Decent Work Strategy
2020-25 Progress Report

Version 1.0 - May 2025

better cotton™

Contents

Photo Credit: Better Cotton/Baran Vardar

Introduction

A Comprehensive Framework

This report reflects Better Cotton's progress in advancing decent work across cotton-producing regions, guided by the Decent Work Strategy 2020–27. Developed in response to the Task Force on Forced Labour and Decent Work and aligned with international labour standards, the strategy sets out a comprehensive framework to embed labour rights into Better Cotton's programmes, standards, and partnerships. It is structured around three core pillars: Learn, Strengthen, and Monitor — each reinforcing our ambition to improve working conditions for cotton farmers and workers while tackling systemic risks such as child labour, forced labour, and discrimination.

Since 2020, Better Cotton has deepened its understanding of labour risks through targeted risk assessments in 15 countries, with deeper dives in India, Pakistan, and Mali. These assessments identified poverty, informality, and limited social protection as key drivers of labour rights violations. The insights directly informed the revision of the Better Cotton Principles and Criteria (P&C) and shaped tailored interventions to address region-specific challenges.

To strengthen capacity on the ground, we expanded training for Programme Partners, third-party verifiers, and local staff, enhancing their ability to identify and mitigate risks. Notable initiatives include partnerships with Jan Sahas in India to improve access to social security schemes and grievance mechanisms for migrant workers and with Search for Justice in Pakistan to equip field staff to detect and respond to child labour cases. Additionally, new tools and guidance were developed to help Programme Partners integrate social sustainability into their work.

Better Cotton also enhanced its assurance processes, embedding worker interviews into assessments to gain deeper insights into field realities. By the 2024–25 cotton season, 95% of assessments included worker interviews, with the number of interviews doubling or even tripling in some cases. Importantly, almost half of interviewees were women, though more progress is needed to ensure full representation. We also piloted forced labour indicators to strengthen risk detection and refined our decent work monitoring in high-risk contexts like Uzbekistan, where specially trained

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monitors conducted in-depth evaluations of labour conditions.

Key lessons from this period reinforced that forced labour risks in agriculture manifest differently than in manufacturing and can be more subtle, requiring improved verification techniques. Additionally, child labour remains a more prevalent concern across all geographies, highlighting the importance of a livelihoods-first approach to address underlying vulnerabilities.

The Decent Work Strategy also shaped Better Cotton's advocacy and multi-stakeholder engagement. We shared risk assessment findings with members, collaborated with investigative bodies and fellow sustainability standards, and co-hosted a panel at the UN Business and Human Rights Forum to amplify the need for collective action on child labour in agriculture.

Looking ahead, Better Cotton is committed to strengthening its farm-level due diligence processes through the labour monitoring and remediation system, refining assurance methodologies, and scaling partnerships to tackle root causes of labour exploitation. As global due diligence requirements tighten, this strategy will ensure Better Cotton not only meets expectations but leads the charge in transforming working conditions across the cotton sector.

Photo credit: Better Cotton/Seun Adatsi

About Our Decent Work Strategy

From Task Force to Strategy

At Better Cotton, we recognise that cotton farmers and farm workers are the backbone of the textile sector, yet they remain among the most vulnerable and underserved actors in global supply chains. Ensuring safe, fair, and dignified working conditions is central to our mission, and we are committed to upholding the fundamental principles and rights at work across all Better Cotton licensed farms.

To provide effective support to farmers and farm workers, we focus on understanding local challenges and fostering strong community trust. Through our global network of trusted Programme Partners[1], who are deeply embedded in the communities they serve, we aim to advance sustainable practices while strengthening labour rights. We have also made significant investments in expanding our expertise and that of our Programme Partners, ensuring that social sustainability is at the heart of our approach.

[1]Programme Partners work with farming communities to ensure they are producing cotton that meets the Better Cotton Standard.

The Task Force on Forced Labour and Decent Work

In April 2020, Better Cotton established the Task Force on Forced Labour and Decent Work to conduct a comprehensive review of the Better Cotton Standard System. The task force, consisting of 12 experts from civil society, retailers, brands, and responsible sourcing consultancies, was tasked with identifying gaps and developing recommendations to enhance the system's ability to address forced labour risks. After six months of virtual collaboration with stakeholders, a detailed report was published in October 2020.

This report outlined key recommendations, structured around seven core themes, which we subsequently integrated into our Decent Work Strategy. These recommendations formed the foundation of our efforts to strengthen social sustainability and were organised into the three key pillars of our strategy: Learn, Strengthen, and Monitor.

The Decent Work Strategy 2020-27

Launched in 2022, the Decent Work Strategy 2020-27, is a framework designed to embed labour rights into every aspect of Better Cotton's work. The strategy has guided our efforts, focusing on three key pillars that align closely with the Task Force recommendations:

Learn: This pillar builds on the Task Force's call for a better understanding of local conditions and enabling environments. By deepening our knowledge of labour issues in Better Cotton-producing regions, we ensure that our approach is contextually relevant and able to address the specific risks faced by workers. This focus on learning is reflected in our ongoing risk assessments and efforts to identify gaps in labour rights practices.

Strengthen: The Task Force identified the need for capacity strengthening among Better Cotton's team and partners, particularly around social sustainability. This pillar addresses that recommendation by enhancing the capabilities of our partners, who have traditionally focused on agronomy rather than social concerns. Through collaborations with labour rights specialists, we ensure that our Programme Partners are equipped to handle social sustainability challenges and that decent work principles are embedded throughout our supply chains. As part of this pillar, we have also significantly enhanced our due diligence processes for Programme Partners and their capacities on meeting Better Cotton's decent work requirements. This involves improving their ability to assess and address labour rights risks effectively, ensuring that their capacity to manage social sustainability is robust and aligned with international standards. Additionally, we have strengthened our assurance tools and grievance mechanisms to ensure that all parties are accountable to workers' rights.

Monitor: Effective monitoring and grievance mechanisms were central to the Task Force's recommendations. The third pillar of our strategy focuses on strengthening our assurance and monitoring systems to track progress at the field level and adjust approaches accordingly. By expanding our use of worker and farmer interviews, along with developing field-level grievance mechanisms, we can better assess the effectiveness of our interventions and respond quickly to emerging challenges. This ensures that Better Cotton remains transparent, accountable, and responsive to the needs of cotton farmers and farm workers.

Five years into our Decent Work programme, we assessed our journey. The task force helped lay the foundation for our approach, which has since evolved into a dedicated thematic workstream within Better Cotton. This growth reinforces our long-term commitment to labour rights.

We have expanded social sustainability expertise across our country teams and at the global level. Our approach has been informed by risk assessments, improved assurance methodologies, and pilot projects exploring technology-driven labour monitoring, wage transparency tools, and remediation strategies.

The past five years have also seen a shift in how we address labour risks in agriculture. The revised Principles & Criteria, which underpin the Better Cotton Standard System, introduced a more structured approach to risk assessment, mitigation, and monitoring. Our assurance processes have been enhanced, with improved methods for worker and farmer interviews that provide deeper insights into on-the-ground realities. Furthermore, we've strengthened occupational safety and health (OSH) requirements, an increasingly urgent priority due to climate change. Our expectations for Programme Partners and verifiers have also increased, reinforcing accountability at every level.

