

Request for Proposals

Decent work baseline research in cotton cultivation in Pakistan

RFP n#: 2025-6-MEL-DWBL

Location: Pakistan

Start date: 4 August 2025

End date: 12 December 2025

Better Cotton key contact:

Vidyun Rathore

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

All applications must be submitted via this [form](#).

You may submit questions to tender@bettercotton.org - RFP n# 2025-6-MEL-DWBL" until 9 July 2025

Applications sent after the deadline (16 July 2025 midnight CET) will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.



Introduction

Better Cotton is the world's largest cotton sustainability programme. Our mission: to help cotton communities survive and thrive, while protecting and restoring the environment. In difficult times, we are meeting the challenge head on. Through our network of field-level partners we have provided training on more sustainable farming practices to more than 2.9 million cotton farmers in 26 countries. More than a fifth of the world's cotton is now grown under the Better Cotton Standard and our membership network includes more than 2,400 members.

More information about Better Cotton can be found on our website: www.bettercotton.org

Better Cotton began working in Pakistan in 2009, launching its first programme in partnership with WWF-Pakistan. The work responded to pressing challenges in Pakistan's cotton sector, including inefficient water use, over-reliance on harmful pesticides, soil degradation, low yields, poor labour conditions, and limited market access for smallholder farmers. Cotton is a critical crop for the country's economy and rural livelihoods, but production practices were often unsustainable and risky for both people and the environment.

To address these issues, Better Cotton focused on building farmer capacity through training on sustainable farming practices. This included integrated pest management, improved irrigation techniques, soil health improvement, and promotion of decent work—especially tackling child labour and gender inequality.

The programme also partnered with local organisations, research institutions, and later with government bodies, to expand its reach. Over time, Better Cotton's work in Pakistan has evolved to include traceability systems and regenerative agriculture approaches, aiming to embed sustainability across the entire cotton value chain.

Introduction and focus of study

Decent work is a key focus area for Better Cotton and we want to know:

1. **The current status of key indicators of our desired outcomes.**
2. **Suggestions for future measurement of these key indicators.**

The findings will help create a baseline for the new Decent Work strategy and its future measurement.

Context:

Working conditions in Pakistan's cotton production sector remain highly precarious. The workforce is predominantly informal, with risks of long working hours, low wages, and high exposure to hazardous pesticides. Legal protections for agricultural workers are limited and labour conditions lack oversight. Labour arrangements via intermediaries are common, lacking transparency and often creating further vulnerability, as workers can face several issues including debt bondage, wage deductions, and unfair terms of work. The enduring presence of feudal landholding systems also increases the risk of forced labour, while risks of child labour remains widespread. Women constitute a significant share of the labour force in cotton farming. However, they are often paid less than men, lack formal recognition for their work, and face a heightened risk of abuse and exploitation. Among women workers, certain groups—particularly migrant workers and non-Muslim labourers—are even more vulnerable. These groups often face systemic discrimination and are frequently subject to exploitative labour arrangements.

Scale of reach of Decent work focused activities in Pakistan:

Better Cotton's work in Pakistan is implemented through Programme Partners based in-country. We work with programme partners who deliver training and information on Better Cotton's Principles and Criteria¹. Partners have field facilitators that directly work with farmers. Better Cotton categorises its farms into three sizes: Large (above 200 hectares), medium (20-200 ha) and small (below 20ha).

State	Number of Programme Partners	Number of Field Facilitators	Size of Farm	Number of that size of Farm	Approximate number of workers on those farms
Punjab	6	795	Large	0	0
			Medium	1036	12910
			Small	244940	92231
Sindh	4	218	Large	22	3266
			Medium	1626	36790
			Small	72325	55133

The main districts where Better Cotton projects are implemented in each province are:

Punjab: Bahawalpur, Bahawalnagar, Rahim Yar Khan, Multan, Lodhran, Khanewal, Mianwali, Vehari, DG Khan, Rajanpur, Muzaffargarh, Sahiwal.

Sindh: Sukkur, Ghotki, Sanghar, Khairpur, Nawabshah, Tando Allah Yar, Mirpur Khas, Matiari, Umerkot

Key indicators for study:

To establish a robust baseline, Better Cotton seeks data on the current status of a set of key indicators across three groups of stakeholder groups: farmers, workers, and field facilitators (including women field trainers and members of Gender and/or Decent Work Committees set up by the PU).

While many of the indicators are quantitative, we recognise that some issues – particularly those related to working conditions, discrimination and lived experience – may be better explored through

¹ <https://bettercotton.org/what-we-do/defining-better-our-standard/>

qualitative and/or participatory methods. These approaches can provide richer insights into challenges that may not surface through close-ended survey questions.

