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Two sides to Better Work - A comparative analysis of worker and management perception of the impact of Better Work Lesotho

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September 2015



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TWO SIDES TO BETTER WORK
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF WORKER AND MANAGEMENT PERCEPTION
OF THE IMPACT OF BETTER WORK LESOTHO

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of a comparison of worker and management perceptions about the impact of the Better Work programme in Lesotho (BWL). The aim of the comparison is to establish whether, and to what degree, there is agreement between workers and managers on the issues on which BWL has had an impact, and whether this impact is sustainable. The impact of BWL on compliance with labour standards is measured by comparing direct feedback from workers/management at the outset of BWL (2011/2012) with their feedback two years later (2013/2014). The findings are remarkable in the level of agreement between workers and managers on the main areas of positive impact. We find that workers and managers agree strongly on improvements in some compliance areas, namely, health and safety, communication and relations. However, they vary in their perceptions about the degree of improvement in supervisor relations. Similarly, different tiers of management agree that there has been a positive impact on productivity, but vary in their perceptions about the degree of improvement. We also find that BWL has had a positive impact on workers beyond the factory, including better financial budgeting and improved health and safety practices, for example.

Abbreviations

BW	Better Work
BWL	Better Work Lesotho
CSR	Corporate social responsibility
EA	Enterprise Advisor
ILO	International Labour Organisation
OSH	Occupational Safety and Health
PAC	Project Advisory Committee
PICC	Performance Improvement Consultative Committee
SST	Supervisor skills training
WAB	Wages Advisory Board

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1. Introduction

The apparel sector in Lesotho began with foreign investment in the early 1990s, initially from Taiwan but more recently from South Africa. The sector is geared for exports, with the Taiwanese manufacturers supplying the United States market and the South African manufacturers exporting mainly to the South African market.¹ The Better Work Lesotho (BWL) programme was officially launched in December 2010 with agreement amongst stakeholders that it would establish Lesotho as an ethical sourcing destination. Currently, 16 of the 41 apparel factories in Lesotho have subscribed to the programme,² (i.e. 13 of the 19 Taiwanese and other foreign-owned manufacturers) and three of the South African-owned manufacturers (out of 22 South African-owned manufacturers).³ This means that about 61% of the workforce falls under the BWL programme. Seven major United States retailers participate in the programme via a Buyers Forum.⁴ The major South African retailers have shown no interest in the programme, with the result that there is little incentive for South African manufacturers in Lesotho to subscribe.⁵

The Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA) initially stimulated Taiwanese investment in the sector.⁶ However, with the phasing out of the MFA in 2005, and the ending of the South African Customs Union's Duty Credit Certificate scheme a few years later, foreign (non-South African) investment has been incentivized by the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which grants duty- and quota-free access to the United States market to qualifying sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries.⁷ Lesotho has been a major exporter of apparel in value terms to the US under AGOA amongst sub-Saharan African countries.⁸ The extension of AGOA through 2025 was critical for the sector and more widely for the development of Lesotho.⁹ The South African-owned manufacturers, however, target the South African market and are not affected by AGOA.

¹ For a more detailed discussion of the two value chains in Lesotho, see Morris et al. 2011.

² The 41 apparel factories employ just under 40 000 workers; this represents 80% of all formal jobs in the manufacturing sector. The importance of the sector for reducing poverty in Lesotho, where the unemployment rate is 29.4% and youth unemployment is 47%, cannot be over-emphasised.

³ C & Y Garments, Everunison, Formosa Textiles, Global Garments, Humin Jeanswear, J & S Fashion, Jonsson Manufacturing, Kopano, Lesotho Precious Garments, Maseru E-Textiles, Mauri Garments, Nien Hsing International, Springfield Manufacturers, Sun Textiles, Superknitting, Tai Yuan Garments, TZICC.

⁴ Jones Apparel, Levi Strauss & Co., Phillips-Van Heusen, SEARS, The Childrens Place, The Gap Inc., Walmart.

⁵ Better Work Lesotho 2014 Better Work Lesotho: Garment Industry 3rd Compliance Synthesis Report 6.

⁶ Pickles and Woods (1989) provide a history of Taiwanese investment in South Africa, and the movement of Taiwanese firms across the border into Lesotho.

⁷ For additional information on the implications of the MFA phase-out, see Ernst et al. (2005).

⁸ It is the second largest exporter of apparel to the US in volume terms after Kenya.

⁹ For an earlier account of the impact of AGOA in Lesotho, see Gibbon (2003) and Lall (2005).

Despite over 20 years of foreign investment in the apparel sector there has been little or no development of locally owned upstream and downstream firms, and there are no locally owned apparel firms. The senior management and skilled technical positions are, furthermore, dominated by foreigners, with Lesotho citizens taking up only human resources management, compliance officer and health and safety officer positions. There are still many foreign supervisors, usually from mainland China, who attend to the technical aspects of clothing manufacture, while the subordinate Basotho supervisors are primarily employed for communication and 'motivation'. There is a critical need for a comprehensive skills development programme that will address training needs from the shop floor up to senior management levels.¹⁰

The baseline for compliance with labour standards or rights in Lesotho is the Labour Code, 1992. It sets standards for amongst other things hours of work, overtime, annual leave, sick leave, and occupational health and safety (OSH) as well as enshrining the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining. It also establishes the Wages Administration Board (WAB), which prescribes national minimum wages for certain occupations and wage schedule for some sectors. These are published in October of each year.

The labour inspectorate of the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) enforces the Labour Code. Enforcement, however, is somewhat irregular and doesn't always achieve the desired result of leading to sustainable improvements in working conditions. This has meant that enforcement in the clothing sector was primarily through audits of the codes of the various buyers sourcing from Lesotho. These codes generally provide only for compliance with national labour legislation (i.e. the Labour Code), but some add certain ILO core labour standards and international good practice. Better Work Lesotho has effectively replaced many of the buyer audits and provides a critical supplement to enforcement by labour inspectors. Cooperation between BWL and MoLE has been formalized recently in a cooperation agreement and a zero tolerance protocol.¹¹

¹⁰ Better Work Lesotho op cit 6.

¹¹ Ibid 8.

2. An overview of the Better Work programme

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) emerged about three decades ago as a response by retailers and brand merchandisers in the global North to consumer pressure about working conditions in the value chains that supplied their products (Christensen and Rikert 1984; Shaw 1999; Strasser and Becklund 1991). CSR, however, has been implemented unevenly and with limited success, and there is an extensive body of literature documenting these shortcomings (see, for example, Elliott and Freeman, 2003; Esbenshade, 2004; Frank, 2008; Jenkins et al. 2002; Locke et al. 2007; O'Rourke, 1997, 2000, 2003; Seidman 2009; Yimprasert and Candland 2000). In 2001 the ILO launched a pilot programme in the Cambodian apparel sector called Better Factories Cambodia. The success of that programme led to the establishment of Better Work within the ILO, in partnership with the International Finance Corporation (a member of the World Bank Group), and the rollout of the programme in additional seven countries.¹²

Better Work is different from other approaches to labour standards enforcement in a number of ways. First, the over-arching focus is on engaging stakeholders in social dialogue – meaning that labour is involved from the beginning – around the issue of improving labour standards compliance without negatively impacting supplier competitiveness. Second, monitoring and evaluation activities are carried out by trained Better Work Enterprise Advisors (EAs) who are based in the relevant country and have good knowledge of local conditions. Third, Better Work obtains agreement from the major buyers that its compliance programme replaces theirs. This means that employers are not faced with numerous different auditing processes by their customers; all are consolidated into the Better Work assessment once a year. Fourth, the assessment process is much more comprehensive, going beyond the baseline requirements found in buyer codes of conduct.

At the top of Better Work's governance structure is the Global Advisory Committee, which includes international trade union federations and employers' organisations, global buyers, donor governments and global value chain experts, along with the Better Work Management Group, which is comprised of senior ILO and IFC representatives. At the national level, a Better Work programme is initiated in a country through the establishment of a tripartite Project Advisory Committee (PAC) consisting of representatives from business, labour and government. The PAC will generally meet two to three times per year to discuss issues such as progress, challenges in program implementation, and key issues relating to labour compliance, industrial

¹² Jordan, Vietnam, Lesotho, Nicaragua, Indonesia, Haiti, Bangladesh.

relations and the industry's competitiveness. The multi-stakeholder approach is continued at the factory level: every factory that subscribes to Better Work must establish a performance improvement consultative committee (PICC), which is comprised of an equal number of management and worker (union and non-union) representatives. The PICC is tasked with the development, implementation and monitoring of factory improvement plans to address areas of non-compliance identified in factory assessments.¹³ Training courses will be developed by Better Work to address the root causes of compliance problems, in particular lack of knowledge of the required standards, and management and workers' responsibilities with respect to meeting the standards.¹⁴ The figure below illustrates multi-stakeholder involvement at each level of Better Work's governance structure – globally, nationally, and at the factory level.

Figure 1 Better Work governance structure



Over the past five years there has been a growing body of research on the impact of Better Work in its programme countries. The research has been largely quantitative, examining, for example, the impact of Better Work on wages (Robertson 2011), factory survival (Brown et al. 2011), human resource innovation (Robertson et al. 2011), and whether better labour standards compliance pays off in terms of attracting reputation-conscious buyers (Oka 2012). There has also been some qualitative research examining workers perceptions of compliance in Lesotho's clothing industry (Pike 2014; Pike and Godfrey 2012). This paper builds on this body of

¹³ See Annex 1 and 2 for more detailed information on the Better Work assessment process and compliance categories.

¹⁴ See Annex 3 for more information about the PICCs and training offered by BWL.

qualitative research by comparing worker and management perceptions of the impact of Better Work in Lesotho (BWL).

3. Methods and Data

Shortly after BWL was launched in December 2010 two interrelated research projects were conducted. The first project was a partnership between Capturing the Gains, an international research programme, and Better Work. Its objective was to establish a baseline of worker attitudes with regard to working conditions and levels of compliance with labour standards. The main research methods were focus groups with clothing workers and a questionnaire survey. In total, 17 focus group discussions were conducted with 149 workers (approximately 8-9 workers per group), and 129 workers completed a questionnaire.¹⁵ The questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS and transcripts from the focus groups were analyzed using NVivo 9. In-depth interviews were also conducted with stakeholders, particularly trade unions organizing in the apparel sector.¹⁶

The second project was part of the Capturing the Gains international research programme and examined whether participation by clothing manufacturers in global value chains led to economic and social upgrading or downgrading. The main research method used for this project was in-depth interviews with senior managers at clothing factories as well as key stakeholders in the Lesotho apparel sector (at both subscribing and non-subscribing firms). Data on a number of performance indicators was also collected from some factories.

In 2013 and 2014 the above projects were followed by further research. The first project, conducted in 2013, replicated the baseline survey of workers attitudes conducted in 2011. In total, 20 focus group discussions were conducted with 141 workers, and 230 worker questionnaires were completed. In the focus groups in 2013, workers were again asked about their perceptions of working conditions and labour standards compliance, but from the perspective of what had improved since BWL and what areas were still in need of improvement. The questionnaires were analyzed using STATA, and the transcripts from the focus group

¹⁵ A note on methodology is attached to this report in Annex 4.