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Our Progress against the Decent Work 2020-27 Strategy

	2020-21	2022-23	2024-25
Learn	✓ Decent Work Task Force set up (p. 7) ✓ Country-level Decent Work risk assessments in 14 countries (p. 12) ✓ Stakeholder mapping in Mozambique and Pakistan (p. 22)		✓ Risk assessment in Tajikistan (p. 12) ✓ Pilot on access to health for smallholder farmers in Côte d'Ivoire (p. 26)
Strengthen	✓ Partnership with Jan Sahas to connect workers to grievance mechanisms, remedy and social security schemes in India (p. 21) ✓ Capacity building of all staff, Programme Partners and verifiers (p. 16) ✓ In-house decent work competencies grown (p. 16) ✓ New 'interim indicators' on forced labour (p. 13)	✓ Adapting capacity strengthening based on risk assessment outcomes (p. 13) ✓ Enhanced assurance tailored to the context (p. 13) ✓ Revision of the Decent Work Principle (p. 17) ✓ Producer-level grievance mechanism and remediation requirements included in the revised P&C (p. 17) ✓ Pilot on tools for labour monitoring and remediation at Producer level implemented in India (p. 18) ✓ Capacity strengthening for verifiers around Decent Work conducted (p.16) ✓ Stakeholder engagement (e.g. working groups and partnerships) (various pages)	✓ Country-level and international partnerships grown through P&C implementation and GIF projects (p. 22) ✓ Labour monitoring and remediation systems (incl. GMs) operationalised at producer level (p. 17) ✓ Pilot on tools for labour monitoring and remediation at Producer level implemented with SANAM and SAN/JFS in Mozambique (p. 19)
Monitor	✓ 2 Worker Voice Technology pilots in India and Pakistan (p. 25) ✓ Global human and labour rights risk scoring developed (p. 28)	✓ Enhanced decent work monitoring in Uzbekistan (p. 31) ✓ Global human and labour rights risk scoring refined (p. 28)	✓ Pilot project on wage transparency and fair remuneration implemented in Pakistan (p. 33) ✓ M&E Evidence Framework set up to track decent work progress (p. 29)

The Decent Work Roadmap to 2030

Since 2020, significant changes within Better Cotton and the broader regulatory landscape have shaped our approach to decent work. These include the revision of our Principles and Criteria v.3.0, the evolution of global due diligence frameworks such as the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) and Human Rights and Environmental Due Diligence (HREDD), and the expansion of our social sustainability capacity. Together, these developments prompted a strategic review to ensure our efforts remain relevant and impactful.

As we look towards Better Cotton's 2030 targets, we've updated our strategic direction through the Decent Work Roadmap to 2030. This revised roadmap builds on our expanded capabilities, deeper understanding of local contexts, and the lessons learned over the past five years. Compared to the original strategy, it places greater emphasis on multi-stakeholder engagement and advocacy, acknowledging that driving systemic change in agriculture requires collective action.

Photo Credit: Better Cotton/Khaula Jamil

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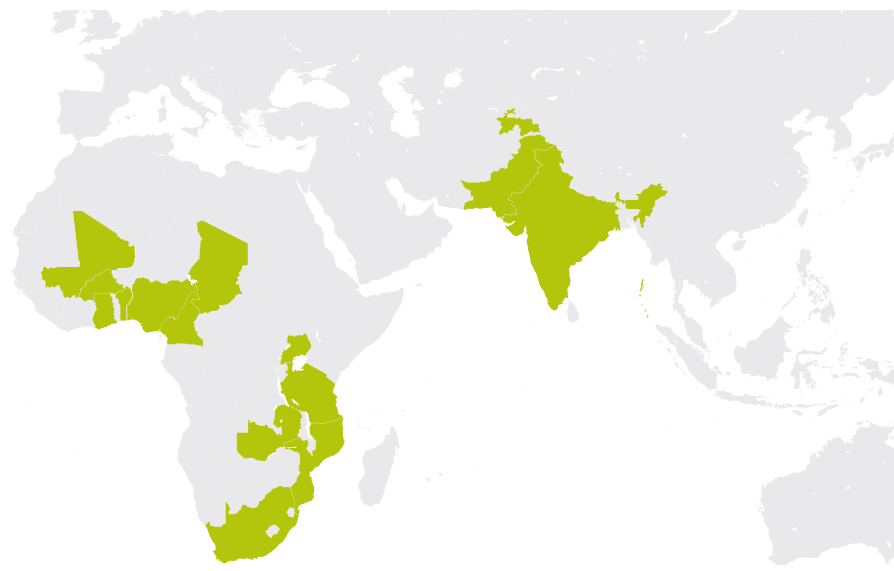
Learn

Understanding the Context

Deepening Contextual Understanding: Better Cotton's Approach to Decent Work Risks

Agricultural contexts, regardless of geography, share a common set of structural labour rights risks—informality, low wages, weak enforcement of labour laws, and limited access to grievance mechanisms. However, these risks manifest in different ways depending on socio-economic conditions, cultural norms, governance structures, and political stability. Recognising this, Better Cotton undertook comprehensive decent work risk assessments in 15 cotton-producing countries[2] to deepen its understanding of both shared and context-specific labour risks. These assessments played a critical role in shaping our approach to due diligence, assurance, and worker protections, reinforcing our commitment to ensuring safe and dignified working conditions.

The assessments combined extensive desk research with field-based qualitative research, incorporating input from farmers, workers, community organisations, and government agencies. The methodology included structured interviews, focus group

[2]The decent work risk assessments were conducted on Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia, with in-depth studies conducted in India, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Mali, and Chad. Separately, as part of a parallel process on new country start-ups, an extensive study was undertaken in Uzbekistan. While not part of the same risk assessment process, this study focused on the enabling environment and human rights performance, identifying key labour rights risks. The insights gained played a crucial role in shaping our programmatic approach in Uzbekistan, following the formal launch of our programme in 2022.

discussions, and stakeholder consultations, ensuring diverse perspectives were captured. Researchers examined multiple risk factors, including informality, poverty, recruitment practices, gender-based vulnerabilities, and legal enforcement challenges.

By adopting a participatory approach, the assessments not only generated rich contextual insights but also helped build trust with local stakeholders. Over time, our Programme Partners became more aware of the inherent risks in cotton farming, shifting their perspective from viewing child labour and forced labour as isolated incidents to recognising them as systemic challenges requiring proactive responses.

Key Findings: Shared Challenges and Context-Specific Risks

Across all geographies, child labour emerged as the most widespread labour rights concern. The studies reaffirmed that in smallholder cotton farming, children often engage in work that is deeply embedded in community norms and family survival strategies. While some work is considered age-appropriate, hazardous child labour remains a persistent issue, exacerbated by economic pressures and limited access to education. Encouragingly, as awareness grew, so too did trust with farming communities as Programme Partners became more comfortable discussing child labour, allowing for more open and transparent conversations on these sensitive topics.