We therefore request that all applicants:

- Propose a mixed-methods approach, clearly outlining which methods (quantitative and/or qualitative) they will use for each indicator.
- Justify their chosen methods, explaining how these will help ensure accuracy, relevance, and inclusivity—especially in capturing the voices of seasonal, migrant, and women workers.

1. Field Facilitators

Domain	Indicator
Training on Decent Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number who have attended Decent Work training overall • % who have attended Decent Work training in last year • % who can cite 3 or more learnings from Decent Work training
Understanding labour rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % who understand the difference between child labour and age-appropriate child work; can give examples and understand why some work is unsafe • % who understand how to identify unfair treatment and can give examples of discrimination and who is at risk • % who can identify health & safety hazards and can give examples of basic mitigation measures • % who can list at least 3 poor work practices that may be indications of forced labour
Labour Monitoring and Remediation System / Incident handling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % who have been trained on how to identify labour rights risks • % who have been trained on how to report incidents • % who conduct worker interviews • % who have identified an incident in the past year • % who agree that most incidents can be reported and escalated through the PU Manager • Number of incidents recorded by the PU • Types of incidents – e.g. child labour; other • % remediated/addressed • Type of remediation delivered in response to the identified incidents

2. Workers

Worker profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % directly employed by farm owner/manager • % employed via labour broker/intermediary
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Training on Decent Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number who have attended Decent Work training overall • % who have attended Decent Work training in last year • % who can cite 3 or more learnings from DW training
Understanding labour rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % who understand the difference between child labour and age-appropriate child work; can give examples and understand why some work is unsafe • % who understand how to identify unfair treatment and can give examples of discrimination • % who can identify health & safety hazards and can give examples of protections they are entitled to • % who are aware of what a worker organisation / trade union is • % who can share 1 benefit of worker organisation membership • % who can list at least 3 practices that farmers aren't allowed to subject them to • % who report having been subjected to at least 3 poor work practices in the last year
Perception of working conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception of safety when conducting cotton farm work (%) • Perception of fairness in work task allocation (%) • Perception of fairness in wage payments (%) • Perception of fairness in treatment e.g. supervision; communication of tasks etc. (%)
Power & voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % who discuss work terms with farmers/employers before they start job -Types of terms discussed/agreed. • % who are engaged in a union or other workers group/organisation • Results/benefits of engagement in a union or other workers group/organisation, or collective bargaining
Grievance mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % who are aware of a grievance mechanism • % who are aware – and can access in case of need, e.g. if agreed terms of work are broken • % who feel safe raising a work-related issue to a grievance mechanism • % who feel that a work-related issue could be resolved through a grievance mechanism
Child Labour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % reporting an understanding/knowledge of rights • % whose children support them at work in cotton farming • % who report other workers bringing children to support them at work
Forced Labour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % who report experiencing at least two high-risk indicators of forced labour (coercion, involuntariness, etc.) • % who report working for free to repay debt to the farmer (probing for debt bondage)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % who report that agreed terms of work were not representative of the actual work they do (probing for coercion)
Health & Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % with access to safe drinking water during work on cotton farms • % access to shaded rest areas during work on cotton farms • % taking at least 1 break every XX hours • % access to private area for personal sanitation within XX minutes walking distance • % given time to attend to personal sanitation needs during working hours
Wage payment modalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % who report wage payment delays in at least 2 of the last 4 wage payments • % who report wage payment delays that exceed duration of the next agreed payment timing • % who report wages are not paid directly to them • % who report wage deductions
Social Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numbers enrolled in social security scheme • Type of support received

3. Farmers

Training on Decent Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number who have attended Decent Work training overall • % who have attended Decent Work training in last year • % who can cite 3 or more learnings from Decent Work training
Understanding labour rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % who understand the difference between child labour and age-appropriate child work; can give examples and understand why some work is unsafe` • % who understand what unfair treatment would look like and can give examples • % who can identify health & safety hazards and can give examples of mitigation measures • % who are aware of what a cooperative and/or Trade Union is • % who can share 1 benefit of cooperative and/or Trade Union membership
Practice adoption – Decent Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % who provide clean and safe drinking water to workers during their work hours • % who can cite at least 3 measures they adopt to avoid worker heat stress • % who discuss work terms with workers before they start job - Types of terms discussed/agreed • Number of breaks provided to workers within a working day at the farm
Perception of working conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception of safety when conducting cotton farm work