¹⁶ For detailed information on the findings of this research, see Pike (2012); Pike (2014); Pike and Godfrey (2014).

discussions were analyzed using NVivo 10. This research allows for comparison between worker attitudes in BWL factories between 2011 and 2013.¹⁷

A year later a project was undertaken to investigate management perceptions of the impact that the BWL programme has had on their factories. The latter project complemented the focus on workers attitudes in the two research projects mentioned above and also allows for comparison with the earlier research on economic and social upgrading and downgrading.

Unlike much of the literature on CSR and the monitoring of codes of conduct, where the voices of workers have generally not been heard, in this study hundreds of workers were involved with focus group discussions and worker surveys. The focus groups, held away from the factories, yielded deep and insightful feedback about workers' perceptions of labour standards compliance. Mirroring this in-depth research on workers' perceptions was a large number of interviews with managers at different levels, from supervisors to the managing director. Furthermore the projects allow for comparison of perceptions over time and comparison of workers' and management's perceptions.

The table below provides a brief summary of the data that was collected for each project during both the baseline and impact assessment.

¹⁷ It also allows for comparison between worker attitudes in BWL factories in Lesotho and worker attitudes in apparel factories in Kenya, where there is no Better Work programme. However, such a comparison is not the subject of this paper.

Table 1 Data collected from workers and management in 2010/11 and 2013/14

	2010/11	2013/14
Workers		
Focus groups facilitated	17	20
# Workers involved in focus groups	149	141
Questionnaires completed	129	230
Management		
Firms involved	10	7
Interviews per firm	1-2	6-8
Interviewees	Senior managers	Senior managers, middle managers, supervisors

The common framework against which worker and management perspectives are compared in this study is provided by the Better Work compliance clusters. Because these deal with core labour standards¹⁸ and basic working conditions¹⁹, they encompass areas of work in which both workers and management might perceive improvements. There are also, however, some areas that are unique to management (e.g. profitability or buyer orders) and some areas that are unique to workers (e.g. improvements in communication within workers' households because of the the impact of BWL).

The aim of the comparison is to establish whether, and to what degree, there is agreement between workers and managers on the issues on which BWL has had an impact, and whether this impact is sustainable. At one extreme, full agreement between workers and managers on positive improvements to a set of compliance issues would be a strong endorsement of the BWL programme and could indicate whether the improvement was sustainable or not. At the other extreme, full agreement between workers and managers that there have been no improvements with regard to a set of compliance issues would indicate the failure of BWL to have any impact. Disagreement about the degree of improvement could be assessed by the extent to which workers or managers perceived there to be persistent problems in a particular area. Similarly there could be disagreement on different areas of improvement. In these cases the research points to a more complex scenario that would need careful analysis to determine why BWL is working in some areas and not others, or why workers and management perceive the improvements differently.

¹⁸ These include: (1) Child Labour, (2) Forced Labour, (3) Discrimination, and (4) Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining.

¹⁹ These include: (1) Compensation, (2) Occupational Health and Safety, (3) Contracts and Human Resources, and (4) Working Time.

4. Worker and management perceptions of the impact of Better Work Lesotho

When comparing worker and management perceptions of the impact of BWL, there are several key observations that can be made:

- Key Finding 1: Occupational health and safety is an area of significant improvement on which both workers and management strongly agree.
- Key Finding 2: Communication and relations is another area of significant improvement on which both workers and management agree. However, workers place more emphasis on the role of the PICCs, and managers place more emphasis on supervisor training.
- Key Finding 3: Improvements in communication and relations appear to be leading to better productivity and quality. Different strata of management agree that there has been a positive impact on productivity but vary in their perceptions about the degree of improvement.²⁰
- Key Finding 4: BWL has a positive impact on workers beyond the factory.

Findings 1 and 2 are easily comparable, given that both workers and management were asked questions on these topics (e.g. labour standards compliance, employment relationships, etc.). Finding 3 is based only on evidence from management because workers were not directly asked about productivity. Likewise, finding 4 is based on feedback from workers only. Therefore, in the following analysis, findings 1 and 2 begin with a short summary, followed by a breakdown of evidence from workers and evidence from managers. Findings 3 and 4 deal with feedback from managers and workers, respectively.

4.1 Key Finding #1 Summary: Occupational health and safety is an area of significant improvement on which both workers and management strongly agree

Both workers and managers highlighted the major strides that have been made with regard to compliance with OSH standards. In 2011 workers reported that this was the main non-compliance issue in the workplace. Management interviews reinforced this perspective. BWL therefore focused on improving OSH compliance as a priority. This included training workers on

²⁰ It should be noted that the interviews with management in 2014 were analysed according to management strata, i.e. senior management, middle management, and supervisors. The discussion of the findings that follows the management perspectives is broken down by these strata. However, it was only with regard to the question of the impact of BWL on productivity and quality that the different management strata revealed markedly different perspectives.

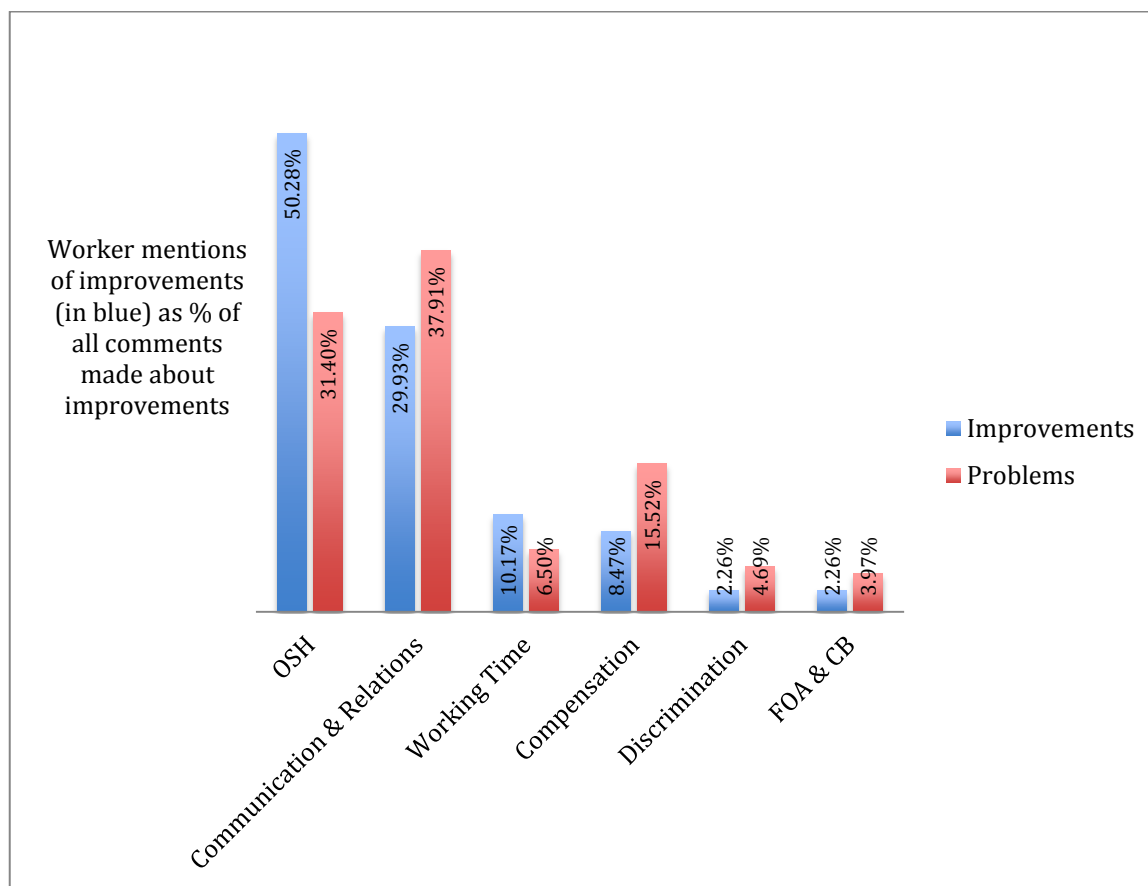
health and safety practices, fire safety, first aid,²¹ and emergency preparedness. It also included training managers on safe practices, the importance of keeping exit doors unlocked, maintaining clear aisles, having an evacuation plan, and so on. Both workers and managers mentioned the noticeable improvements that this made. Even in cases where firms had OSH committees and OSH policies in place, managers noted that these had been ineffective until BWL was implemented at the factory.

4.1.1 OSH: Evidence from workers

According to workers who participated in the 2013 impact assessment research, BWL's push in the area of health and safety has been paying off. One of the biggest improvements noted by workers in 2013, especially those who had been in BWL factories for the longest period of time, was health and safety. The figure below illustrates workers' feedback about improvements since BWL as well as persistent problems. Workers were asked, 'what has improved since Better Work?' and their feedback was recorded, sorted by compliance point, and analyzed as a percentage of all comments made about improvements. Similarly, workers were asked 'what problems still persist?' and the same method was applied to identify the compliance areas where workers perceived the greatest proportion of persistent problems. As the figure illustrates, improvements in OSH far outweigh the persistent problems, and it is the clear winner in terms of major improvements since BWL. The other compliance items are discussed in more detail in later sections, but are worth including here to provide an overall snapshot of improvements in all compliance areas, relative to one another. This especially brings out the significant improvements in OSH relative to the other compliance items.

²¹ BWL does not conduct first aid training, but when it raised lack of training in first aid as a non-compliance issue, factories took action and got workers trained through the Red Cross or other organisations.

Figure 2 Worker perceptions of improvements vs. persistent problems since BWL



In 2011 and 2013, workers were asked whether they received PPE, and if they receive it on a regular basis or only because the buyers are visiting. 72% of workers in 2013 reported that they now receive PPE, compared with 48% in 2011. Only 42% of those workers report receiving PPE for buyer visits only, compared to 61% in 2011.

One worker reflected on the issue of PPE and other health and safety issues:

“We are very proud of BW. The problem we used to have is that it was a struggle for us to get PPE. The fire extinguishers were expired all the time. First aid box was always open, not locked, and empty. There was no toilet paper in the toilets, nor soap. Since BW, all [these things]...are in order now.”

Another worker linked the issue of PPE to the appointment and training of safety officers;

“Before BW we did not have PPE because we didn’t have safety officers. Since BW, safety officers were trained. When I get home, I feel a lot better because I don’t inhale toxic chemicals and dust anymore.”

Workers were especially positive in their feedback about the role of the PICCs in improving their health and safety conditions. Through the PICC, they are able to raise their specific health and safety concerns, which are heard by union and non-union worker representatives, manager representatives, as well as an Enterprise Advisor from BWL. Workers felt that this has been a much more effective method for achieving improvements in health and safety. They voice their issues to the PICC, management is informed of the required changes, and Better Work is there to follow-up on the improvements:

“Since BW there are many changes because we have the PICC committee. It is the one that is in charge of health and safety. They sometimes act as mediators to try and resolve the issues of workers.”