A deeper understanding of child labour prevalence led to a refinement of Better Cotton's approach in Principles and Criteria v.3.0. The revised standard moves away from zero-tolerance framing and instead focuses on distinguishing between hazardous child labour and age-appropriate work. This approach acknowledges the realities of smallholder farming while maintaining a firm commitment to children's rights. To support this, we developed detailed Child Labour Global Guidance, equipping Programme Partners

and auditors with clear criteria to assess and respond to child labour cases more effectively.

While our standard focuses on child labour prevention, our remediation approach ensures that responses to identified cases prioritise sustainable solutions over punitive measures. Rather than abrupt removals, which risk displacing children into even more hazardous work, our interventions centre on awareness raising, school enrolment where possible, and supporting households through strengthened livelihoods and access to social security schemes. This aligns with the growing movement on child labour prevention and business, reinforcing the importance of addressing the root causes of child labour rather than treating it as an isolated issue.

Forced labour risks were identified across regions but manifested in more subtle and complex ways compared to the manufacturing or service sectors. Unlike factory settings, where forced labour may involve locked workspaces and physical coercion, risks in agriculture were primarily linked to debt bondage, deceptive recruitment practices, and dependency on exploitative intermediaries. While these risks exist, their detection is significantly harder, requiring a shift from conventional audits to more proactive, ongoing risk assessments.

Translating Insights into Action

The findings from these assessments directly shaped the revision of the Better Cotton Principles and Criteria v.3.0, refining our assurance approaches and strengthening verifier training. This revision represents a fundamental shift from a compliance-based model to an assess and address approach, moving beyond audits that merely flag issues towards a continuous, farm-level due diligence model. Producers are now required to actively monitor and remediate labour risks, rather than reacting to findings on an ad-hoc basis. This shift acknowledges that decent work challenges cannot be resolved through compliance alone but demand a holistic, ongoing approach that integrates risk mitigation, stakeholder collaboration, and deeper worker engagement.

Given the challenges of detecting forced labour in agricultural settings, Better Cotton developed interim forced labour indicators – e.g. workers being charged with recruitment fees, withholding of ID or travel documents, or unreasonable terms of employment[3] - and tested them in select regions before incorporating the most relevant ones into the new standard

[3]Please note that the full list of indicators has been replaced by the requirements in the Principle and Criteria v.3.0 and hence is no longer available on our website.

Photo Credit: Better Cotton/Khaula Jamil

and our enhanced decent work monitoring approach in higher-risk contexts. These indicators have improved the accuracy of farm-level assessments, allowing for earlier detection of risks and providing more actionable insights. Their integration has strengthened the credibility of our assurance programme, ensuring that findings are rooted in a deeper understanding of forced labour risks and their subtle manifestations in agriculture.

To strengthen our assurance system and enable accurate verification of the new, more nuanced decent work indicators, Better Cotton introduced mandatory worker interviews. This decision was made despite significant challenges in reaching seasonal workers, who often move between farms and stay in one location for only a few weeks. The new indicators require producers to demonstrate ongoing progress rather than simply meeting baseline criteria. They move beyond passive requirements such as "workers have the right to…" and instead mandate that producers actively inform workers of their rights and ensure they understand them. This fundamental change makes the indicators more meaningful but also raises the bar for verification, making worker interviews indispensable for accurate assessments.

In the 2024-25 season
95%
of assessments included worker interviews

The introduction of mandatory worker interviews, coupled with verifier training on decent work risks, has already led to notable improvements in assessment quality. Verifiers are now better equipped to identify risks, ensuring that corrective action plans address real labour rights challenges. In the 2024-25 season, 95% of assessments included worker interviews, with the average number of interviews doubling or even tripling in some cases. Importantly, almost half of the interviewees were women, though this still does not fully reflect the fact that the majority of seasonal manual workers in cotton farming are women. While there is still progress to be made, this represents a significant step towards a more inclusive and accurate assessment of worker conditions.

Strengthen

Strengthening Competencies

Between 2021 and 2024, Better Cotton trained over 450 individuals, including in-house staff and third-party personnel, on decent work criteria, indicators, and best practices for worker interviews. The training programmes covered critical topics such as forced labour, child labour, and their manifestations in cotton farming. This effort was ramped up ahead of the launch of the revised Principles and Criteria v.3.0 in 2023. Training sessions addressed the new assess and address approach, labour risks, a new approach to age-appropriate work, occupational safety and health (OSH), wages and grievance mechanisms.

Better Cotton trained over 450 individuals

Additionally, Better Cotton introduced social auditing competency requirements for its auditors, supported by comprehensive training resources. In 2021, all assessors and verifiers received training on forced labour, while the 2022-24 training programmes included detailed guidance on worker interviews and explanations of the updated Principles and Criteria v.3.0.

As awareness of decent work deficits and their underlying drivers grew, Better Cotton intensified its focus on social sustainability, leading to several organisational changes to strengthen in-house expertise. One of the most significant steps was the formalisation of Social Sustainability Workstreams, establishing dedicated global sub-teams for gender equality, decent work, and sustainable livelihoods. Additionally, Decent Work and Social Impact Teams were introduced in key cotton-producing countries, including Pakistan, India, and Uzbekistan, with plans underway to expand these roles regionally in Africa.

These teams play a pivotal role in supporting Programme Partners to understand, implement, and exceed Better Cotton's social sustainability requirements, driving continuous improvement at the country level. Their work includes providing country-specific insights to enhance programme planning and assurance approaches, training local auditors, fostering strategic partnerships, coordinating funding and initiatives, and leading advocacy efforts at both national and international levels.

Photo Credit: Better Cotton/ Joe Woodruff

Strengthening Better Cotton Principles & Criteria

The revision of Better Cotton's Decent Work Principle in the Principles and Criteria v.3.0. (P&C)[4] marked a significant milestone in the organisation's efforts to improve labour practices. As noted before, the changes introduced under Principle 5 on Decent Work signalled a major shift away from a compliance-driven model, moving towards an assess and address approach that prioritises transparency, proactive risk management, and remediation.

Inspired by best practices from the Rainforest Alliance, the revised approach encourages producers to identify and address risks on an ongoing basis rather than reactively in response to audit findings. This shift has helped foster greater trust and openness between farmers, workers, and Programme Partners, allowing for more candid discussions on sensitive issues such as child labour and forced labour and enabling more relevant actions.

Several fundamental adjustments were made to reinforce decent work protections and promote fair labour practices across

[4]This revision was part of the ISEAL Good Practice requirement for the Voluntary Sustainability Standards like Better Cotton.

the cotton supply chain. Still grounded in the ILO's Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, the revised standard introduced clearer guidelines on the risk assessment, monitoring, and remediation of labour rights risks, also raising a bar with several new requirements, including:

- Producer-level grievance mechanisms for reporting labour rights concerns
- Expanded indicators for forced labour to improve risk detection.
- Occupational safety and health (OSH) indicators
- Reframed approach to child labour to place greater emphasis on age-appropriate work
- Minimum wage indicators, requiring producers to take steps towards living wages
- Written contracts for workers to improve transparency

These revisions reflect a growing recognition that labour rights violations in agriculture are often rooted in systemic issues, shifting the focus away from identifying isolated incidents and towards proactively addressing underlying risks.

By embedding preventative measures and risk mitigation strategies into the standard, Better Cotton is encouraging producers to take a proactive and meaningful role in upholding decent work principles, rather than viewing them as mere compliance obligations.