Child labour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % whose children support them at work in cotton farming • % who report their workers bringing children to support them at work • % reporting children working on other cotton farms in their area
Power & voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % who are engaged in a cooperative, union or other farmers group • Results/benefits of engagement in a union or other workers group/organisation
Health & Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % with access to safe drinking water while working on cotton farm • % taking at least 1 break every XX hours during cotton farm work
Social Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numbers enrolled in social security scheme • Type of support received

Sample

We recognise the need to balance sample size and selection with several constraints and priorities, including the available budget, the need for representation of key stakeholder groups, the practicality of identifying respondents, and the choice of data collection tools. While we aim for as much accuracy as possible, we do not prescribe a specific sample size or accuracy requirement for the quantitative data. However, we expect no lower than a 90% confidence level with a 10% margin of error per province and stakeholder group—with a preference for higher precision where feasible.

We ask applicants to propose a sampling strategy for both quantitative and qualitative components. This should include:

- Suggested sample sizes by stakeholder group and location
- Proposed sampling selection methods and rationale
- Plans to ensure representation of priority groups, including seasonal and women workers

Available Data and Constraints

Better Cotton Partners maintain detailed records for:

- Field Facilitators and Farmers, including geographic location, age, and gender

However, data on workers is significantly more limited:

- We have only approximate numbers of workers per Partner
- Gender-disaggregated data is available only for Sindh
- There are no individual-level records for workers (e.g. name, age, contact details)
- Many workers are seasonal and may be difficult to reach during the data collection period

These limitations must be factored into the sampling and outreach strategy, particularly for the worker sample. We expect applicants to demonstrate a strong understanding of the local context and propose practical, context-sensitive solutions—including strategies to:

- Maximise participation of seasonal workers

- Ensure adequate representation of women workers
- Reach vulnerable groups, such as non-Muslim and migrant workers

Key Considerations for Sample Design:

Applicants should consider the following in shaping their sampling approach:

- Ensure geographic representation, reflecting the spread and scale of Decent Work activities across Pakistan
- Collect data from all three stakeholder groups: field facilitators, farmers, and workers
- Ensure the following minimum representation targets:
 - 50% women among workers
 - 10% women among field facilitators
 - 10% women among farmers
- Consider inclusion of vulnerable groups, such as non-Muslim and migrant workers

Sampling should be informed by:

- Country-level reach figures (e.g. number and type of farms, field facilitators, farmers, and workers per location)
- Availability of existing lists for field facilitators and farmers
- The absence of worker lists, requiring alternative selection methods
- The desired gender balance in the dataset
- The indicators we aim to assess through the baseline

Data quality and ethics

Collecting data from workers on cotton farms can pose ethical and logistical challenges. Engaging workers during their working hours may result in lost income or productivity, while collecting data outside of working hours can inadvertently exclude those with household responsibilities—particularly women—thus introducing gender bias into the data.

Better Cotton is open to respondent remuneration where appropriate, though we recognize this raises further considerations, such as managing expectations about future benefits and ensuring that participation remains truly voluntary.

We ask applicants to clearly describe in their proposals how they will:

- Minimize the burden on workers, including strategies for scheduling and time management.
- Ensure informed and voluntary participation, including how consent will be obtained.

- Address potential gender and social exclusion, particularly of women and marginalized groups.
- Consider if, when, and how remuneration might be used ethically and transparently.
- Manage expectations among participants, especially regarding the purpose of the research and any benefits.
- Ensure the safety and well-being of participants throughout the process.

Proposals should reflect a worker-centred and ethically sound approach to data collection that respects participants' time, dignity, and rights. Experience with rights-based or participatory research approaches will be viewed favourably.

Scope of Work

The selected consultant or firm will be responsible for the following deliverables:

1. Inception Report (English)
 - An updated version of the proposal, informed by a review of key documentation and initial discussions with Better Cotton staff.
 - Should incorporate insights from:
 - At least three inception meetings with relevant Better Cotton staff
 - A review of the Decent Work Strategy, Principle 5 Decent Work of the Better Cotton Principles & Criteria, relevant project design documents, and activity plans
2. Sampling Strategy
(This may be included as part of the inception report)
 - A clear and feasible sampling approach that reflects the considerations outlined in the sampling section above, including:
 - Stakeholder group representation
 - Geographic spread
 - Gender and vulnerability considerations
 - Practical limitations related to worker outreach
3. Data Collection Tools (English)
 - Development of both quantitative and qualitative data collection tools
 - Refining the tools based on at least two rounds of review and feedback from Better Cotton
 - Final tools must be translated into relevant local languages prior to use in the field
4. Data Collection
 - Training workshop(s) for data collectors, attended by Better Cotton and relevant Partner staff to ensure shared understanding and prompt clarification
 - Pilot testing of tools to ensure appropriate length and clarity of questions, ideally on a sample of target stakeholders (Field Facilitators, farmers and workers).
 - Fieldwork, carried out by trained enumerators using appropriate local languages