Another worker stated:

“Since the BW program, every little issue, we manage to solve it. That is why I don’t really have many problems anymore... In PICC meetings, when we request a meeting with the manager, we certainly get an appointment.”

It may indeed be that, through the mechanism of the PICC, issues are more clearly identified and addressed. It may also be, however, that managers are simply making these improvements because they know that Better Work is monitoring them more frequently than a buyer. Whether or not this solves the problem in a sustainable way is not entirely clear. But it is a major improvement upon what was happening before, when workers were receiving minimal if no protection at all and had no voice.

Many workers believe that managers are making these improvements because BWL has told them to. Some see a direct link between voicing a concern in the PICC (which they may do themselves), having BWL require managers to make a change (a process they do not see, and which may or may not actually happen), and having that change lead to improvements in their working conditions. Fire extinguishers were an issue that came up frequently:

“Before BW the fire extinguishers were packed in a very small space and there would be packing boxes next to it. We had a meeting discussing the fire extinguisher issue. The Chinese managers were the ones who [found it] difficult to understand that they should leave space for the fire extinguishers – until BW trained them. Now

we are able to agree with each other that we should leave enough space for the fire extinguishers.”

Another worker cited another example:

“There was a forklift driver without a license. BW suggested that the driver should get a license or he must stop operating the forklift. The company took the responsibility to make sure that driver gets the license for the forklift.”

In addition to the PICCs, there has also been more OSH training for both workers and managers. This has made them more aware of things they may need to do themselves – like how to operate fire extinguishers, how to care for someone who is bleeding or has been exposed to chemicals, and how to respond if there is a fire. Training has also made them more aware of how the factory should be arranged in order to be safe – for example, all doors need to be unlocked, routes need to be properly marked on the floor in case they need to evacuate, first aid boxes should be full, fire extinguishers not expired, and chemicals labelled in Sesotho.

“Before BW all emergency doors were locked and I was afraid if there could be any sort of emergency we would not know which door to use. Since BW, we are so free. Before we start the day, they make sure that all the eye guards on the machines are all open. They make sure that the factory is clean. They look after sick people. BW has really done a miracle for us.”

Workers were asked whether they had an OSH policy in their workplaces, and whether or not they had received any OSH training. 71% of workers in 2013 reported having an OSH policy, compared to only 39% in 2011. Furthermore, the proportion of workers receiving OSH training has doubled from 13% to 26% (although this relatively low proportion might explain why workers see the PICCs at the main vehicles for change).

In addition to these improvements at work, many workers also spoke about how the knowledge that they had acquired about health and safety at work had given them the skills to make a positive impact in their communities and homes. This was generally attributed to the interventions of BWL. This will be discussed in more detail under Key Finding 4 below (BWL has a positive impact on workers beyond the factory).

Despite a range of significant improvements in health and safety, workers report that there are still many problems that persist in this area. Many of their complaints sound similar to the feedback that workers gave during the baseline research. Some of these complaints are from workers employed at factories that have been with Better Work for two to three years (three

years is the maximum participation period), so while there is some indication that tenure with BW is positively linked to improvements (i.e. the longer a factory participates in BW the more positive the feedback from workers about conditions), there is some variation between factories. For instance, if two firms participate in BW for the same period of time, it is not necessarily the case that they will roll out changes (i.e. make improvements) at the same pace. Alternatively, the variation may be at the department level or even between individual workers. Workers in some sections may be more likely to receive PPE first or be invited to training sessions, whereas other workers are not.

Based on the workers feedback, it seems that some factories among the long-term BW participants are underperforming. Workers from those factories reported basic health and safety problems that one would have expected to have been addressed in the first few months of BW participation:

“The factory is very dirty. It’s like we work in a storage room. There are boxes everywhere, the passages are narrow, and tables are all over the factory. If there could be an accident in the factory, I won’t be able to even pass other machines.”

Another worker at one of these factories stated:

“We once had an emergency. There was part of the factory burning and we had to run to the emergency doors. All the emergency doors were locked. We were using one door and we were stepping on each other and more people got hurt and it was terrible... We’ve been trained for emergency preparedness but when the accident happened, it’s the time when they did not open the doors.”

Another worker recognised explicitly that her factory was a laggard:

“[My factory] also is still way behind. We are not given nose bags all the time, only when the buyers come. In winter we don’t have heaters. The air conditioning does not work so during summer it’s too hot. The doors are always locked.”

In addition to persistent OSH problems, workers in the 2013 research mentioned issues related to toilet usage and hygiene more often than workers did in the baseline research. In particular, many workers said they are given very little toilet paper, if any at all, and that there is no soap in the bathrooms. The toilets are apparently also frequently out of order or there is no water. Among other hygiene issues, this means that it takes longer for the cistern to refill and to flush, making them late to return to their work. Some workers also reported that they are told to

refrain from using the toilet or that the toilets were locked to limit how often workers used them.

Many workers also complained about not having lockers for their food, or having lockers that are outside where their food can spoil in the sun. This was an issue raised in both the baseline and impact assessment research, so it is not clear what efforts are being made to improve this problem.

“We don’t have canteens where we put our food. We just put them outside in the sun or in the dust or in the rain. Sometimes we would eat our food spoiled, especially during summer, because of too much heat.”

4.1.2 OSH: Evidence from management

Almost all managers believed that BWL had resulted in a big improvement in compliance with OSH standards. In part this improvement is because there appears to have been almost no knowledge or understanding across all levels of management about the standards as well as the rights and obligations of workers. Compliance has therefore improved because BWL has simply educated workers, supervisors and managers about what they should be complying with.

Managers’ perceptions, however, pointed to the need to educate everyone in the factory about standards, indicating that managers are not the only ones responsible for improving compliance but that workers also must play a role. They felt that, even if they tried to improve compliance, they could be fighting an uphill battle unless workers understand the need for compliance and what the standards are. For example, management could make an improvement by providing face masks, but this does not help if workers do not wear the masks. According to some managers, workers will resist doing certain things because they see this as a management instruction to do something that they do not want to do (e.g. because the masks can become uncomfortable). It is only when they understand the reason for the instruction, and that it is about compliance rather than a management whim, that workers acquiesce. This lack of knowledge and concern with compliance on the part of both workers and managers was described as follows by a senior manager:

“BWL has had a big impact on OSH. We did not comply before. Workers threw away face masks and we did not care because we did not see it as a problem. We now realise that we must be responsible even if it means disciplining workers to comply.

We had no fire drills. Now workers and everybody listen to what the OSH committee says because if they don't they will be disciplined."

A Chinese factory manager, stated that before she attended BWL training she "did not understand what was required", but that now she understands so she "can tell them to put face masks on" and she "knows about fire exits". Another manager echoed her when he listed that BWL had taught them: "about correct way to discipline, about working hours, control of workers and how to handle problems with workers." Another manager said: "Better Work is like a school that comes here and deals with issues we are weak at. We have learnt from them... they are like a teacher for us."

The mechanism to impart this basic understanding has mainly been the training courses that BWL has offered but it is also evident that the PICCs play a role (and training of the members of the PICCs) as well as the visits by the EAs and the advice they give to managers and workers. A couple of managers also identified the compliance assessments as useful for the firm because they pointed out issues of which management had not been aware. BWL were, as one manager put it, "a new set of eyes in the factory" that saw things managers were not seeing.

Improving compliance is however more than just education. It is also dependant on better communication, i.e. managers need to be asking questions of subordinates and there needs to be a channel through which subordinates can bring non-compliance issues to the attention of management. It might also be necessary to create new management positions that focus on compliance, or compliance needs to be made a core part of the management strategy at the firm. Only a couple of firms, however, have gone as far as to appoint managers who are dedicated to compliance or to build compliance into management strategy. At one firm a senior manager stated that they had decided that all decisions and actions with regard to production and operations that are designed to improve competitiveness are contingent on a baseline of compliance. If any decision or action will breach the compliance baseline it would be rejected. Compliance is therefore built into the management strategy of the firm. The same firm had recruited a compliance manager and he had recruited four assistants. Their particular focus was OSH compliance. The assistants were tasked with inspecting different areas of the factory every day to ensure compliance was being maintained. The firm appeared to have made significant improvements with regard to compliance.

Middle managers and supervisors tended to focus on much more specific aspects of compliance on which BWL had impacted such as provision of protective clothing, rules regarding chemicals, designated areas for smoking, keeping passages unobstructed, risk assessment, signage regarding fire extinguishers and emergency exits, and first aid training. A number of managers repeated the point made by senior managers that workers were critical for improving compliance. As one manager noted:

“When I started at the firm we had to start the OSH system from scratch but Better Work helped me a lot. Everybody at the factory now knows about OSH. Workers did not want to use face masks. But there has been a big improvement since the Better Work training. But now they don’t want to use needle guards and eye guards. So it is a constant battle to get them to comply.”

A manager at another firm echoed this view when she said: “Before OSH was a management function but now everybody knows what is required for OSH and will complain if they pick up non-compliance...”

The role of PICCs was highlighted by a number of managers. At one factory the OSH committee, established in terms of the Labour Code, had been merged with the PICC committee in order for OSH issues to be dealt with more effectively. At another factory a manager stated that they had an OSH committee but it had been completely ineffective until BWL did OSH training and established the PICC. Thereafter the OSH committee began to function and improvements were made in OSH compliance. At a third factory there had been a deliberate decision to have a number of members who sat on both the PICC and on the OSH committee, so that there was communication and coordination between the two.

A human resources manager gave an explanation of how the proximity of BWL to the factory had been important for compliance:

“[Better Work] has had an impact on compliance because they are different from other auditors. Other auditors come in, do a quick audit and go. But Better Work try to understand the level of understanding at the factory and engage with management about it. Then they direct training based on the audit results so that it focuses on legal requirements. So it shows to the company the impact of doing things wrong, i.e. non-compliance. And they have locals doing the audits, which bridge some of the barriers of culture and language. But the important thing is that Better Work Lesotho is local, they are just down the road so can come back for

follow-ups. So we can sit down with them and discuss the weak areas at the factory, how to address them, but also raise with them some of the challenges we have in addressing them.”

4.2 Key Finding #2 Summary: Communication and Relations is another area of significant improvement on which both workers and management agree, although to differing degrees

The baseline research that was conducted in 2011 found that supervisors had a critical impact on compliance. Foreign supervisors had a management style that led to conflict with workers, whereas the lack of skills and abuse of power by local supervisors led to mistreatment of workers and underpinned instances of non-compliance in a wide range of areas, including OSH. This was one of the reasons why BWL subsequently focused attention on supervisors and their relations with workers, namely through Supervisory Skills Training (SST).

Furthermore, with the establishment of PICCs workers report that they now have a much more accessible avenue for raising and resolving workplace issues – whether regarding supervisor relations, OSH, or otherwise. By opening up this communication channel, workers are speaking more with their supervisors, are able to resolve their problems, and are feeling better about their work. This has even affected their home lives, because they are finding work less stressful, and they communicate better with family members, which has improved relationships.

