interventions, etc. (particularly where certain IPs have a strong focus on specific environmental or social issues).
- In collaboration with IPs, BCI can support the identification of resources available at the regional level and facilitate connections between IPs and technical experts, research departments, training providers etc. During group workshops, IPs identify common needs for resources within and across organisations as well as opportunities for external support.
- Determining the high level project goals will allow the IP Coordinator to pre-fill the ‘Improvement Goal’ sections of the CIP template (refer to Step 3) in a consistent manner for a single project, providing PU Managers with a common foundation to work from when developing the CIP.

² The document refers to ‘IP Coordinator’ as a generic term for the key management staff in the partner organisation that oversees the PU or project

Step 3: Complete the CIP Template (or equivalent)

Timing: *By the start of sowing*

Who: *Completed by the PU Manager in close conjunction with the IP/Project Coordinator*

The BCI CIP template takes a holistic planning approach. It is structured to address **all planning requirements** in the criteria of the Better Cotton Standard V2, while also ensuring the PU prioritises the most important issues for their context by identifying a maximum of 10 CIP 'Focus Areas' to be addressed over a 3 year time period.

The CIP template (or equivalent) is fully owned and completed by the PU Manager in close conjunction with the IP/Project Coordinator. The IP/Project Coordinator's role is to support, advise, and validate the plan as well as identify and secure the necessary resources and external expertise for implementation. If using the template, PU Managers start by filling out management plans for IPM, Pesticide phase-out, Water, Soil, and Biodiversity, as well as sections on Fibre Quality and Decent Work. Each management plan asks for a high-level improvement goal (to be agreed with the IP). Next, the plan is broken into subcomponents or P&C Criteria (e.g. *soil type identification and analysis* for the Soil Management Plan).

Requirement:

For each plan subcomponent or BCI Criteria, the PU Manager must define the following for the template or equivalent:

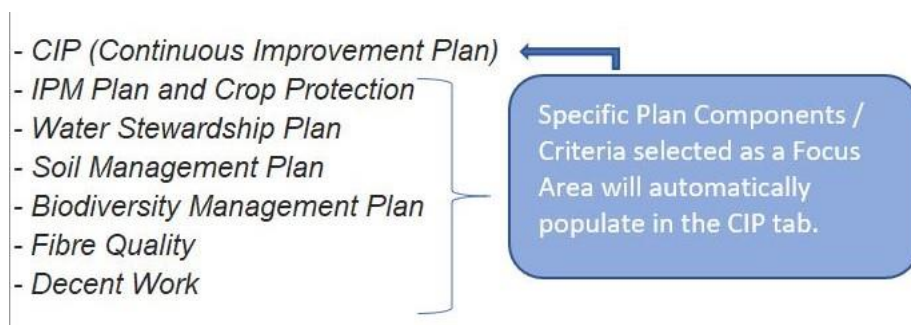
- **3-year Objective:** A measurable and specific statement of what the PU aims to achieve on the issue by the end of 3 years.
- **Intervention(s):** One or more field-level activities / practices to be targeted in farmer capacity building activities - such as training - and implemented by farmers in order to achieve the objective.
- **Indicator(s):** One or more indicators from the BCI P&C Indicators (both core and improvement) that will be fulfilled through the achievement of the objective and interventions.
- **Prerequisites:** Preliminary steps that need to be taken before implementation of the Interventions can begin, including e.g. the identification of potential barriers to adoption, research and external expertise, application for grants.
- **Resources:** Any human or financial resource the PU may rely on or utilise to implement the interventions effectively.
- **Annual training targets:** Percentage farmers targeted for training on the listed interventions in Years 1, 2, and 3.
- **Annual adoption targets:** Percentage farmers targeted to be adopting the interventions / practices shared through training by the end of Years 1, 2, and 3.

If completing the template or equivalent, the PU Manager must also select or define specific management plan components or P&C Criteria as **Focus Areas**.

Guidance:

A Focus Area signifies a top priority for the PU, as determined by PU/ IP consultation, farmer consultation, internal and external assessments, resource availability, etc. No more than 10 Focus Areas can be selected. When a Focus Area is selected, it will automatically populate in the 'CIP' tab of the template. As a result, by filling out the management planning sections of the template, the CIP itself is automatically defined as a set of top priorities for the PU:

3.1 Structure of the CIP Template:



For more information on completing the BCI CIP template, refer to the *Guidance Tab* of the template document, as well as *BCI Training Module on Continuous Improvement Plan*.