Impact and Early Adoption

The transition to the assess and address approach has already begun to reshape training, awareness, and engagement efforts at the field level. In the 2023-24 cotton season, over one-third of all worker training sessions in countries such as Egypt and India focused on decent work topics, reflecting the renewed emphasis on social sustainability in the revised standard.

In India, Better Cotton's country team-led training sessions reinforced this shift, with Programme Partners overwhelmingly welcoming the new approach. They noted that the focus on risk identification and remediation, rather than punitive compliance, had increased trust among farming communities. As a result, farmers and workers were more willing to engage in open discussions about sensitive labour

issues, particularly child labour, which had previously been difficult to address in an environment driven by fear of sanctions like licence denial.

A Step Forward for Fair Labour Practices

The revisions to Principle 5 on Decent Work mark a critical step forward in strengthening fair labour practices in cotton production. By embedding practical mechanisms for risk identification, worker engagement, and remediation, the revised standard moves beyond theoretical commitments to drive meaningful improvements in working conditions. As Better Cotton continues to refine its assurance systems and programme implementation, these changes will help ensure that labour rights protections are responsive to the realities of cotton farming communities.

Photo Credit: Better Cotton/ Florian Lang

The Assess and Address Approach: Operationalising the Labour Monitoring and Remediation System

The introduction of the assess and address approach in Better Cotton's Principles & Criteria v.3.0 marks a significant shift in how decent work is monitored and upheld in cotton farming. This approach requires producers to develop a deep understanding of local labour risks and prioritise them by establishing a system for ongoing monitoring and remediation and evaluate the effectiveness of their interventions. The labour monitoring and remediation system is introduced gradually, beginning with a risk assessment and prioritisation based on survey data and direct engagement with farming communities. This is followed by an operational phase, where monitoring, remediation, and stakeholder engagement plans are designed and implemented.

Recognising both the challenges and opportunities of this approach, Better Cotton developed comprehensive guidance for producers, drawing on best practices from the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) and existing models, such as the Rainforest Alliance's leadership in the assess and address approach. To ensure the framework is adapted to real-world conditions, Better Cotton launched two pilot projects to test and refine the labour monitoring and remediation system in smallholder farming contexts. These pilots were conducted in India and Mozambique, two countries with predominantly smallholder farmers but vastly different socio-economic landscapes.

Insights from the India Pilot

The first pilot, implemented in Gujarat, India (March 2023 – March 2024), was led by Programme Partner AFPRO and focused on establishing a labour monitoring and remediation system through local partnerships and a structured data collection plan. The project provided key learnings that are shaping Better Cotton's

approach to assess and address implementation:

- community engagement is critical to building trust and acceptance of the system
- rights-holders must be actively involved in risk identification and prioritisation
- existing tensions in farming communities must be navigated with care
- progress on easily addressed concerns can streamline how more complex issues are dealt with

Learnings from the Mozambique Pilot

Building on these insights, a second pilot was conducted between August 2024 and March 2025 in Nampula and Niassa, Mozambique, in collaboration with Programme Partners SANAM and SAN/JFS. This project sought to develop a locally owned, context-specific labour monitoring and remediation approach, with extensive engagement from farming communities.

The Mozambique pilot revealed previously overlooked labour dynamics, strengthening Programme Partners' understanding of local risks. A community-driven approach has proven essential in ensuring accessibility and trust in grievance mechanisms while integrating local expertise into the remediation process.

Through these pilots, Better Cotton continues to refine its guidance and training materials, ensuring that the assess and address approach is practical, effective, and locally relevant for smallholder farmers worldwide.

Photo credit: Better Cotton/ Morgan Ferrar

Adopting 2030 Social Impact Targets

Sustainable Livelihoods

Achieving decent work in farming communities is impossible without improving farmer livelihoods, and this was reinforced as a critical insight in risk assessments. Economic insecurity, unpredictable earnings, and lack of access to financial services are key drivers of exploitative labour conditions, including low wages, reliance on child labour, and increased vulnerability to forced labour risks. This aligns with Better Cotton's 2030 Impact Targets, which aim to sustainably increase the net income and resilience of two million cotton farmers and workers. Decent work is not only a prerequisite for achieving this target but also a natural outcome of empowering farmers economically. By ensuring fair wages, safe working conditions, and access to resources, Better Cotton can create a virtuous cycle where improved livelihoods foster decent work, and decent work, in turn, strengthens farmer resilience and productivity. This holistic approach is essential for breaking the cycle of exploitation and building sustainable, equitable cotton value chains.

Gender Equality as a Cross-Cutting Priority

With women constituting a large share of the workforce contributing to cotton farming, Better Cotton recognises the pressing need to ensure women in farming communities enjoy equal rights and opportunities. Through its work across the Better Cotton Standard System, Better Cotton has a unique opportunity to address systemic gender inequalities and promote fair, safe, and dignified working conditions for both men and women.

Acknowledging that empowering women farmers and workers requires integrating gender considerations into all farm activities, the P&C v.3.0 features gender equality as a cross-cutting priority to support women's inclusion and tackle unfair practices across all its principles.

Beyond our work under the Principles and Criteria, we are committed to reach one million women in cotton with programmes and resources that promote equal farm decision-making, build climate resilience, or support improved livelihood and to ensure 25% of field staff are women with the power to influence sustainable cotton production by 2030. This aligns with and reinforces our decent work ambitions, which champion non-discrimination of all workers, including providing equal employment opportunities and fair working conditions for women and minority workers.

Strengthen Partnerships

The last few years have seen the forging of important partnerships with local organisations and the mapping of available services in two high priority countries.

India: Strengthening Social Security and Labour Rights Protection

In 2021, Better Cotton Programme Partners Lupin Human Welfare & Research Foundation and AFPRO joined forces with Jan Sahas — an Indian NGO dedicated to eradicating sexual violence and forced labour — to strengthen worker protections in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra's cotton-growing regions.

The initiative aimed to address the root causes of labour exploitation in smallholder farming, leveraging local and international partnerships to create sustainable interventions.

The pilot, implemented across six districts, successfully reached nearly 29,000[5] cotton farmers and workers, linking them to vital social security benefits. Building on early learnings, the second phase intensified efforts to expand social security access and deepen labour rights knowledge. Weekly village camps and household visits played a key role in raising awareness of labour rights, social security schemes, and worker protection mechanisms. Over 300 village camps engaged 11,000 participants, ensuring that communities understood their entitlements and safe migration practices.

The project underscored the need for longer engagement periods—at least 12 months—to effectively secure complex social security benefits. Documentation barriers, particularly for women, remained a significant hurdle, requiring dedicated efforts to streamline access. Collaboration with panchayats, local governance structures, proved essential in improving project acceptance and effectiveness. Seasonal migration patterns influenced worker availability, highlighting the importance of flexible programming that scales activities during peak agricultural seasons. Finally, extensive community engagement reaffirmed the need to balance worker protection with maintaining cooperative relationships with farmers.

A core component of the initiative was capacity strengthening for Better Cotton Programme Partners, who received training on labour rights, grievance mechanisms, and case management. This equipped them to continue facilitating social security access beyond the life of the project and strengthened their ability to identify and address labour rights issues. PPs now routinely refer cases to Jan Sahas' hotline and legal services as part of their producer-level grievance mechanisms, reinforcing Better Cotton's commitment to sustained labour rights protection.