Workers highlighted the persistence of problems with regard to supervisor relations to a greater extent than managers. Although workers perceived improvements in communication with supervisors – largely due to the PICCs – they still experience problems with regard to favouritism, poorly trained supervisors, and verbal abuse. In other words they are subject to the side effects of more systemic issues. Managers identified the persistence of some problems but this was outweighed for them by improvements, particularly as a result of BWL supervisor training.

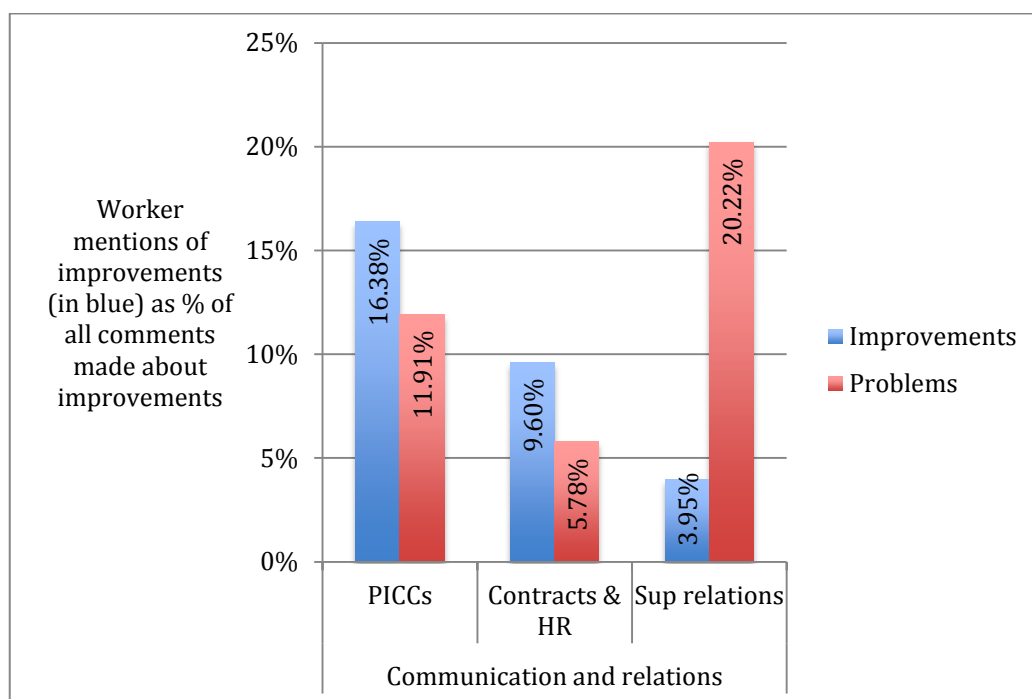
Systemic barriers to improvement related in part to the absence of formal selection/promotion procedures for supervisors at factories. Workers believed that supervisors were selected simply on their ability to be hard on workers, without any consideration of the skills they might possess. Some managers also bemoaned the arbitrary way in which supervisors were selected. The second barrier is that many of the foreign supervisors are appointed on three-year contracts. With each batch of new recruits, the problems between supervisors and workers start again – for example, language barriers, cultural differences, misunderstandings – and training must be repeated. Third, misconduct by foreign supervisors is not dealt with through the formal

disciplinary process. Instead, factory managers deal with such instances informally and the outcome is never known. It is therefore hardly surprising that the abuse of workers has continued for so long.

4.2.1 Evidence from workers

The category “communication and relations” encapsulates all points related to human interactions in the workplace – including work relationships and grievance processes. In this case, the relationships generally refer to relationships between workers and supervisors, and sometimes between workers and managers. Grievance processes generally refer to the ways in which workers are free to file and resolve complaints. Before the BWL programme was implemented, this was done through the supervisors or the HR managers. After BWL was launched, even though workers can still approach their supervisors or HR managers with their issues, it appears that they more commonly take their concerns to the PICC. Though the PICC cannot deal with complaints formally, workers report that they are easily able to voice and resolve their workplaces issues through the PICC. In Figure 2, it is evident that there has been a major improvement in the area of communication and relations overall. However, upon closer inspection, one sees that it is only in some of the sub-areas of communication and relations that major improvements have been made. For example, as the figure below illustrates, workers’ feedback about improvements in this area was dominated by heavy praise for the PICCs. On the other hand, the persistent problems with supervisor relations still outweigh any improvements that were mentioned by workers. The following figure breaks down the sub-categories of “communication and relations” to illustrate that the major improvement relates to the function/outcomes of the PICCs (e.g. voicing and resolving workplace issues) and that the major ongoing problems are with supervisor relations. The figure further illustrates that persistent problems far outweigh improvements in the area of supervisor relations.

Figure 3 A closer look at communication and relations



The issue of supervisor relations was a major concern raised by workers in the baseline research. BWL took the issue seriously and devoted time and resources to training supervisors – both foreign and local – on people skills. For example, supervisors were trained on how to deal with workers if they make mistakes, if they need to speed up, if they have personal issues they need to attend to, etc. Some workers said that it was easier to approach their supervisors now:

“Since BW, we work freely now. We are free to talk to the supervisors.”

Another worker spoke specifically about how mistakes were now dealt with:

“Before BW, sometimes I would have made a mistake. Before, four or five supervisors would come and discipline you for a small tiny mistake that you made. Now you can be able to reason with one supervisor and she can hear you and the issue ends there.”

However, the majority did not notice significant improvement, and in fact complained that it is an ongoing issue.

“As a factory worker I am happy because of Better Work Lesotho. It has changed our lives and the Basotho supervisors. What’s left are the Chinese supervisors. They are still rude. The factory manager should take everything seriously.”

Although the BWL training course for supervisors has had a positive impact it seems that the PICCs have been a greater influence on supervisors' treatment of workers. The PICCs provide a space in which problems can be aired and workers and supervisors are held accountable to one another with regard to the solution of the problems. Additionally, it is a continuous process and its effect is disseminated out to the rest of the factory. Training, on the other hand, may happen only once a year and could include only a few of the supervisors in a factory. But both the PICCs and continuous SST training are needed and complement one another.

Another issue that came up in the baseline research was that supervisors would discriminate against workers, sometimes on the basis of their race, gender, or HIV/AIDS status, and sometimes in the form of sexual harassment. In 2013, there was generally positive feedback in these areas, though of course some issues remained more prominent for some than others. Some workers felt that they were still not being treated as human beings, while others saw modest improvement:

“[Before Better Work] there was harassment in the factory. Chinese supervisors and managers were always insulting the Basotho, calling us dogs. And nobody cared to discipline the Chinese when they insult the Basotho. Now, since Better Work, it is not over but it is better than before.”

Being able to approach one's manager, or being able to voice a concern, was an important issue for workers. This came through in the workplace problems they raised, but it also came through in the discussions they had around improvements since Better Work. Several workers alluded to improved communication and relations with their managers, which not only helped to resolve their issues but also appeared to make their work more fulfilling. Though one might not truly be able to 'enjoy' factory work, they seemed to have more peace of mind knowing they could take an issue to their manager and discuss it.

“The problem we used to have was that the Chinese did not treat factory workers like people. They would fire people right away without any good reason. The Chinese managers were trained by Better Work in communication skills. So far things are a lot better because we are now able to sit down and discuss all the issues. If an employee is found guilty of something, before they could fire the employee, they take that employee to a disciplinary hearing, discuss the issue. Then if the employee needs to be fired, he can be fired, or he can go back to work.”

This feedback from workers emphasizes improvements in processes for dealing with disputes. It is evident from the interviews with workers that new channels of communication have been opened between workers and managers, and that workers feel they are being treated more fairly when it comes to voicing and resolving workplace issues.

Regarding the issue that workers raised about sexual harassment from supervisors, workers in one focus group said that, through BWL, they were able to raise this issue, and BWL followed up by speaking to the employer about the problem. Much to their satisfaction, and perhaps surprise, that supervisor was dismissed immediately from the factory. This appeared to have a strong impact on workers, instilling in them a sense of confidence that BWL indeed works.

Several workers mentioned that their employers listen to BWL, and when BWL says to do something, they are sure to do it. As seen in other comments made by workers about improvements since BWL, there is a general sense of relief in the fact that they can express a concern and have it addressed. The sense from the baseline research was that workers had grown to believe no one was listening to them. In fact, comparing research done in the 1990s (Baylies and Wright, 1993) with the baseline research in 2011 (Pike 2014; Pike and Godfrey, 2012), it is difficult to tell the stories apart. Many of the problems they raised back then dominated the discussions we had in 2011. In general there seemed to be very little hope that their concerns would be met with any sort of remedy. By 2013, however, though many problems persist, workers were growing increasingly hopeful that change is possible – primarily through the mechanism of the PICCs, where they can see an issue from inception through resolution. To reiterate, it is not necessarily that they are resolving the most egregious violations, but that they are being heard, and that changes are taking place. The moral of the story, persistent in many of the findings, is that voice matters.

Having a forum where they are listened to also helped to resolve other workplace issues, for example with regard to the treatment of pregnant women and workers with HIV/AIDS:

“Better Work has improved the dynamics between men and women. Before we didn’t care about pregnant women at all. But BW when it started it had a workshop on pregnant women. They didn’t select only women but men also were part of the workshop on how they can handle a pregnant woman at work.”

“Things have changed now since BW...People with chronic diseases, when they need to go take their medication, they are free to go to the office and take it.”

Workers also spoke about being free, since Better Work, to talk to their HR and factory managers.

“BW has helped me open communication channels between me, my supervisors, and my managers. Because when I have a problem, I’m free to go to the office and discuss them.”

“The good thing about PICC is that employees are free to lodge their complaints... [They] would be making sure that everything is fine in the factory. And normally we would be taking the complaints to management. Then I will take back the answers... Management is willing to work hand in hand with PICC.”

Workers were also asked whether or not their contracts had been explained to them, which is especially important given that contracts are often not in Sesotho although most workers speak only Sesotho. In 2011, despite the fact that 89% had signed contracts, only 56% of these contracts were in Sesotho, and only 48% had actually been explained to the worker. In 2013, there were improvements across the board. In addition to there being more workers who signed contracts (98%), a greater proportion of these contracts were in Sesotho (68%) *and* were also explained to workers (60%).

Though there have been improvements in this area, there is a caveat, namely that some workers may perceive the PICC to be a substitute for a functioning grievance procedure. Even though the PICC is not the forum for formally filing grievances, workers appreciate the PICC as a forum where they can raise any workplace issues.

“The PICC committee is very important to the factory. I’ve realized that since we had that committee, when we talk about our issues, they are dealt with. Before everything was handled by a [HR manager] and I think he didn’t care much or he didn’t manage to handle all the problems.”

In addition to the above caveat, there are several problems that do indeed persist in the area of contracts and human resources. Those issues echo those that were raised in the baseline research. First, some HR managers are reportedly still rude and harsh with workers, and they are perceived to still take the supervisor’s side in disputes with workers. Since they are supposed to serve as a place where workers can address their grievances, many workers still feel like they are stuck.