Step 4: Implement CIP

Timing: Cotton season Year 1

Who: PU Manager with his team and/or external experts

Once the PU Manager has established the Continuous Improvement Plan the Implementation phase can begin.

Requirement:

The PU manager must:

- a. ensure Field Facilitators are equipped with the knowledge, materials, and training skills to be effective in the field and
- b. implement the CIP.

Guidance:

Successful implementation starts with significant groundwork before the onset of farmer training as part of the Internal Management System implementation, including activities such as:

- Extensive TOT for Field Facilitators on Focus Area interventions
- Developing new training materials and methodologies
- Defining seasonal Training Plans
- Securing external support and /or resources
- Establishing the monitoring process for training and adoption

The core activity of the implementation phase is farmer capacity building through training and other learning mechanisms such as field demonstration plots, etc. It is therefore essential to have empowered FFs with a sense of ownership over the CIP and its objectives before the start of the season.

Step 5: Monitor CIP Implementation

Timing: Cotton season (Sowing- Harvest)

Who: PU Manager with support of FFs

► Internal Monitoring

PU Managers can monitor the implementation of training and assess the percent of farmers adopting the practices associated with CIP Focus Areas utilising the PU's Internal Management System.

Requirement:

At the outset of the season, the PU Manager must ensure the existing monitoring system for assessing adoption and non-conformity risks is adapted to capture information on the interventions identified for CIP Focus Areas.

► Reporting progress

Requirement:

On an annual basis, PU Managers must report the PU's progress on the targets identified for CIP Focus Areas in the self-assessment questionnaire submitted to BCI.

The BCI CIP template facilitates both internal and external monitoring of CIP achievement by framing issues by P&C Criteria or Management Plan component and linking CIP objectives and interventions to BCI Indicators. This allows 3 year objectives and annual targets to be reported to BCI in relation to the achievement of specific indicators in the BCI Standard.

Guidance:

This process will allow BCI and the IP coordinator to understand the PU's progress in achieving the improvement goals they have committed to in the CIP.³

► External Monitoring⁴

From the 2020-21 season, achievement of the targets identified for CIP Focus Areas will also be monitored through existing external assessment mechanisms under the *Better Cotton Assurance Programme*.

Requirement:

From the 2020-21 season, PU managers must have evidence available to demonstrate progress towards the targets for all of the CIP Focus Areas to external assessors.

³ From the 2020-21 season, the self-assessment questionnaire will be streamlined to assess: a.) compliance with Core Indicators and b.) PU progress on CIP Focus Areas (rather than assessing the full list of Improvement Indicators)

⁴ External Monitoring of CIP achievement will not be applicable until 2020-21. The assurance impact of the outcome of these assessments will be determined through a strategic revision to the existing Assurance Programme to be completed prior to the 2020-21 season.



Guidance:

2nd Party Credibility Checks conducted by Implementing Partners and BCI, as well as 3rd Party verification visits, will assess progress on CIP Focus Areas and communicate feedback and recommendations to the PU.

This external feedback will support PU Managers in ensuring the effectiveness of their internal monitoring system, and will help PU Managers and IP Coordinators to understand where implementation needs to be strengthened to ensure that the 3 year objective for CIP Focus Areas can be achieved.

Step 6: Review and revise

Timing: *End of Season / post-season*

At the end of the season it is important for the PU manager to review the progress in implementing the practices identified in the CIP Focus Areas, and readjust the plan accordingly.