Over 300 village camps engaged **11,000** participants

Pakistan: Strengthening Child Labour Prevention

In 2023, Better Cotton established a strategic partnership with Search for Justice, a leading child protection organisation. This collaboration, supported by the Better Cotton Growth and Innovation Fund's (GIF) Knowledge Partner fund, aims to reinforce child labour prevention efforts in Rahim Yar Khan, Punjab, in close coordination with Better Cotton's Programme Partner, Rural Education & Economic Development Society (REEDS).

Child labour remains a significant challenge in Pakistan, particularly in agriculture. Official data from the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2021–22) estimates that over 1.2 million children aged 10–14 are engaged in work, with 56% employed in the agricultural sector. However, broader estimates suggest the number of children in labour may be as high as 10 million, spanning multiple age groups. A 2012 rapid assessment by the National Rural Support Program (NRSP) highlighted the scale of the issue in Southern Punjab, estimating that 385,000 children across four districts were involved in child labour, with 26% engaged in cotton farming.

Against this backdrop, Better Cotton's 18-month initiative with Search for Justice built the capacity of almost 200 field staff to enhance the understanding of age-appropriate child work versus child labour at the farm level. Through targeted training workshops, the initiative equipped field staff with the skills to identify, monitor, and refer child labour cases to specialised services, while also strengthening awareness of legal and institutional mechanisms available for child protection. This effort ensured that farming communities and local stakeholders are better positioned to address child labour risks effectively.

A key focus of the initiative was shifting away from punitive, zero-tolerance approaches towards a more pragmatic framework that emphasises clear guidance on age-appropriate work. Rather than centring on what farmers, workers, and children must not do, this approach empowered communities with actionable knowledge on what constitutes safe, lawful, and developmentally appropriate work. By fostering understanding rather than fear of reprisal, the initiative supported more effective and sustainable solutions that prevent harm while respecting the realities of rural livelihoods.

Beyond farm-level interventions, the partnership extended to public sector engagement, consulting and collaborating with the labour department in Punjab to support policy advocacy on child labour and decent work.

This collaboration underscores the importance of a holistic, multi-stakeholder approach to tackling child labour, integrating the efforts of Better Cotton, Search for Justice, REEDS, local governments, and farming communities.

Stakeholder Mapping in Pakistan and Mozambique

Better Cotton has recently carried out two mapping exercises to support decent work in cotton farming. One was to identify the available services related to decent work in Mozambique and to establish strategic partnerships with them. The other was to understand the existing grievance mechanisms in Pakistan, both state-based and non-state based, judicial and non-judicial, and how they are accessible to Better Cotton farmers in targeted districts.
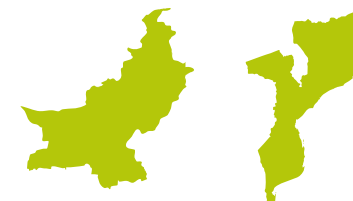
Mozambique: Identifying Strategic Partnerships for Decent Work and Livelihoods

The stakeholder mapping in Mozambique aimed to identify and assess local organisations that could collaborate with Better Cotton and its Programme Partners to advance decent work and smallholder livelihoods in the Nampula and Niassa provinces. The focus was on organisations engaged in child labour prevention, labour rights promotion, grievance and remediation processes, social protection, and livelihood support. Special emphasis was placed on finding partners that could fill knowledge gaps among Programme Partners, fostering collaborative action and learning.

750 cotton producers

60% of whom were women

As a result of this mapping, Ophavela was selected as a Knowledge Partner for a pilot project running from January 2024 to March 2025. The initiative aimed to improve the socioeconomic conditions and well-being of 750 cotton producers, 60% of whom were women, in the Mecate district. Ophavela supported Programme Partners in forming savings and credit groups, providing technical training, facilitating women's empowerment activities, and distributing seeds to diversify income sources and enhance food security. Supported by Better Cotton's Growth & Innovation Fund, the pilot showed promising results. For instance, in the communities that received training, women's potential began to be recognised, and women showed greater confidence in their abilities, resulting in women setting up and running small businesses, taking up leadership positions in local groups, and showing interest in managing their own land for cotton cultivation. Due to this positive impact, this project has been allocated further funding from the GIF in 2025 to continue to expand their work.

Photo Credit: Better Cotton/Seun Adatsi

Pakistan: Strengthening Grievance Mechanisms for Farmers and Workers

In Pakistan, Better Cotton conducted a mapping study to assess the availability and effectiveness of grievance mechanisms in Punjab and Sindh—two key cotton-producing regions. Initiated in 2020, the study examined state-based and non-state-based, judicial and non-judicial mechanisms, as well as the role of intermediaries in supporting workers seeking remedy for forced labour, child labour, workplace violence, and sexual assault.

200
farmers, workers, and local organisations consulted

Through consultations with nearly 200 farmers, workers, and local organisations, the study identified 18 different grievance mechanisms and assessed them using effectiveness criteria drawn from the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs). These criteria included legitimacy, accessibility, predictability, equitability, transparency, rights-compatibility, continuous learning, and engagement with stakeholders.

The mapping also highlighted key barriers to worker protection, including gaps in the legal framework, exploitative working conditions, lack of awareness of rights and grievance mechanisms, gender norms limiting women's access to remedy, and fear of retaliation. The findings informed an evaluation of both formal and informal grievance mechanisms to determine their capacity to provide meaningful redress for workers facing labour rights violations.

Critically, the outcomes of this mapping exercise now inform the grievance mechanism management and remediation protocol for all Programme Partners in Pakistan, which collectively reach hundreds of thousands of farmers and workers. With the entry into force of the Principles and Criteria v.3.0, which mandates grievance mechanisms at the field level, this study serves as a foundational resource for ensuring effective reporting, worker protection, and access to remedy within Better Cotton's programmes in Pakistan.

Photo credit: Better Cotton/Carlos Rudiney
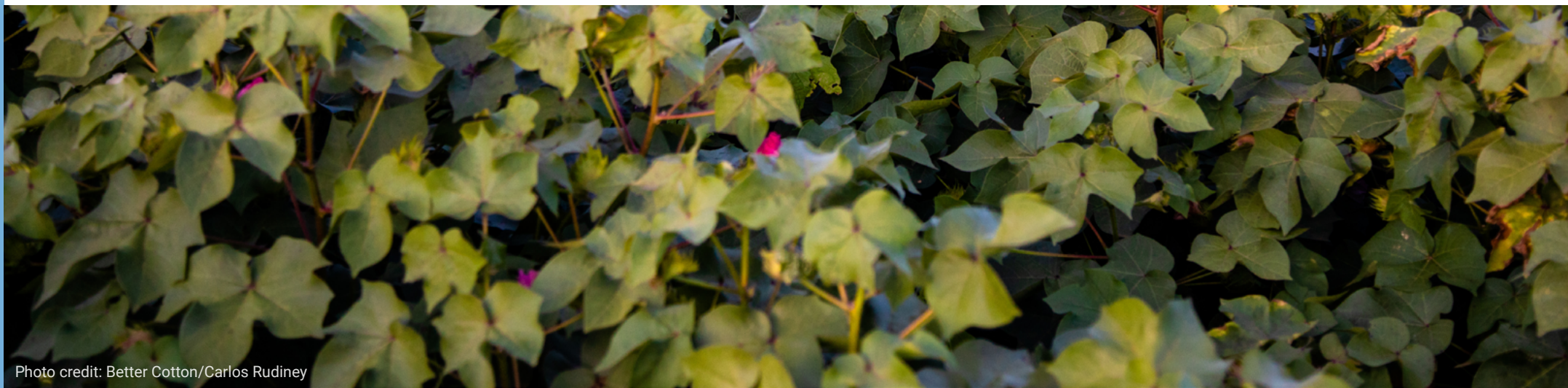
Testing New Approaches: Exploring Worker Voice Technology in Cotton Farming[6]