In terms of next steps, one option is simply to keep HR more informed of what is happening in the PICCs, which will be aided by ensuring that the senior HR manager is always on the PICC. Another option is to provide more training to HR managers regarding how they should engage with the workers to resolve disputes. The latter has been ongoing since the first year of Better Work Lesotho. This has evidently helped, as workers report better communication with their HR managers. But in other places it has not yet had the intended impact. A combination of both strategies – allowing the PICCs to serve as the main in-house grievance procedure, as well as training HR managers – may be an effective option. As part of allowing the PICCs to serve as an important grievance function, they should continue to be developed in each of the factories. Workers have found the PICCs to be valuable, and particularly so in this area of raising and resolving workplace issues.

4.2.2 Evidence from management

BWL was perceived by many managers to have had a very positive impact on communication and/or relations, in particular relations between supervisors and workers, rather than relations within management or between supervisors.

The close inter-relationship between communication and relations is captured by the following quote from a senior Taiwanese manager:²²

“The most significant improvement from BWL is communication with workers through all levels of management. We learnt that we cannot be aggressive with them. And workers have also learnt to communicate better with management. This has been achieved by shortening the chain of communication from senior managers to workers and by improving the communication of Chinese supervisors with workers.”

Another manager at the same firm stated that BWL “has changed the mind-set of floor managers [i.e. supervisors], with the result that there has been a reduction of verbal and physical abuse.” A manager at another firm stated that “BW has improved communication” and went on to explain that the communication chain “is from Taiwanese production manager to Chinese senior supervisor, to local Basotho supervisor to Basotho worker, which used to create a lot of problems but it has improved.”

²² Note that this quote and all the quotes that follow are not verbatim quotes but based on a written record of the interview.

Whereas workers saw the PICCs as having had the biggest impact on improving the relationship with supervisors, managers highlighted BWL training as the major factor impacting on relations between supervisors and workers. Managers noted the improvement in how supervisors treated workers after attending BWL training courses, which had led to an improvement in relations between supervisors and workers. The PICCs had however also played a role in this improvement. According to one manager: “Before BWL the communication between supervisors and workers was not good. The PICC has helped in this regard because workers can take problems there and we also use the PICC to communicate things to workers.”

An issue that came up in a number of senior manager interviews was the attitudes of worker to managers. One complained that “BWL has not dealt with workers’ behaviour problems – stealing and keeping work stations clean.” The Basotho production manager at another factory elaborated on this issue as well as showing how poor communication complicated the relationship between workers and all managers:

“BWL has been very important in terms of relations between workers and managers because before there was no communication. So workers just wanted to do things how they wanted to and did not want to listen to managers. And they don’t respect black managers. Relations are now much better and [there is] better communication. Workers will now approach managers whereas before they were too scared.”

What the above quote suggests is that in the absence of communication from senior managers workers did not respect the authority of supervisors, particularly if they were Basotho. This was not just about communication from management to workers: while workers did not want to take instructions from supervisors, they were also too scared to talk to supervisors and managers about problems. Improved communication seems to have broken down these barriers.

Although the above manager claims there was “no communication” before, it is more likely that he was referring to no communication from senior management. This points to the failure of senior managers to make workers understand more about the firm’s strategy and the challenges it was facing. Without this knowledge workers clearly see no need to cooperate with supervisors if the only communication they are getting is one instruction after another and abuse when they make a mistake. A manager at another firm highlighted this issue when he stated that: “BWL has had a positive impact. Workers and managers now have a common cause. We are moving

forward together in the right direction.” Another manager stated more cautiously that “Better Work is taking us in the right direction but it is a process and will take time.”

Middle managers articulated very similar perceptions as senior managers. However, they tended to highlight the role of the PICCs in improving communication and relations, probably because many were members of the PICCs. However, middle managers also provided a perspective on the impact of BWL on senior managers:

“Top management definitely take Better Work seriously. They now listen when you discuss problems with them. Friction between supervisors and workers has reduced a lot but not entirely eliminated. But the main problem is with the new Chinese supervisors who take time to acclimatise.”

He elaborated on this point as follows:

“Top management have now got understanding. Before you could not even get a senior manager to recognise the problem, that the way supervisors treated workers was a problem. They would side with the supervisor and would say “but that is the way things are done”. They are using mainland Chinese as supervisors. They are on three-year contracts so there is constant turnover. So every new batch starts with the same problems and attitudes. Some of the BWL training for supervisors needs to be built into the orientation programme for new supervisors.”

Middle managers echoed the perception of some senior managers that the behaviour of supervisors had improved but still remained a problem for various reasons:

“Chinese supers are not disciplined or dismissed. They are dealt with in a different process... Taiwanese rule the company but now they are communicating more and are listening more. Relations have improved but not all supervisors are on board – there needs to be more training.”

The same manager highlighted the role of the PICC in improving two-way communication between managers and workers:

“The PICC is very effective. It brings a balance between management and workers. Decisions now take into account the concerns of workers and we end up making win-win decisions. The factory manager will seldom attend PICC but he ensures that decisions are implemented... There is also a report back system so that decisions are

communicated to all workers. We will have our own PICC meetings now – we have learnt from Better Work how to run them...”

Furthermore, workers at the firm now knew that they could take issues to the PICC and they would be dealt with. More importantly, they had learnt who the responsible managers were for different types of issues so they knew with whom to take up issues.

There were no major differences in the perceptions of supervisors to those of managers on the issue of communication and relations. They also believed much had changed for the better but this was more work to be done. A local supervisor noted that “Chinese supervisors have changed how they treat workers; they used to shout but not anymore. Basotho supervisors have also changed but some not. This is because of Better Work training.” While this perspective pointed to the behaviour of Basotho supervisors as still being a problem, another supervisor at the same factory took the opposite view:

“Better Work needs to train Chinese managers, because not all cooperate with Better Work. Chinese supervisors have improved but there is a lot of friction with Basotho supervisors. Chinese supervisors see themselves as superior to local supervisors. More training is needed for Chinese supervisors... They need training on what the labour laws are so that they know what they are supposed to be complying with.”

Another worker suggested that both Chinese and Basotho supervisors were equally to blame, but mainly because Basotho supervisors had copied the behaviour of Chinese supervisors:

“Chinese supervisors have changed character. Before they used bad language and harassed workers. They did not treat Basotho supervisors like human beings. But this has changed. Before Better Work we [the local supervisors] also did not know how to treat workers, we copied the Chinese way. But now we know how to treat them.”

A Basotho supervisor at another factory painted a more optimistic picture: “Before we were interpreters for the Chinese supervisors but now we share the problem and how we deal with it. Before they took very big power for themselves... see this sharing with the other supervisors also.” Another local supervisor echoed this perception:

“Before if there was a problem we [the local supervisors] did not know who to go to with it and would end up just sitting with it, but now we know where to go and how to approach the Chinese supervisors. The Chinese supervisor now treats her much

better. So she is no longer scared to take a problem to the Chinese senior supervisor.”

A number of Basotho supervisors indicated that they were able to use the PICCs for dealing with workers who refused to obey legitimate instructions. This generally seemed to be because the workers did not respect the local supervisors or they did not believe that the supervisor was authorised to give them the instruction. The supervisors would get a worker representative on the PICC to meet with themselves and the worker in the lunch period to discuss the issue in dispute. This would generally involve the PICC member explaining to the worker that the supervisor was entitled to give the worker the instruction in question. One of the supervisors stated that she had used this method to explain to a stubborn worker the importance of the production target. Another supervisor noted: “Workers know that I am their supervisor and they need me and I need them to do the job. So there is better communication and trust.”

Although management perceptions indicate that BWL has had a significant impact on supervisor and worker relations it is apparent that a lot more work needs to be done. Furthermore, this work will be on-going because of the turnover of supervisors from mainland China and the need to ‘educate’ each new batch of expatriate supervisors. This situation will continue until local supervisors acquire the technical skills to take over the full range of supervisory functions. Skills training for local supervisors is therefore critical for solving this problem in the medium- to long-term. It is notable that the BWL supervisory skills course, one of the few courses that deal directly with skills, was very well received by all the interviewees that had participated in it. However, the course deals with ‘management’ skills rather than technical skills so will not give local supervisors all the knowledge they need to take over from expatriate supervisors.

4.3 Key Finding #3 Summary: Improvements in communication and relations appear to be leading to better productivity and quality

The following describes how different strata of management perceived improvements in productivity and quality differently. Most senior managers did not believe that BWL had made a positive impact on productivity and quality, although a few assumed there had been some improvement but without have any evidence. On the other hand, they were not able to state clearly the nature of the improvement, whereas middle (non-production) managers and, in particular, supervisors, were emphatic that they had seen improvements.

A senior manager at one firm stated that the BWL compliance audits had a positive impact on productivity and quality because they identified problems that could then be dealt with. However, he noted that addressing the problem areas usually required changes that have a negative impact on output, albeit just for a short period. Similarly, while BWL training and the PICC meetings were beneficial, they also meant lost production time for those people attending. The positive impacts were therefore offset by negative impacts. But these were the only instances where managers suggested there might have been positive impacts. All the other senior managers did not think that there had been any impact, and some did not believe this should be an outcome of the BWL programme, i.e. they had no expectation that the BWL programme would lead to such improvements. A couple of senior managers suggested that workers felt more secure and satisfied in their work because of BWL, and it was likely that this has impacted positively on productivity and quality. But, as mentioned above, they did not have concrete evidence of the positive impact and were simply drawing a logical inference from the perceived impact on job satisfaction.

The majority of middle managers who were interviewed believed that BWL had impacted positively on productivity and quality. One human resources manager linked the positive impact to the improvement to relations between managers and workers due to the BWL programme. Improved relations meant fewer problems, such as “screaming fights” on the production floor, for the human resources department to deal with, so they could give their attention to other things such as training, productivity and quality. He had therefore been able to move from a ‘fire-fighting’ role to a much more strategic human resource management mode. He cited the example of his initiative to train two assistants to read and analyse the production data written up on the performance boards at the end of the sewing lines. The idea was that they would monitor the data across the lines with a view to picking up problems more quickly than supervisors and even begin to anticipate problems so that they could be nipped in the bud before they affected production. At first the supervisors were suspicious that the two assistants were there to monitor them but they were persuaded that the task of the two assistants was to solve problems rather than find fault. Furthermore, the assistants would first discuss their findings with the supervisors, which made them feel part of the process to come up with solutions to problems. These steps appear to have won over the supervisors.

There was as yet no concrete evidence as to whether the initiative had impacted positively on productivity or quality. However, the point being made by the human resources manager was that the improved relations in the workplace had released human resources management from

spending most of their time dealing with problems, so that they could start developing proactive initiatives.

The supervisory stratum believed much more strongly that subscribing to the BWL programme had led to improved productivity and/or quality. Eleven supervisors believed this to be the case, with some stating very emphatically that BWL had resulted in improvements to productivity and or quality, as against three supervisors that had not seen any impact. The supervisors generally did not elaborate as to why or how BWL had led to better productivity and/or quality, but many were very firm in the view that there had been a positive impact.

The most obvious explanation for this is that senior managers are remote from the production floor and have therefore not seen the impact of BWL on productivity and quality. This is less so the case with middle managers, while supervisors are best placed to put together the interventions done by BWL and the performance of workers on the production floor. Another reading could be that senior managers believe that productivity and quality are their responsibility and are therefore reluctant to give credit for improvements to an outside agency such as BWL, especially since productivity and quality is not the main focus of BWL.