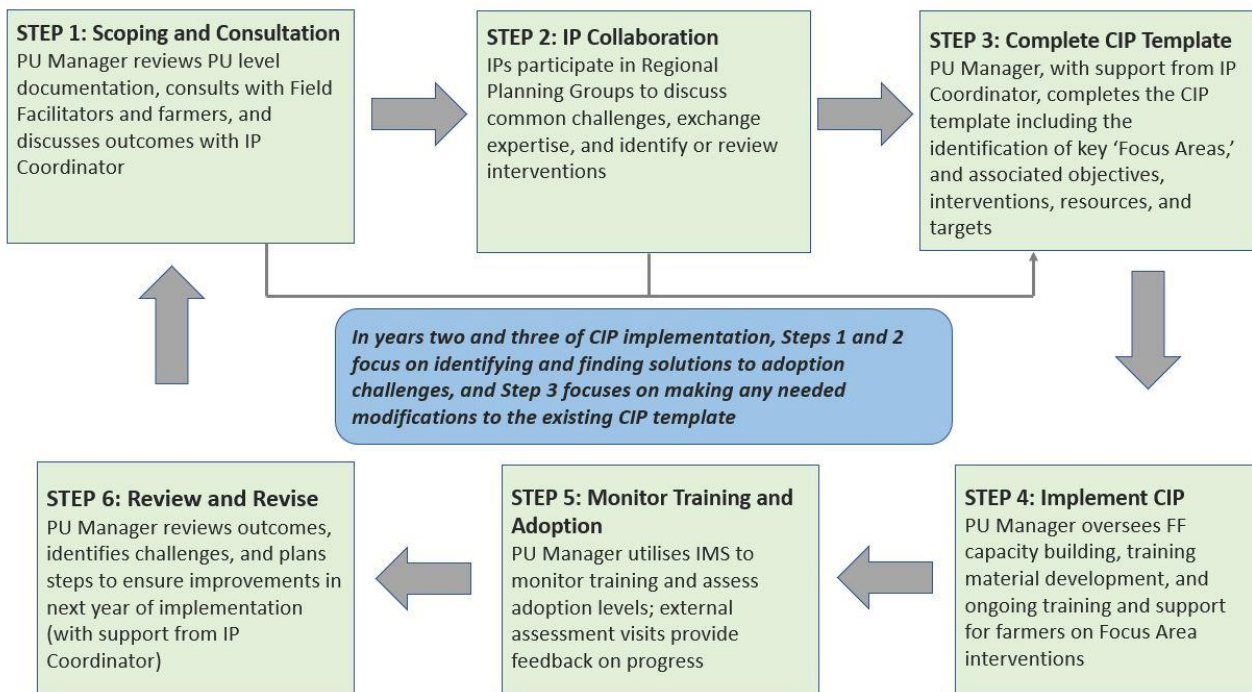
Requirement: The PU Manager must formally review the CIP Focus Areas in light of the outcome of implementation and internal / external monitoring utilising the PU's Internal Management System.

Guidance:

Understanding both the training and adoption rates through monitoring enables the PU Manager to identify areas of success as well as areas that require further capacity building at FF level, improved training materials, external support, or a revised approach.

These learnings can be further explored through Steps 1 and 2 of the annual planning cycle; in years two and three of CIP implementation, the consultation and IP collaboration steps (Steps 1 and 2) should focus on understanding the root cause of challenges and finding solutions to low adoption rates. The outcome of this exploration can then inform amendments to the CIP, including modification of certain targets and interventions, to address the challenges and low adoption rates identified.

2.) Overview of the CIP Process



3.) Roles and Responsibilities in the CIP Process

Field Facilitators, Farmers, PU Managers, IP management staff, and the BCI Secretariat all have a role to play in supporting PUs to develop and implement an effective CIP. The following table outlines these roles and responsibilities across the key CIP cycle steps:

	Consultation	IP Collaboration	CIP Template	Implementation	Monitoring / Review
Field Facilitators	Provide inputs to PU manager in collaboration/consultation with farmers		Familiarise themselves with the key focus areas, interventions and targets	Participate in trainings given by the IP and PU manager; deliver training and other support to Learning Groups	Provide feedback to PU manager on training participation, adoption, results indicators etc.
PU Manager	Review PU Documentation, lead consultation with Field Facilitators and Farmers	Provide feedback from Consultation to IP Staff	Complete template, identifying Focus Areas, interventions, and targets	Conduct internal capacity building and oversee training content development and delivery	Lead internal monitoring system to assess training and adoption rates; review outcomes and identify challenge areas
IP Staff	Support PU Manager to develop FF and farmer consultation	Participate in regional workshops and share expertise, identify sustainability 'hotspots', resource	Support PU Manager to identify Focus Areas and define interventions,	Conduct internal capacity building, secure resources and external support to support implementation	Conduct IP 2PCC and provide feedback on CIP progress; review challenge areas together with PU



	process and review findings	needs, potential interventions	objectives, and targets		
BCI	Provide feedback on performance through External assessment and Self-assessment analysis and IP Support Framework	Coordinate regional workshops and develop regional resource hubs	Provide CIP template, guidance, and Training Module	Provide thematic training modules on the BCI Standard to support PU level capacity building	Conduct external assessment and provide feedback on CIP progress

4.) Further Resources

- *CIP Template*
- *CIP Training Module*
- *Better Cotton Assurance Programme*
- *Better Cotton Principles and Criteria V2*