Ensuring that farmers and workers have a direct voice in shaping their working conditions is critical to improving decent work outcomes in agriculture. However, traditional engagement methods can be resource-intensive and difficult to scale. In response, Better Cotton explored the potential of Worker Voice Technology to collect direct insights from farmers and workers at scale, enhancing its ability to assess risks and inform programme implementation.

In 2021, Better Cotton, in collaboration with CABI Pakistan and Ulula and funded by ISEAL Innovations Fund, piloted Worker Voice Technology in Sindh, Pakistan, using phone surveys to gather feedback from cotton farmers and workers. The initiative aimed to overcome the challenges of remote assessments during the COVID-19 pandemic while testing the feasibility of digital engagement in agricultural settings.

The pilot targeted approximately 200 farmers and 430 workers, using Interactive Voice Response (IVR) technology to allow respondents to answer pre-recorded questions via mobile phones. This approach ensured anonymity and accessibility for low-literacy groups. To encourage participation, field staff conducted in-person trainings, WhatsApp outreach, and SMS notifications. The response rate exceeded initial projections, with 468 responses, including 22% from women, demonstrating the potential of digital engagement. However, further community trust-building efforts and refinements to survey design could have increased participation even further, particularly among migrant and temporary workers.

The survey revealed critical insights into labour conditions and pesticide use, including the prevalence of hazardous pesticide application, wage advance practices, and gaps in training on safe pesticide handling. The pilot demonstrated that Worker Voice Technology could engage a broader audience than traditional methods, but its success relied heavily on strong partnerships with local actors. Timing, in-person engagement, and adherence to data privacy regulations were identified as key factors for effective implementation.

Encouraged by the success of the Pakistan pilot, Better Cotton expanded its use of Worker Voice Technology in 2023, launching the Farming Community Phone Survey in three districts in Gujarat and Maharashtra, India. Partnering with three Programme Partners and Ulula as the survey tool provider, the project aimed to validate and quantify labour risks to better inform programme implementation and assurance processes. Over 5,600 farmers and workers participated, allowing Better Cotton to assess risks with statistical significance. However, most identified risks were already known and embedded in existing capacity-strengthening activities. As responses to this mobile phone survey were anonymous and close-ended, it was not possible to trace individual cases potentially requiring clarification or remediation.

While Worker Voice Technology provided valuable insights for enhancing risk-based assurance and informing Third Party Assessors ahead of audits, the high cost relative to its added value prevented full-scale adoption. As with any pilot, the setup required significant groundwork — including focus group discussions to refine survey questionnaires — to ensure they captured relevant risks and were easily understood by the target demographic. Future applications would build on this foundation, making the process more efficient. With the introduction of producer-level grievance mechanisms as a requirement in P&C v.3.0, the use of Worker Voice Technology may be revisited to support these structures as they develop.

Better Cotton remains committed to integrating technology in ways that meaningfully amplify worker voices, improve responsible outreach, and ensure programme implementation is informed by direct worker insights. Future efforts will focus on refining cost-effective, scalable solutions that balance digital innovation with practical impact on the ground.

[6]To learn more, head to Pilots in Remote Auditing | ISEAL Alliance

Enhancing Smallholder Resilience through Collective Action on Health Insurance in Côte d'Ivoire

In 2025, Better Cotton, in collaboration with [Elucid](#) and [Olam Agri](#)'s subsidiary SECO, launched an 18-month initiative to strengthen smallholder farmer resilience in Côte d'Ivoire by expanding access to quality healthcare through collective action. This project supports Better Cotton's Decent Work Strategy by improving social protection for cotton farming communities and reinforcing farmer-producer organisations (FPOs) as key actors in securing rights and services for their members.

With 46% of Côte d'Ivoire's population living below the poverty line, health-related expenses remain a major financial burden for smallholders, who largely rely on family labour. Despite national efforts to expand universal health coverage, enrolment remains low due to high costs, limited service availability, and scepticism towards formal insurance schemes. The resulting lack of affordable healthcare leaves farming households vulnerable to economic shocks, often forcing families to compensate for lost income through increased labour participation, including by children.

This project bridges the gap between smallholder farmers and essential healthcare services by leveraging collective action to enhance access, affordability, and trust in insurance schemes. The approach includes:

- Strengthening farmer producer organisations (FPOs) to manage and sustain health insurance enrolment, ensuring local ownership and long-term viability.
- Integrating local healthcare facilities into a digital platform, developed by Elucid, to enable secure, transparent payments, improve service quality, and expand access to World Health Organization-accredited medication and essential care.
- Piloting a sustainable funding model, assessing farmers' willingness to pay, and exploring alternative contribution mechanisms—such as in-kind payments or private sector co-financing—to ensure the model remains financially viable beyond the project's duration.
- Contributing valuable learnings to other commodities and regions, promoting more sustainable agricultural practices across sectors, but also present valuable data on the correlation between health outcomes and farmer incomes, by creating a working model for health programmes in the cotton sector.

Photo Credit: Better Cotton/Landry Yao

Photo credit: Better Cotton/Baran Vardar

Monitor

Global Risk Scoring

The complexities of decent work are multifaceted and interlinked, making it challenging to address them all at once. At Better Cotton, we adopt a risk-based approach that aligns with our mandate, scope, and resources to prioritise areas where farmers and workers are most vulnerable. To support this, we've developed a risk analysis tool that informs our programme strategy and assurance approach. This tool provides an overview of the labour and human rights landscapes across the countries we operate in, helping us focus our efforts where they can have the most significant impact.

The tool initially focused on forced labour risks and later expanded to cover seven thematic categories: freedom of association, forced labour, child labour, gender discrimination, discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, and caste, governance and the rule of law, and land rights. It assesses cotton-producing countries where Better Cotton has direct programmes, recognises equivalent standards, or prospective countries. Scores are assigned based on external indices and internal data, with a 60/40 weighting respectively acknowledging the growing expertise of our country teams, to calculate each country's overall risk score. This methodical approach ensures a thorough risk assessment across various domains.

The data is annually monitored for any changes and the results are used to inform prioritisation of decent work team resources and implementation of a more targeted support approach. You can review the methodology here, while the results are not public and intended for internal use only.