When one reflects back on the 2011 data it is interesting to note that the 'production at all costs' management approach was much more muted in 2014. Furthermore, whereas this approach negatively affected relations between supervisors and workers in 2011, improvements in these relations by 2014 as a result of BWL could be linked to better performance. This is arguably why supervisors believed most strongly that productivity and quality were improving, even if they did not necessarily always state it was because of improved relations. By the same token, middle managers were probably far more aware of the benefits of improved relations for production than senior managers.

4.4 Key Finding #4 Summary: Improvements at work are having a positive impact on workers' home lives

Conventional CSR codes of conduct and audits focus just on the workplace. However, in 2013 we asked workers questions about whether the BWL programme had had any impact on their lives at home and in their communities. A number of workers made comments to the effect that BWL had had a variety of positive impacts. As one man said:

“Even at home, I think Better Work has really improved our lives. We now share responsibilities. Even our community is more clean because we apply whatever we

learn from the BW trainings. For example, as we both are working, if I arrive home early, I cook, I clean the house. She finds everything in a good space. I do laundry also. We help each other. [Before BW] I did it seldomly. Now I do it often.”

There was, however, less feedback about men helping more with chores at home, and more feedback about improved communication between men and women when addressing issues at home. These issues ranged from discussing how to address problems in their own relationship, to things like budgeting and planning for the family.

“We were trained on communication skills. For example in a family, if there’s something that you see is wrong, you should not bottle it inside. You must say it and then solve it. It has helped me a lot.”

Improved communication and basic budgeting skills were particularly important with regard to household finances:

“I’ve learned how to draw my budget. We’ve learned to save money. We no longer go to backstreet funeral schemes. We go to real insurance companies now. We were taught to make some investments.”

It was clear from workers’ feedback that learning to budget not only helped their finances but was also improving their relationships. Unlike the feedback in 2011, when workers reported friction at home related to budgeting, many of them referred to training on financial literacy they had received on how to budget, and told stories about how they were applying those skills at home. Because they are communicating more about the money they make and how to budget, there is more transparency and hence less distrust about how that money is being spent. This is not to say that this problem has been eliminated, but workers report that this is one of the more significant improvements at home since Better Work.

“BW has taught us to be open with each other, man and wife. Now, they are able to put down their salary and discuss a way forward to build their family. Whereas in the olden days, a man would just give his wife R50 and the wife would not even care to ask where’s the rest of the money.”

Beyond improved communication between husbands and wives, workers reported that there is also improved communication between family members, such as between parents and children or between siblings. Many workers said that they are now less stressed than they were before BW, either because their employers are not shouting at them, or they are being given notice about overtime. This made them feel better about going to work and also put them in a better

frame of mind when they returned home. They were therefore more likely to be more communicative and pleasant with their family members.

“If my employer has shouted at me at work, I was always taking my frustrations out on my children. I would shout at them and wouldn’t want to hear anything from them. Now, since BW, I am open. We always joke around with my kids and I’m able to help with their assignments...because I went for BW trainings and there were some things I was taught in that training.”

The impact of BWL was not restricted to the home or to communication and finances. First aid and health and safety skills had benefits, via workers, for the household and wider community.

“I was trained on first aid, so when I’m at home I am able to apply that. Even when I meet people on the street who have problems, I’m able to apply the skill.”

“Since BW trainings that I attended, I now know about nutrition, how I can look after sick people, the foods that I can give them in order for them to have strength.”

“At home, we have an understanding about the fire, different types of fires. If it’s a fire caused by electricity, what kind of fire extinguishers we can use, and so on.”

5. Concluding analysis and a recommendation

Both workers and managers perceived BWL to generally have had a very positive impact on a range of compliance issues, with both workers and managers emphasising that there had been a strong positive impact on compliance with OSH standards and on communication and relations. This is not surprising because BWL has over the last couple of years targeted these issues for special attention. This, however, should not detract from the very strong endorsement of the BWL programme. The question is whether the positive impact has created the momentum to sustain compliance improvement. In this concluding section we provide an overview of the findings with regard to compliance with OSH standards and communication and relations with a view to answering this question.

5.1 Occupational health and safety

Workers in 2011 reported that compliance with OSH standards had become something of a game played with CSR auditors. By 2013/14, both workers and managers agreed there had been

significant improvement in OSH compliance. The most obvious reason for this is that BWL targeted this issue for special attention. However, that on its own would not necessarily produce such a result. What is apparent with regard to OSH compliance is that the different components of BWL (i.e. assessments, the PICCs and training) have effectively combined and complemented one another. Compliance assessments have provided the foundation and an annual benchmark, training has improved the awareness of both managers and workers, and the PICCs have been a vehicle where workers and shop stewards are able to continually raise and resolve grievances regarding OSH non-compliance. Furthermore, as one manager noted, BWL is 'just around the corner'. Workers or managers can easily contact EAs, they are seen regularly at factories, and managers have to take seriously what they say or BWL will be back the next day or week. This is a very different system to a one-day annual audit that has often been announced in advance. Managers and workers have clearly modified their behaviour as a result of the much more visible and hands-on approach of BWL, and the results are evident from their similar perceptions.

There were, of course, some differences of emphasis on the part of management and workers. One notable difference was the perception of workers that the improvements were because BWL had told their managers to make changes. Managers, on the other hand, suggested that a big part of the improvement was because workers now understood why they should comply with certain OSH standards because of the BWL training, and would listen to managers when they told them, for example, to wear their face masks instead of throwing them away. Such a difference is probably understandable but it does emphasise that compliance is not just about managers changing their behaviour but also about workers having more knowledge about the standards with which the factory should be complying. Ultimately it is workers and their unions that are going to have to continue to monitor and enforce compliance when BWL departs.²³

The fact that there were persistent problems at some factories, despite significant strides at other factories, is a strong indicator that management and workers will continue to need the interventions of BWL, as well as cooperation from management, to keep improving compliance. So, this is not a sustainable improvement without the continued presence of BWL. This is not to

²³ The idea behind BW is to spend approximately five years in a programme country, helping to develop local capacity, so that stakeholders can take over the functions of the programme (i.e. assessments, training, etc.). This has not happened in any of the programme countries. The Lesotho programme, however, is funded by the US Department of Labor, which has decided to withdraw funding in 2016, because only about half of the apparel manufacturers have subscribed to BWL (very few of the South African-owned manufacturers have joined the programme) and the Lesotho government has decided not to legislate compulsory participation in BWL. This apparently means that BWL has not signed up sufficient manufacturers to make the programme cost efficient. Low participation goes against the mandate of this kind of programme intervention, in that it creates significant obstacles for developing local capacity and hence sustainability.

say that, without BWL, everything will fall apart. However, significant gains have been made off a low base and there is still a long way to go before these are self-sustaining. BWL has a role in preparing unions and employers to take over the functions of assessments, training, and the establishment of PICCs in each factory. Local capacity is currently being developed through training of unions and employers, in particular in the area of establishing functioning PICCs. However, this process should ideally take place over several years in order to ensure the changes will be sustainable.

The attention given to OSH by BWL also had a positive impact on health and safety practices at home. Therefore one must look at this contribution not only in terms of improvements at work, but also overall improvement in knowledge and skills regarding OSH issues. Workers, for example, reported feeling more equipped to care for sick people in their communities, were more knowledgeable about proper ventilation and usage of chemicals and fire equipment in their homes, and also were better able to advise their children on aspects of hygiene. This is an issue that the government could potentially become more involved in when BWL leaves, by supporting training and education on health and safety issues on an industry-wide basis.

5.2 Communication and relations

Feedback from the baseline research indicated that workers seemed to have little recourse against abusive supervisors because their perception was that HR managers always sided with supervisors. HR managers, on the other hand, were in a difficult position, because senior management were concerned with only one thing, namely pushing production, and seemed to believe that it was normal for supervisors to abuse workers, i.e. it was just 'how things were done'. The injunction to HR managers was therefore clearly just to patch things up as quickly as possible and get people back to work, rather than addressing the root cause of complaints and frequent outbursts on the shop floor. Given the above, the improvements that BWL has made to communication and relations, significant though they were, have been off a very low base.

Both the PICCs and training affected supervisor-worker relations. The reason why workers stress the role of PICCs is probably because it is there that they can raise any issue to deal with a supervisor and it is likely to be resolved quickly. This means that the range of instances of non-compliance that are rooted in supervisors abusing their power can all be addressed via the PICC. In more general terms, furthermore, the PICC opens up an avenue for communication about problems that has the effect of improving relations between supervisors and workers. So,

workers are now communicating more with their supervisors, are able to resolve their problems, and are feeling better about their work. This has even affected their home lives, because they are finding work less stressful, and has improved their communication skills, which has improved relationships within families. Whether or not a factory subscribes to BWL, establishing PICCs (or similar types of committees) has positive implications for the well-being of all workers, both at work and at home. It may therefore be appropriate for the relevant stakeholders (i.e. government, unions, employers) to devise a plan for mandating and institutionalizing such committees on an industry-wide basis.

In addition to the PICCS, the training of supervisors has been valuable and should continue as it has positive implications for communication and relations, as well as productivity and quality. It is notable that one of the managers in the baseline research said that he thought poor supervisor-worker relations were linked to the firm's emphasis on quantity. This emphasis resulted in immense pressure on supervisors to really push workers to reach high targets. In this situation workers were more likely to make mistakes, which would result in supervisors screaming and shouting at them, rather than assisting them to solve the problem. This created a vicious cycle because workers became really scared to make mistakes, and if they did make a mistake feared the supervisor finding out. While the same pressure was still present in 2014, the supervisors understood, because of BWL training, that there was a different way of dealing with it. Their better treatment of workers resulted in workers having more confidence in discussing issues with supervisors and calling on their assistance to solve problems. The consequence appears to be fewer mistakes and interruptions caused by shouting matches on the shop floor. This perception was supported by the responses of an HR manager, who said that the improved relations between supervisors and workers had freed him up from his 'fire-fighting' role (i.e. trying to restore order on the shop-floor when a supervisor and worker got into an argument) to focusing on more proactive HR strategies, that would affect positively productivity and quality.

Finally, the focus groups with workers indicate that the impact of BWL has been felt beyond the workplace in the homes of workers. Workers have, through BWL training, acquired communication skills that they have transferred to their households. Many workers reported that there had been an increase in shared responsibilities at home, better communication about budgeting, as well as the use of techniques for resolving conflicts. Many workers felt that they were working more as a team with their partners and that this was also helping them to save money. Management do not appear to be aware of this additional benefit of BWL for workers.