- Better Cotton and its Partners will support access to locations and provide lists (including contact information) for Field Facilitators and Farmers
- 5. Reporting and Presentation
 - Draft report (max. 60 pages, English) summarising key findings against baseline indicators, with preliminary narrative analysis and recommendations on future data collection
 - Presentation of key findings in English (maximum 40 slides) during a session of up to 1 hour 15 minutes, with:
 - ~30 minutes for presentation
 - ~45 minutes for Q&A and discussion
 - Final report (max. 50 pages, English) integrating feedback and containing refined findings, narrative analysis, and recommendations
- 6. Data Submission
 - Submission of:
 - Raw and cleaned quantitative datasets
 - Codebook, if numeric codes were used for survey responses

High-level Timeline

16 July 2025	Applications deadline All applications must be submitted via this form .
16 July to 25 July 2025	Applications review & shortlisting / Interviews
29 July 2025	The successful applicant will be notified Unsuccessful <u>shortlisted</u> applicants will also be notified
4 August 2025	Start of the consultancy
22 August 2025	Inception Report and Data Collection tool drafts
29 August 2025	Data Collection tools finalized
Completed by 30 September	Data Collection (due to worker availability, this needs to be completed by end of September 2025)
28 October 2025	Draft Report

By 12 December 2025	Final Report, presentation and raw and cleaned data with codebook There should be time for 2 rounds of comments from BCI team
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Required Skills & Knowledge

Skills, Knowledge and Experience
<i>Essential</i>
10+ years of experience of work on rural development in Pakistan (lead consultant)
7+ years' experience of work on rural development in Pakistan (at least one other team member)
7+ years of experience of working on decent work-related issues (lead consultant)
5+ years' experience working on decent work-related issue (at least one other team member)
Master's degree on relevant topic (lead consultant) – labour rights, agriculture, development, evaluation, research methods
7+ years Research / evaluation process – data collection / analysis / reporting
4+ years Research / evaluation process – data collection / analysis / reporting
Proven ability to organise data collection on labour or related issues in Pakistan
Data collectors with necessary data collection skills and languages for collecting data labour issues in Pakistan within the two provinces that are the focus for this research.
Proven ability to produce clear reports on topics relevant to this study.
Business proficiency in English: Better Cotton's language of operation is English
<i>Optional</i>
Knowledge and experience of certification and standards
Knowledge and experience of cotton cultivation

Application Requirements

Please note that we have changed our RFP submission protocol, and this is now in two phases;

- Phase 1: Initial details will be submitted on the form found in this [link](#).
- Phase 2: You will receive an email with live links to upload relevant documents (please check your Spam and Junk folders)

Proposals responding to this Request for Proposals should be a *maximum* of **12 pages** (excluding CVs), have a budget within the range of **14,000 EUR – 20,000 EUR**, and **include the following**:

- Overview of relevant experience, summarising key experience of applicants and description of least 3 pieces of decent work-related pieces of research/evaluation or MEL roles within the team.
- Proposed methodology, including: approach/methodology, planned types of data collection tools for the indicators and your justification for their suitability [including if you've successfully used them before], sample size and selection approach for field facilitators, farmers and workers, how will you manage the key data quality and ethical considerations.
- Timeline of key steps in the research
- Detailed and transparent budget, in EUROS, including staff days/time allocation and day rates
- CVs as separate attachments.
- If possible – a relevant report or presentation on a similar topic in order to demonstrate ability to produce relevant and clear reports.

We thank all applicants for their interest; however, only shortlisted applicants will be contacted.

Better Cotton is committed to good practice and transparency in the management of natural, human and financial resources. All applications will be reviewed under the principles and subject to Better Cotton's policies on equal opportunity, non-discrimination, anti-bribery & corruption and conflict of interest.

Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

Technical Evaluation Criteria

- Relevant professional experience of the proposed consultant(s)
- Demonstrated understanding of this RFP – responding to its requirements
- Quality / suitability of the proposed approach and methodology
- Feasibility of the proposed activity plan and timeline, and appropriateness of time allocated to delivering each task
- Clarity of the proposal and budget

Financial Evaluation Criteria

- Alignment of the budget to the activity timeline detailed in the technical proposal
- Adherence to the available budget
- Value for money (quality of consultancy team, methods, sample and proposed outputs for the cost)