Freedom of Association

Forced Labour

Child Labour

Discrimination Based on Ethnicity, Religion, and Caste

Gender Discrimination
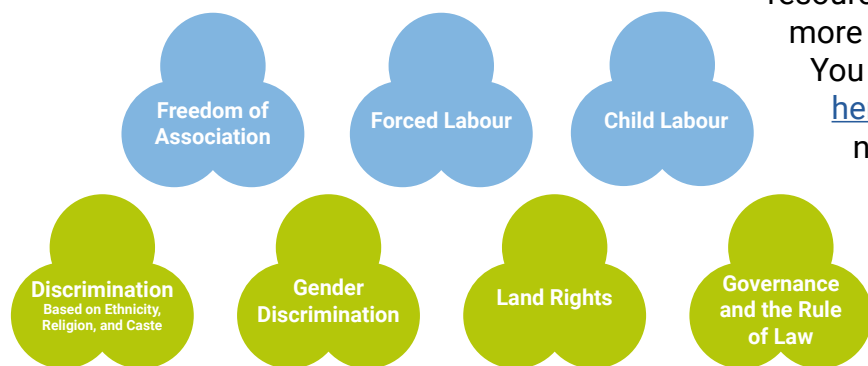
Land Rights

Governance and the Rule of Law

Photo Credit: Better Cotton/Joe Woodruff

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Framework

Better Cotton collects seasonal data on a range of aspects of producer performance. We are continuously striving to improve the quality and relevance of the information we receive from Producers, minimise reporting fatigue and ensure data collected can be useful for partner self-assessments.

One of the foundational elements of our MEL programme is the Evidence Framework, a set of indicators that allows us to track progress on key areas of work.

The new framework will enable consistent tracking of key elements of labour rights practices on the ground, enabling us to assess the effectiveness of our approach and inform further adjustments where necessary. Data collection will be rolled out gradually, resources permitting, starting with India, Pakistan, Cote d'Ivoire, and expanding over time.
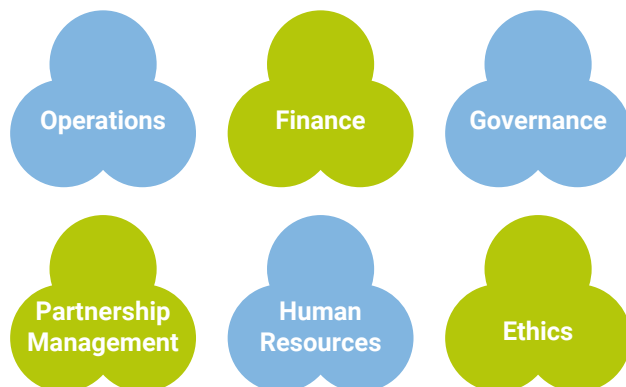
Photo Credit: Better Cotton/Katrina McArdle

Programme Partner Due Diligence

In response to recommendations from the Task Force on Decent Work and Forced Labour, and to meet ISEAL requirements, Better Cotton began developing its Programme Partner due diligence framework in 2021. Designed through a consultative process involving the Better Cotton team and partners, the framework was first piloted in India with our Programme Partner, include name here, before being formally rolled out in 2022.

The due diligence process assesses partners across six key areas: ethics, governance, human resources, finance, operations, and partnership management. Additionally, a financial health check evaluates the financial health of partners. Each area is reviewed and scored, with findings compiled into a due diligence report that includes a corrective action plan to support continuous improvement.

By February 2025, Better Cotton had conducted over 50 due diligence assessments for both existing Programme and Strategic Partners as well as prospective entities seeking to join the programme. The next phase will focus on rolling out a tailored due diligence framework for agribusinesses in Brazil, refining the overall process based on lessons learned, finalising assessments for existing partners, and continuing evaluations for new entities. Due diligence assessments will be updated every three years to ensure partners maintain alignment with evolving requirements and best practices.

Six key areas Better Cotton's due diligence process assesses partners against:

- Operations
- Finance
- Governance
- Partnership Management
- Human Resources
- Ethics

Photo Credit: Better Cotton/Eventrra

Enhanced Decent Work Monitoring in Higher-risk Contexts

Better Cotton's risk-based approach extends to its assurance approach, ensuring that labour rights risks are effectively identified and addressed in higher-risk regions. In Uzbekistan, where cotton production has historically been linked to state-imposed forced labour, Better Cotton requires producers to undergo an enhanced farm-level assessment by trained decent work monitors. Apart from a thorough examination of the fundamental principles and rights at work, these assessments provide a comprehensive evaluation of recruitment practices, working conditions, and wage payments, alongside extensive worker interviews conducted during peak labour seasons when risks are highest. Additionally, input from external stakeholders and local communities helps capture concerns that may not be immediately visible through field visits alone.

Better Cotton's Principles and Criteria v.2.1 did not adequately cover key labour rights issues, particularly forced labour and health and safety. To address this, we introduced a separate enhanced decent work monitoring process, which ran alongside the licensing assessments from 2021 to 2023. Non-compliance could lead to licence denial or suspension, reinforcing the process's importance. However, with the introduction of P&C v.3.0, which now integrates stronger labour rights indicators, these gaps have been addressed, allowing for the enhanced approach to be streamlined into regular licensing assessments for new farms, while continuing as a stand-alone process for existing farms where systemic risks are identified.

Since its inception, the enhanced decent work monitoring approach has undergone continuous refinement. Developed in collaboration with labour rights experts at a human rights consultancy and through consultations with civil society groups, including Cotton Campaign and human rights activists, it was first piloted with three cotton textile clusters in 2021. In the following years, it expanded progressively, reaching 12 farms in 2023 and 16 farms by the 2024-25 season with nearly 1,300 workers interviewed. The monitoring approach remains dynamic, adapting to emerging risks and lessons learned from past assessments. remains dynamic, adapting to emerging risks and lessons learned from past assessments.

A key feature of the approach in Uzbekistan, for example, is the collaborative relationship with state institutions, established through a joint roadmap. This partnership has enabled Better Cotton to raise critical findings from monitoring assessments and advocate for systemic improvements. Recognising the challenges that clusters faced in providing appropriate contracts to seasonal workers under national labour laws, Better Cotton secured commitments from the relevant state agencies to support clusters in meeting this requirement. The partnership has also encouraged a greater role for labour inspectorates in monitoring working conditions during the harvest season, including access to clean water and shade. In parallel, as part of Better Cotton's child labour remediation approach, discussions are underway to explore how the state can extend social security support to vulnerable families in farming communities while strengthening awareness of child labour hazards and oversight of school attendance.

With the transition to certification, the assurance approach in Uzbekistan will continue to evolve. The final certification decision will now rest with independent third-party certification bodies,

requiring an investment in training auditors. Better Cotton will ensure that certification auditors receive comprehensive training in worker interviewing techniques and are equipped with risk profiles and insights collected over years of decent work monitoring. Given the highly formalised nature of Uzbekistan's cotton cluster system, where labour management practices are more advanced, and where trained decent work monitors and comprehensive wage documentation are already in place, Better Cotton was able to roll out its wage verification approach in Uzbekistan a year ahead of the global launch. This provided valuable insights to refine the verification framework before broader implementation.

Beyond institutional partnerships, Better Cotton maintains a standing engagement with the Cotton Campaign to regularly exchange findings and information, and validate risks. This critical relationship ensures that concerns flagged by civil society groups are meaningfully addressed while reinforcing a shared commitment to upholding labour rights in Uzbekistan.