5.3 Are the improvements sustainable?

The degree of overlap in worker and manager perspectives is highly encouraging. One of the main problems in research on compliance with labour standards is that there is too often disconnect between worker and manager perspectives, or that one side's voice is left entirely out of the picture. In this study we have incorporated both perspectives, and found positive results. The fact that there has been such close overlap between these perspectives comes back to the BWL mandate of improving labour standards compliance without negatively impacting supplier competitiveness. It begins with engaging all stakeholders in social dialogue about their underlying interests, business needs, and other internal/external demands. It proceeds by establishing the PICCs in different factories, and continuing to work towards understanding what the key issues are that need to be addressed. In the case of Lesotho, this process helped to identify the major problems of OSH non-compliance and poor supervisor-worker relations, which BWL immediately targeted as core areas for training and education. From both worker and manager perspectives, the results of this have been overwhelmingly positive.

However, in order to achieve sustainable improvements, there needs to be effective management systems in place. One of the reasons that there have been inconsistent improvements across factories is that they lack adequate systems that would institutionalize and enforce compliance. Without this, factories run the risk of repeating the old problem of ad-hoc fixes that resulted from planned CSR audits for which managers could prepare. In some factories, management systems were being put into place. In these cases, it will be a matter of BWL working together with those factories to synchronise their processes. In others, BWL will need to work more closely with management to help establish these systems, working also with unions and workers, to ensure they are effective. Through setting up effective systems in-house, it is more likely that improvements will be sustainable.

5.4 Recommendation

When asked about ways in which BWL could continue to improve, managers' responses tended to revolve around BWL continuing to do what it has been doing and, if anything, that there should be more training. Workers similarly praised the work that BWL has been doing so far, and encouraged BWL to keep promoting that employers work together with workers and unions. Although this strong endorsement is not a guarantee of sustainability of improved compliance,

the positive feedback serves as a reminder that BWL is having a real impact on the people it is intended to benefit.

Having said that, there is still a long way to go to achieve full compliance in factories and to make it sustainable, so it is a relatively simple task to list a lot of recommendations with regard to what should be done. But the Lesotho government has limited capacity and resources, Better Work is similarly constrained, and trade unions are only beginning to mend their differences after years of fragmentation. One needs to be cognisant of these realities when making recommendations. We will therefore rather focus on a single core issue that underpins much of the non-compliance at factories and which we think can be feasibly addressed in the medium-term. This is the issue of supervisor-worker relations, which remains a major persistent problem in the industry.

There are three inter-related reasons, which one can call 'structural' barriers, that explain why this remains a persistent problem. The first is the fact that, at most firms, there does not appear to be a formal selection or promotion procedure for supervisors. Some managers confirmed that this was the case: the production manager, without the involvement of HR, generally did selection and only the production manager knew the criteria for selection. Promotions therefore appeared to these managers as arbitrary. Not surprisingly, workers believed that supervisors were selected simply on their ability to be hard on workers, without any consideration of the skills they might or might not possess. This arrangement has clearly contributed to the poor relations between supervisors and workers, but there appear to be no moves to systematise the selection of supervisors.

Second, the custom in Taiwanese-owned firms is to recruit (mainly) Chinese supervisors to deal with the technical aspects of production on the shop floor. These supervisors are generally appointed on three-year contracts. At the end of their contracts most supervisors return to China and are replaced by new recruits. With each batch of new recruits the problems of abuse of workers therefore starts all over again. So, while the practice of recruiting Chinese supervisors continues, BWL will need to continually be training supervisors in order to address the issue of supervisor-worker relations. Related to this practice is the fact that it is expensive to dismiss a Chinese supervisor, which has resulted in an opaque and informal disciplinary process emerging for them. So, if a Chinese supervisor hits a worker and the worker hits her back, the Chinese supervisor will go into an informal process, the outcome of which is not known (i.e. it's unclear what kind of discipline, if any, they receive), whereas the Basotho worker will go into the formal disciplinary process that will have an outcome (e.g. dismissal). In this context it is hardly surprising that the abuse of workers has continued for so long.

Third, there is little or no training on technical skills available for local supervisors.²⁴ Most local supervisors are put into the position with no training and are expected to 'learn while doing'. This means that they have tended to take their lead from the Chinese supervisors, which includes copying the bad habits of the Chinese supervisors. It also means that it is easy for local supervisors to slip into bad habits of their own. But, more importantly, there is very little transfer of technical skills from Chinese supervisors to local supervisors. So, there is very little likelihood of local supervisors progressively taking over the full supervisory portfolio from the Chinese supervisors, which means that the practice of recruiting Chinese supervisors will continue for the foreseeable future.

There is an urgent need for technical skills training for local supervisors, which would form the basis for a systematic selection procedure for promotion into the position. Such training should lead to a pool of skilled local supervisors that can progressively take over functions from Chinese supervisors that will end the need for recruiting them. When that happens the BWL training for supervisors will end the problem of poor supervisor-worker relations, which we believe is a necessary condition for achieving sustainability with regard to compliance.

²⁴ Besides the fact that there is no training for local supervisors, they are also at the highest level they are ever likely to go in the firm. There is no training that would enable them to move into production management positions and little likelihood that they would ever be recognised for such positions.

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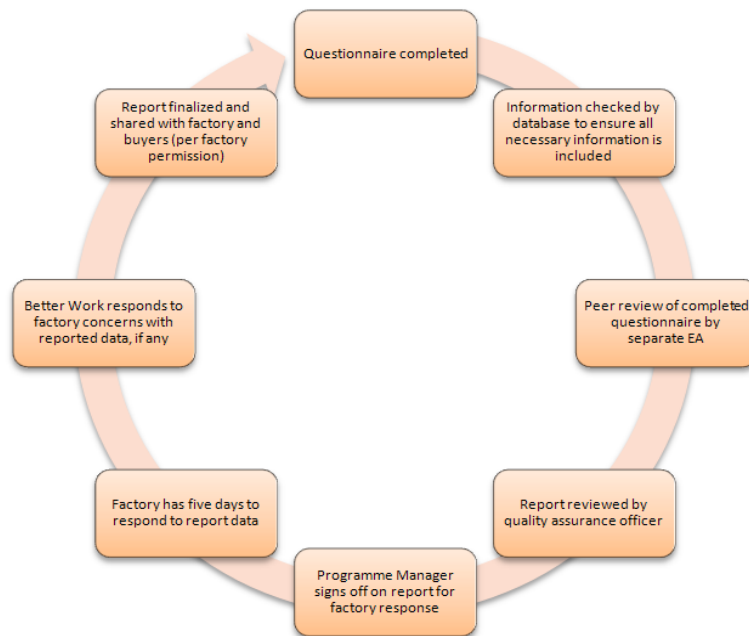
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Annex 1: Better Work assessment process

The starting point for the implementation of a BW country programme is the recruitment of buyers and manufacturers, followed by the initiation of its three main legs at the manufacturing firms.²⁵ The first leg is the compliance audits. These are conducted once a year at participating firms, usually over two days. The second leg is the establishment of bipartite performance improvement consultative committees (PICCs) and facilitation to ensure they function effectively. The third leg is training. The implementation of the three legs is in the form of an annual cycle. The assessment process starts the first annual cycle (and subsequent annual cycles), and is followed by meetings with management and workers to set up the PICC.

Conducting a compliance assessment involves a number of phases: the factory visit, internal review by the assessment team, the drafting of an assessment report, feedback from factory management regarding the report, and the finalization of the assessment report. The central component is the factory visit during which the assessment is conducted. Thereafter an improvement plan for the factory is formulated, and at about the same time - usually five months into a cycle – the first progress report is done. Over the next six months the PICC meets and improvement activities take place, leading to the second progress report in about the 11th month of the cycle. Thereafter the factory is expected to conduct an internal assessment of its progress and conduct further improvement activities through to the start of the next cycle, which begins with another compliance audit. Throughout this period the EA will be in contact with the factory, both workers and managers, to provide advice and assistance. Furthermore, a training plan will be drawn up for the factory and training interventions, usually targeting specific groups, will take place at various points in the course of a cycle.

²⁵ This section describes the BW model that was in place throughout the duration of this research. A new Better Work Factory Services Model is currently being developed and will be applied as of April 2015.



A key aspect of the programme is the integration of the three legs with one another. The problems identified in assessments are brought to the PICC meetings for discussion and decisions about solutions. Training courses will be geared to address the root causes of compliance problems, in particular lack of knowledge of the required standards, and management and workers' responsibilities with respect to meeting the standards. The effectiveness of the PICC and training courses will in turn be monitored in progress reports and the next compliance assessment, which will identify persistent problems as well as any new non-compliance issues. The rationale of the programme is to establish a baseline of compliance and non-compliance, and then to progressively reduce the number of non-compliance issues at the same time that the factory's staff is enabled to better monitor and enforce compliance.

An EA is appointed for every subscribing factory and is responsible for on-going contact with the firm, including drawing up the factory improvement plan with PICC members at the firm, monitoring progress and drafting the progress reports. The EA also assists in setting up the PICC and facilitating meetings. An audit team of two EAs is assembled once a year for each factory. In order to make the audit as objective as possible the team excludes the EA who is responsible for the particular factory. The BW training officer appointed at each country office is responsible for all the training programmes across all factories, but also monitors the training needs of each factory in order to design and deliver courses that target specific non-compliance problems.

The BW programme envisages that each subscribing factory will progress through three phases (no timeframe is prescribed for the phases). The first is the foundation phase, during which the

BW programme is implemented at the factory. The second phase sees the development of management systems that will provide the basis for managers and workers at a factory to take over the responsibility for managing compliance from BW, i.e. the factory develops in-house capacity for monitoring, enforcing and improving compliance. In the final phase – graduation – the factory becomes self-sustainable with regard to maintaining compliance.²⁶

The BW model has a number of strengths. First, it is a locally-based compliance model. The programme is implemented by a country office that employs and trains mainly local staff as EAs, who understand the relevant labour legislation and know the local conditions. This allows BW to conduct unannounced compliance audits, which precludes management from ‘preparing’ for an audit. But it also means that BW EAs are literally ‘just around the corner’, so they can be easily contacted by managers or workers at a factory and can visit factories regularly. Engagement with subscribing factories is therefore regular and on-going. Managers know that BW is close at hand, either for advice and assistance or to take up issues raised with them by workers. Similarly, BW is highly visible to workers, through the PICC meetings and regular visits.²⁷ Workers, furthermore, get to know their EAs and can contact them at any time.

Second, most code compliance programmes comprise a compliance audit only, perhaps with follow-up audits to check that the necessary action has been taken to address non-compliance issues. But these audits often require compliance with quite basic buyer codes of conduct. Better Work compliance audits are far more comprehensive. Furthermore, CSR best practice includes a remedial dimension that aims to assist a factory to achieve compliance, rather than merely policing and punishing for non-compliance. The BW programme, however, goes beyond CSR best practice: the three integrated legs generate a synergy that is designed to produce a virtuous circle of increasing compliance that becomes self-sustaining.

²⁶ The BW model is being updated to reflect ongoing advice from actors across the supply chain. BW is adapting the ways that in-factory services are delivered, in order to maximize impact, sustainability and scale. It will do so through: stimulating faster improvements in critical areas of non-compliance; creating higher levels of factory ownership and responsibility; strengthening mechanisms for worker management communication; providing platforms for shared learning between factories; focusing on root causes through a management systems approach; establishing greater accountability through public reporting; differentiating factories based on performance. More information on the new model will be made available on the BW website.

