

Analysis conducted to identify outcome level deliverables as a result of BCI facilitation in Bahawalpur and Sanghar districts - Pakistan

Executive Summary

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Undertaken for the **Better Cotton Initiative** by Apna Arsh Welfare Society Pakistan-AAP



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Executive Summary

Background: BCI, the Better Cotton Initiative is a holistic approach to more sustainable cotton production covering all three pillars of sustainability: environmental, social, and economic. By adhering to BCI production principles, Better Cotton farmers produce cotton in a way that is better for the environment and farming communities.

The objective of this outcome evaluation will focus on the outcome level and inform BCI and its implementing partners about progress made to date and enable project improvements to be made. It will contribute to an environment of learning and promote accountability of performance.

Through this study, achievement of results at the outcome level was evaluated, and analysed to determine contribution to BCI's overall goals of improved livelihoods and strengthened environmental and economic sustainability.

Objective and design of the study: BCI identified 2 project areas namely Bahawalpur and Sanghar districts, for this study. 3 Learning Groups (totalling 30 smallholder farmers) and 10 medium farmers from each project area were selected based on random sampling from the BCI selected Producer Units. The sample pool of 80 respondents was then contacted for individual interviews and Focus Group Discussions, along with representatives of external stakeholders including external supply chain actors, schools and health units, to provide a well-rounded view of BCI interventions.

Key factors for outcome level evaluation included farm level practices (BCI principles, including Decent Work Criteria), production data, changes in farmers' lives/communities, as well as their satisfaction levels. Impact of Implementing Partner activities, as well as their sustainability plans, partnership development and outreach and organizational/project maturity levels were also observed.

Key Farm-level findings: Farmers in both sample areas were well-versed in Farm management practices, including soil, water, fertilizer, IPM, fibre quality. Variations in over- and under-reporting were noted for various variables between farmer field book recorded data and recall-method collected data through this exercise. Variations existed in uptake/practice of labour and DW principles and practices, despite the relative ages of both project regions, owing to various reasons, as detailed in the report.

Prior to BCI facilitation, farmers in the project regions had little to no awareness about DW, particularly child labour practices. It was observed that in the older project region (Bahawalpur), all farmers had been positively mobilized to the benefits of child labour reduction and eventual elimination, as well as re-enrolment of children in to schools, whereby an improvement of over 100% was documented in intervention areas since start.

A high level of satisfaction and an air of positive development in community life were expressed by all respondents from both target areas. A sense of wellbeing in family as well as community life and interaction

was highlighted, particularly owing to the fortnightly BCI LG meetings. Important messages regarding decent work, women's role in the fields, children's re-enrolment in schools and pertinent messages regarding crop cycle and its management were ably disseminated and absorbed.

Key Changes in Farmers' lives: The BCI program has affected positive changes in participating farmers' lives, and these changes are more relevant, especially at the Small Farmer level, due to the limited exposure and scale of these farmers. The single most satisfying factor voiced by small farmers from both selected project locations was achievement of significant improvements in their farm management practices as a result of BCI interventions, including improved farm management practices (reduction in the number of harmful and irrelevant pesticide sprays, adoption of innovative pest management techniques, increasing and optimal use of organic fertilizer, improving irrigation and soil management practice, and ability to select the right seed varieties etc.). Adoption of these practices has led to financial, economic, environmental and social benefits. Sustainability achieved through the adoption of these practices is expected to be the single largest motivator ensuring that the small farmers continue to implement these practices in the future as well fulfilling the sustainability aspect.

Another important cultural benefit, though indirectly affected through LGs and facilitation, has been the increasing interaction of the farming communities, leading to enhanced communal bonding and resolution of social issues at the village/community level. This has led to an increasing number of farmers now interested and willing to send their children to school, increased awareness of hygiene and health and gender related issues.

On the other hand, owing to the larger land holding size, medium sized farmers reported that they were already exposed to some of these best practices as a result of a higher level of exposure and approach to support organizations, however, they have learnt about cotton storing and transporting techniques and fine-tuned these operations at their farms after BCI facilitation and the issue of contamination is getting under control, helping them to realize some price premiums at the time of selling to ginners. The Medium Farmers have also become more aware about DW, child labour and gender related issues and now they keep a watchful eye for any deviations during the cotton season.

Implementing Partner facilitation and local partnerships development: IPs had enlisted the services of various Producer Organizations (POs) and partners, especially in the Bahawalpur area, and are steering them towards sustainability for the POs. From the project areas selected for this study, the Sanghar area lagged behind, but only owing to its younger age, and was quickly catching up in building beneficial community and organizational partnerships and linkages. However, hand-holding and guidance of the POs and partners by BCI is an area still needing additional work. From an environmental, social and economic perspective at the outcome level, cotton farmers at the small and medium levels, have benefitted greatly from BCI's holistic approach towards the cotton crop.

However certain facilitative regimes still require attention such as, low quality of facilitation owing to inadequate level of training of field facilitators in some areas, low frequency of mobilization/sensitization events that needs to be increased keeping the budget constraints in mind and lack of enriched/standardized

curriculum/material especially pertaining to DW that can be enriched through establishing partnerships with relevant local organizations who specialize in related content development. BCI is urged to take a deeper look into these issues for inclusion and up gradation of BCI's Better Cotton Standards Systems efficacious implementation.