Photo credit: Navbahor Textile LLC /Better Cotton

Commitment to Fair Remuneration and Wage Transparency

Fair wages are essential to ensuring decent work in cotton production, a critical issue in the industry. Many cotton farmers and workers face challenges such as low wages, informal employment, and a lack of wage transparency, which contribute to economic insecurity and perpetuate poverty.

In cotton production, wages have traditionally been low, and informal payment structures have made it difficult to verify and enforce fair pay. Workers in the cotton sector, especially smallholder producers, often earn below the legal minimum wage, and women are disproportionately affected by these pay gaps. Addressing these challenges is crucial to improving livelihoods and promoting sustainable practices within the cotton sector.

One of the pivotal steps in Better Cotton's journey towards fair remuneration is the introduction of Criterion 5.7 to the P&C v.3.0, which mandates that large- and medium-sized producers pay at least the legal minimum wage, ensuring that workers are paid fairly and on time. While this is an initial step, it lays the groundwork for long-term improvements in wage structures, bringing greater visibility to remuneration practices in cotton farming.

Recognising the complexities of wage verification in agriculture, Better Cotton has adopted a phased approach to implementing this requirement. A one-year grace period for the 2024-25 season was given to producers to adapt to this requirement, taking into account informal payment structures, seasonal employment patterns, and the lack of legal minimum wages in some countries. To support this transition, Better Cotton launched a wage verification project to develop guidance for auditors and ensure accurate assessments across different farm categories, with distinct approaches for smallholder and larger producers.

Photo Credit: Better Cotton/Baran Vardar

In July 2024, Better Cotton received a grant from the ISEAL Innovations Fund to develop and test a digitised wage sampling tool in Pakistan. This tool represents an innovative solution for the cotton industry by providing clear, structured guidance on how to collect and analyse wage data using digital tools. The tool includes a survey questionnaire that was tested in Pakistan and can be adapted for use in other contexts. This initiative aims to create a scalable, low-cost solution for collecting wage data, which will set a baseline for tracking wage improvements over time.

Better Cotton recognises that smallholder wage verification presents unique challenges due to the informality of the sector. As a result, the wage sampling tool focuses on addressing these challenges while ensuring effective data collection. To ensure smooth implementation, Better Cotton has been training Programme Partner field staff to use the new tools. The training is crucial for equipping partners with the skills to conduct the survey and understand the methodologies involved.

Looking ahead to the 2025-26 certification season, Better Cotton plans to roll out the wage sampling methodology in different country contexts, tailored to the specific needs of each location. Alongside this, auditors will be trained on wage verification methods, marking the first global roll-out of this approach.

Better Cotton also acknowledges that a living wage in cotton farming will remain a distant goal without structural changes throughout the supply chain. This includes a stronger commitment to responsible purchasing practices and improved market access for farming communities. The wage data collected will be used to raise awareness of the living wage gap and support advocacy efforts, driving collective action to address the underlying risk factors contributing to decent work deficits in agriculture.

Photo Credit: Better Cotton/Baran Vardar

Five Years Laying the Groundwork

Scaling Impact and Strengthening Commitments

Five years into the implementation of its Decent Work Strategy, Better Cotton is reflecting on the progress made and adapting to an evolving regulatory, environmental, and industry landscape. The next phase of our work will focus on deepening engagement, fostering collaboration across the supply chain, improving traceability, and addressing the growing climate-related risks facing farming communities. We remain committed to ensuring that decent work is not just a standard, but a reality for cotton farmers and workers worldwide.

Advancing Due Diligence, Traceability, and Stakeholder Collaboration

The adoption of mandatory human rights due diligence directives presents both challenges and opportunities for the cotton supply chain. As a unique intermediary between retailers, brands, and farming communities, Better Cotton is well-positioned to ensure that due diligence efforts reflect local realities. We will strengthen our support for due diligence by enhancing reporting, risk analysis, and direct engagement with supply chain actors.

To further scale social sustainability initiatives, including self-help groups, livelihoods projects, community-based education, and child labour monitoring, Better Cotton will focus on better reporting and deeper engagement. Retailers and brands are increasingly involved in their upstream supply chains due to legal obligations, sustainability commitments, and reputational concerns. Better Cotton will foster dialogue and collaboration, shifting from reactive risk management to proactive partnerships that drive farm-level change.

Additionally, with traceability to the country-of-origin already in place, Better Cotton is accelerating efforts to achieve traceability back to the gin level within the next one to two years. This enhanced transparency will enable retailers and brands to engage directly with farming communities, promoting investment in sustainability initiatives and strengthening multi-stakeholder collaborations to address systemic decent work challenges.

Addressing Climate-Driven Labour Risks

The effects of climate change are reshaping working conditions in cotton farming. Rising temperatures, extreme weather events, and declining agricultural productivity threaten livelihoods, job stability, and worker health and safety. These climate stressors increase vulnerability, pushing some workers into precarious employment or exploitative conditions.

Recognising that decent work cannot be achieved without climate resilience, Better Cotton is integrating occupational safety, social protection, and worker well-being into our climate adaptation efforts. This includes advocating for stronger occupational safety measures, promoting access to clean water and shade, and collaborating with national labour inspectorates to improve monitoring during extreme weather conditions. Through policy engagement and field-level initiatives, we will continue to ensure that labour rights remain at the core of climate adaptation strategies.

Advancing Advocacy and Impact Monitoring

Better Cotton's commitment to social sustainability has positioned it as a leader among sustainability standards in the cotton sector. By openly sharing risk assessment findings, assurance approaches, and best practices, we will continue to drive industry-wide improvements. Our collaboration with fellow sustainability standards, labour rights organisations, and civil society actors will be further strengthened to ensure alignment and collective impact.

To reinforce accountability and effectiveness, we will enhance impact monitoring and evaluation systems, ensuring that our activities remain evidence-based and outcome-driven. This will allow us to refine our interventions, measure progress more effectively, and share insights with key stakeholders. By strengthening our ability to track and demonstrate impact, we can push for meaningful improvements in working conditions and livelihoods.

A Roadmap for the Future

Determined to ensure that our work remains relevant and impactful, Better Cotton has published a revised strategy for 2025-2030, aligning with its broader 2030 Strategy framework. This updated strategy outlines priorities and objectives for the next five years, reflecting the organisation's commitment to continuous improvement and deeper engagement across the cotton supply chain.

As we look ahead, the Decent Work Strategy will continue to guide our work, ensuring that Better Cotton not only delivers on its commitments but also helps shape global conversations on decent work in agriculture. Our ambition is clear: to create a cotton sector where farmers and workers operate in safe conditions, earn fair wages, and have a voice in shaping their future.

This progress report is not a conclusion, but a stepping stone.

Realising meaningful change will require collective action from governments, brands, civil society, and the farming communities themselves. Better Cotton stands ready to convene, collaborate, and drive forward this agenda, with the aim of making decent work a reality for all.

We invite all stakeholders—retailers, brands, Programme Partners, policymakers, and civil society—to join us in this next phase of action. **The time to act is now.**

Photo Credit: Better Cotton/Khaula Jamil

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