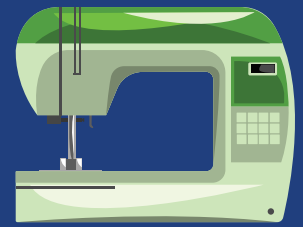


Renewed Commitment to Social Protections for Factory Workers in the Garment Industry



The pandemic and the lessened demand for textiles made government actors realize the importance of industry competitiveness; showed a greater willingness to operationalize strategies that promote social protection in order to minimize negative impact on the economy.

At the onset of COVID, demand for apparel/textiles plummeted

Industry would have to take steps to remain competitive

Governments were more willing to engage in addressing social protections for workers

Project presented a platform to engage stakeholders to address the vulnerabilities of factory workers.

Priority shifted to get factories back online and stay competitive to secure share of a more limited market; shifted to a hybrid service model to meet the demands of each local context.

PROJECT NAME: Better Work

PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE: July 2017 – June 2022 (phase IV), July 2022 – June 2027 (Phase V, expanding to Pakistan and other countries)

COUNTRY PROGRAMS (PHASE IV): Bangladesh, Cambodia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Haiti, Indonesia, Jordan, Nicaragua, Vietnam (plus “thematic interventions” in Madagascar and Sri Lanka, not included in Phase IV Strategy)

Improves working conditions in global textile and apparel supply chains. By monitoring factories’ compliance with national labor laws and international labor standards, Better Work promotes better conditions for workers, develops competitiveness by providing technical assistance to factories that need to improve their compliance, and informs major brands and buyers of labor conditions in the sector.

COVID Implications:

FACTORIES – faced challenges with supply chains, procurement and transportation of raw materials, worker overages, cancelled orders, public health issues on factory floors.

WORKERS – some forced to sleep in factories, crowded dormitories (Jordan), migrant workers unable to travel; some terminated or furloughed; difficulty receiving cash payments; furloughed workers became isolated

PROJECT – initially had difficulty communicating directly with workers, had limited physical access to factories to conduct assessments, difficulty collecting data to inform decision making

UNIONS – minimal knowledge how to operate virtually, low capacity for tech skills, lack of access to equipment/smartphones

Response		
Renewing Focus on Occupational Safety & Health	Advocating for Worker Social Protections	Advancing Sustainability
Opportunities		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accelerated the development of tools and guidelines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasized weaknesses in worker safety legislation and practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institutionalized behavior changes vis-à-vis health and hygiene by working with factories to establish protocols that included social distancing, disinfecting, and PPE use
Adaptations		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shifted focus to worker safety and health (including mental health) and how to better prepare systems for future viruses and biological hazards Prioritized safe return to work initiatives by combining OSH compliance requirements with COVID protocols at factories Took advantage of its unique entry point at the factory level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitated the process of moving employers from cash to digital payments to workers, a practice that is favorable to the worker and has a high probability of continuing (Cambodia) Advocated for the rights of migrant workers and negotiated with stakeholders to ensure the costs of housing them in-country was not borne by the workers (Jordan) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virtual adaptations lent themselves to reaching more trainees and transferring tools and approaches to partners for them to deliver services independently from the project; were able to reach more factories in some countries Piloted a hybrid approach to factory inspections that included a written report with video verification and use of an embedded factory ambassador to report on compliance
Messaging to Factory Workers		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worked with WHO to develop and distribute guidance related to COVID for workers and general public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addressed worker wellbeing through social media campaigns to address depression, anxiety, isolation and stress <p><i>Example: Facebook Live sessions in Cambodia reached 2 million people</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established new norm of communicating directly with workers via social media <p><i>Example: WhatsApp, Instagram live (Indonesia), Facebook (Cambodia), telephone lifelines (Jordan), new mobile app called Gopy (Vietnam)</i></p>

Limitations to Solutions (Cross-Cutting):

- Lockdowns challenged project’s ability to collect data – worker experience (surveys) and monitoring compliance with national labor standards à pushed creativity to reach workers and factory managers thru any means possible
- Connectivity issues hampered the quality of online trainings
- Technological barrier was significant; direct communication with workers was difficult when they didn’t have phone credit or know how to use Zoom; government officials were initially resistant to virtual meeting options
- Assessed and understood impacts of COVID on women but did not use this knowledge to its full extent in programming
- COVID was not the primary problem for all countries; security issues (Haiti), civil conflict (Ethiopia), and the presence of a large migrant worker population whose mobility was eliminated (Jordan) compounded the challenges presented by COVID. Other economic issues still take priority over worker safety (e.g. job creation in Jordan).

Lessons Learned



The project's ability to convene stakeholders and facilitate dialogue was made possible because it was already a trusted partner. Invest in building relationships among partners.

The project recognized early in the pandemic that brands wanted to refocus on corporate social responsibility and governments wanted to stay competitive in a newly limited market. Constantly monitor motivations of different stakeholders and capitalize on opportunities where these overlap.



Get creative to maintain worker engagement by any means possible.

Factory workers are a multifaceted segment of the population that experience crisis in different ways. Engage gender and social inclusion expertise early to ensure the voices of marginalized workers are heard and their experiences understood.



Hybrid assessments can be a useful tool and allow compliance checks to be conducted in remote areas and an effective training tool for inspectors, but in-person verification and follow up remains a best practice.