²⁷ A close relationship is established, to the extent that a shop steward who was interviewed at one of the factories considered himself to be ‘a member’ of BWL.

Annex 2: Better Work compliance categories

The compliance assessment focuses on eight area or clusters. Four of the clusters are based on fundamental rights at work (i.e. the reference point is the ILO) and four are based on national labour law relating to working conditions. Each of the eight clusters is divided into key components known as ‘compliance points’; there is a total of 38 compliance points (although some might be dropped for a country depending on its national labour law).

	Compliance Clusters		Compliance Points
Core Labour Standards	1.	Child Labour	1. Child Labourers 2. Unconditional Worst Forms 3. Hazardous Work 4. Documentation and Protection of Young Workers
	2.	Discrimination	5. Race and Origin 6. Religion and Political Opinion 7. Gender 8. Other Grounds
	3.	Forced Labour	9. Coercion 10. Bonded Labour 11. Forced Labour and Overtime 12. Prison Labour
	4.	Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining	13. Union Operations 14. Interference and Discrimination 15. Collective Bargaining 16. Strikes
Working Conditions	5.	Compensation	17. Minimum wages 18. Overtime wages 19. Premium Pay 20. Method of Payment 21. Wage Information, Use and Deduction 22. Paid Leave 23. Social Security and Other Benefits
	6.	Contracts and Human Resources	24. Employment Contracts 25. Contracting Procedures 26. Termination 27. Discipline and Disputes
	7.	Occupational Safety and Health	28. OSH Management Systems 29. Chemicals and Hazardous Substances 30. Worker Protection 31. Working Environment 32. Health Services and First Aid 33. Welfare Facilities 34. Worker Accommodation 35. Emergency Preparedness
	8.	Working Time	36. Regular Hours 37. Overtime 38. Leave

Related to every compliance point is a set of questions, each of which address a specific issue (in all there are over 200 issues and questions, although the number asked might vary from country to country). An example of the issues and questions for the ‘working environment’ compliance point, within the ‘occupational safety and health’ cluster, is as follows:

Question 201. Issue: Workplace temperature: Is the temperature in the workplace acceptable?

Question 206. Issue: Obstruction of passages and/or fencing of floor openings: Are all passage ways free from obstruction and floor openings fenced off and covered?

The assessment report records the answers to the questions as well as the source for the answer, i.e. whether it was answered through interviews with workers, and/or the union, and/or management, and/or by consulting documentation, and/or through observation. A question might therefore be answered from a number of sources, e.g. question 206 (above) could be answered by interviews with workers and observation. The result is a comprehensive compliance assessment that lays the foundation for on-going improvement in compliance.

The assessment tallies up violations of compliance points (a compliance point is violated if even one of the questions related to it points to non-compliance). The number of compliance points found to be violated as a percentage of the total number of compliance points within a cluster produces a non-compliance rate for a factory. The compliance rate is used to track progress at the factory as well as to compare data across factories and even countries, e.g. a factory's non-compliance rate can be compared with the non-compliance rate for all factories in the BW programme in a country.

The latter is facilitated by compliance synthesis reports that are published annually by BW in each country. BWL's second compliance synthesis report presents aggregate data for the 14 factories subscribing to the programme in the period from January to December 2012.²⁸ In addition, the report compares aggregate data for the nine factories that were included in the first compliance synthesis report. The aggregation of data and comparison over time has allowed BWL to identify particular problem areas for targeted attention. For example, following the first compliance synthesis report the following were identified as 'zero-tolerance issues': verbal harassment, discrimination on the grounds of a workers' perceived or real HIV status, and OSH issues that pose an imminent risk to workers' health and lives. The second compliance synthesis report highlighted verbal harassment of workers by supervisors and OSH non-compliance as major problems. BWL published its third compliance synthesis report in September 2014.

BWL has also produced its first thematic synthesis report.²⁹ The focus of this report is the Contracts and Human Resources compliance cluster, in particular Dialogue, Discipline and Disputes issues. The reason for the report was the very high levels of non-compliance rates for these issues revealed by the first and second compliance synthesis reports. The report analyses findings from the three cycles the programme had been through, which allowed for a comparison of compliance findings over time.

²⁸ Better Work Lesotho: Garment Industry 2nd Compliance Synthesis Report 2 April 2013 (www.betterwork.org)

²⁹ Better Work Lesotho Thematic Synthesis Report: Contracts 24 April 2014 (www.betterwork.org)

Annex 3: PICCs and Training

The performance improvement consultative committee (PICC)

The establishment and functioning of PICCs follows a set of guidelines developed in consultation with members of the Project Advisory Committee. The PICC comprises an equal number of management and worker representatives (i.e. shop stewards belonging to unions represented in the factory and non-unionised workers). The management side must include a senior manager (preferably the factory manager) who will be able to ensure that decisions are implemented. The exact numbers are determined by the number of unions represented in the workplace and their representativeness in proportion to the total workforce.

The PICC is tasked with the development, implementation and monitoring of factory improvement plans to address areas of non-compliance identified in factory assessments.³⁰ For the handling of grievances, there are usually other mechanisms in place in a factory, but workers are also able to raise issues in the PICC meetings. This assists in improving communication and building more cooperative relationships between workers and managers.

Action plans decided on by the PICC are likely to be implemented only if the factory manager is part of the decision, especially if the action plans have cost implications. One of the main problems experienced by BWL is non-attendance of PICC meetings by factory managers. BWL EAs have responded in such cases by meeting the factory manager soon after the PICC meeting has taken place to present the decisions to him or her and get agreement on implementation. This strategy appears to be working relatively well. Another problem is weaning the PICC from the active role played by the EA. This arises mainly because managers refuse to meet unless the PICC meeting is set up by the BWL EA or they know the EA will be attending. It is an indication that most senior managers at clothing factories in Lesotho are not participative by nature.

The effectiveness of PICCs therefore varies across factories, which means that workers and others have different perceptions of the role played by the PICC. In some factories the PICC was seen as the key element in the BWL programme, whereas at others BW training was seen as far more important.

Training

BWL has developed a set of courses that will support the auditing and workplace cooperation functions of the programme. The courses have been designed to address issues prevalent in the

³⁰ Better Work Lesotho 2014 Better Work Lesotho: Garment Industry 3rd Compliance Synthesis Report 8.

apparel sector, but the training materials can be adapted to address different country contexts as well as cultural and linguistic diversity within countries. The training is targeted at managers, supervisors and workers, and the courses can be delivered in the classroom or the factory. A key objective of the courses is to build capacity in factories to progressively take over the compliance improvement process, i.e. to make it self-sustaining.

The following courses have been presented in Lesotho: Supervisory skills training; Human resources management; Occupational safety and health; and, Worker Life Skills training (comprising Maternity Protection, Financial literacy, Introduction to workplace communication). In addition, BWL have run courses on Risk assessment and Emergency preparation and preparedness that are targeted at OSH officers. These courses have been developed by BWL to address particular problems identified in Lesotho's garment industry.

The courses vary in length from three hours to five days and are presented at a factory for a group of employees or are presented at an outside venue to selected workers, supervisors or managers from a number of factories (the upper limit is generally 25 persons). The Human resources management and the Supervisory skills courses are probably the most intensive, requiring respectively five full days and three full days. They are generally taught at an outside venue for participants from a number of factories.

The training materials are developed in English but BWL has translated most of the courses targeted at workers into Sesotho (some are still in the process of being translated), while the Supervisory skills course has been translated into Sesotho and Mandarin. The training officers employed by BWL have done most of the translations of the materials. The translation includes adapting the materials for local circumstances. BWL has also, as noted above, developed some relatively short courses (at most one day) specifically for Lesotho.

BWL also provides what are known as 'learning seminars' for PICC members. They are included in a factory's annual assessment and advisory services subscription. Three of the learning seminars have been presented in Lesotho: Grievance handling; Chemical safety; and, Fire safety.³¹

The BWL training officers prepare a training plan or schedule for each factory, which responds to the types of problems identified in the compliance audit. There is, however, not always a good uptake of training courses. Training during working hours constitutes lost production time or management time. If a factory is busy this will mean they will not participate in courses or will postpone a course. Furthermore, BWL charges a fee for some courses, which appears to put off

³¹ There is one other 'learning seminar', namely self-assessment, which has not been presented by BWL.

some firms. The end result is that training is uneven, with some factories having done quite extensive training while others have done little. This unevenness is replicated within factories, because there are workers who have attended two or three courses while there are others who have never been on a training course. Workers who have attended Workers' Life Skills training courses, for example, are generally full of praise for the training, but the limited capacity of BWL and relatively high turnover of staff in factories means it is usually reaching only a small proportion of employees in the sector. However, for other trainings, it is easier for BWL to sufficiently cover the key target groups (e.g. mid-level management and supervisors). Since BWL is only working with 16 factories, it is easier to reach more of them.

Annex 4: Methodology Note

Worker Data

Focus group transcripts were analyzed using qualitative software known as NVivo. NVivo allows researchers to code the personal attributes of the participants involved in the research and tie it to each of the statements they have made in an interview. It also allows researchers to then sort the data from the transcripts by themes. To do this, the researcher creates folders, highlights the sections of the transcripts that apply, and drags/drops these highlighted sections into the appropriate folders. In this study, folders were created according to the Better Work compliance clusters. New folders were created to capture themes that came up in addition to the Better Work compliance clusters. If the personal attributes have also been coded, it then becomes possible to query the data according to different attributes. For example, if we wanted to know whether health and safety was an issue raised more often by men or women in the focus group discussions, we could run a query of the folder on 'health and safety' with a breakdown by gender. Similarly, we could do the same with a breakdown by factory. The results might indicate, for example, that females spoke more frequently about problems with health and safety than did the males, or that workers at a particular factory spoke more about health and safety problems than did workers at any other factory. The frequency is determined by the number of times a particular issue is mentioned in a focus group discussion (separated by positive and negative valence).

Management Data

Interviews were conducted with managers of apparel factories in Lesotho in 2011. At that point BWL had only just been formally launched and implementation at some factories had only just begun. The interviews therefore did not deal directly with managers' perceptions of BWL. Rather, the primary focus of the interviews was whether participation in a global value chain had led to economic and/or social upgrading/downgrading at apparel firms. The interviews nevertheless covered a wide range of issues relating to the financial, operational, labour relations and compliance circumstances of firms and therefore provide a reasonable baseline with which to compare the interviews conducted in 2014.

There are two limitations with regard to the comparison of management perceptions between 2011 and 2014. First, there are only three firms that are common to the sample of ten firms researched in 2010 and the seven firms included in the 2014. Second, in 2011, interviews were conducted with senior managers who could give perspectives on the financial, production and

labour relations functioning of firms. In most cases only one or two interviews were conducted at each firm. However, the 2014 research, benefitting from the insights generated by the earlier research, sought to interview a cross-section of managers at each firm, from supervisors through to the managing director.³² In most cases six to eight interviews were conducted at each firm spread from the top to the bottom of the management hierarchy.

³² The earlier research projects had suggested that management culture and language were critical variables that divided management into strata, in particular separating supervisors from higher levels of management.

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