# CASE STUDIES OF INTERVENTION EFFECTIVENESS

A 'First look' into Supporting Informal RMG Workers in Bangladesh using LaborLink, a tool to disrupt the Prevalence of Forced/Child Labour

# Contents

# A 'First look' into Supporting Informal RMG Workers in Bangladesh using LaborLink, a tool to disrupt the Prevalence of Forced/Child Labour

*"Continuing studies is irrelevant to someone whose mother has left him." This was said by Md. Nahid\* (name changed), a 13-year-old boy working in an informal garment factory in Keraniganj. He, and many other children, work there as 'Sagred' (helper) to the skilled workers. Their workspace is also where they sleep and eat. They work for 11 hours a day and besides being provided a bed and food, are paid only 400 BDT (USD 4.70) a month. He is from a rural area of Madaripur district. His father died recently and his mother left with another man. He was living with his grandmother and later came to this factory with a distant uncle from his village. This was his answer when asked if he wishes to continue studying. (Source: Focus Group Discussion conducted on 10 December, 2020)*

## Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| BDT | Bangladeshi Taka |
| BFA | Better Fit Approach |
| BLF | Bangladesh Labour Foundation |
| DCAP | Data Collection and Analysis Partner |
| FCDO | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office |
| FGD | Focus Group Discussion |
| GFEMS | Global Fund to End Modern Slavery |
| ILO | International Labour Organization |
| IVR | Interactive Voice Response |
| KII | Key Informant Interview |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| SCF | System Change Framework |
| RMG | Ready Made Garments |
| ToC | Theory of Change |
| US | United States |
| USD | United States Dollars |

# Abstract

*Although child labour has almost entirely vanished from the formal garment sector of Bangladesh, the issue is still widespread in the country's unregulated informal garment sector. These informal factories pose a significant risk of forced labour as well. ELEVATE, a leading business risk and sustainability solutions provider, has customized its Laborlink worker survey tool to collect data on child and forced labour prevalence and associated risks in informal factories.*

*In this context, this report is the first in a two-part learning exercise designed to critically review the ELEVATE intervention and generate lessons and insights that are of practical utility for a wider audience. The 'First Look' case study acts as a snapshot of the current status of the project and seeks to understand the extent to which the project is in line with its articulated theory of change. It also documents the progress made, if any, at the preliminary stages of the project. Findings suggest that progress is on track for the first phase of the project, despite COVID-19 related delays and modifications to the project plan. Given that it is still early in the project execution phase, the bulk of evidence will be assessed in the 'Second Look' case study which will offer a deeper, more comprehensive overview of the intervention and its impact.*

# Introduction

## Context

The garment sector was once a significant employer of child workers in Bangladesh. However, since the introduction of the Harkin Bill in the U.S. Senate in 1992, child labour has almost entirely vanished from the country's formal garment sector.[1] However, child labour is still widespread in the unregulated informal garment sector. Observation research[2] has established that in this sector, children are engaged in a range of tasks, often for long hours and in unhygienic and exploitative conditions.

According to research by NYU Stern Center for Business & Human Rights, approximately 3,800 out of the 7,000 RMG factories in Bangladesh (over 50 percent) are indirect factories that subcontract for Tier 1 factories, and about one-third of these are informal, i.e., not registered with the government. These informal factories pose a significant risk of forced labour as they are 'hidden' and thus, not subject to government regulation or labour compliance activities of large buyers. NYU Stern Center and BRAC University Center estimate that as many as three million of Bangladesh's RMG workers fall outside the scope of any labour monitoring programmes.

The Global Fund to End Modern Slavery (GFEMS) is a transformational multi-donor fund that works to forge public-private partnerships and catalyse a comprehensive global strategy to end modern slavery. GFEMS, in an agreement with the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has funded projects in three target areas – Ethical Recruitment, Apparel, and Commercial Sexual Exploitation. GFEMS selected the consortium of *Athena Infonomics* and *Itad* (henceforth, *Athena-Itad*) to support its review and learning activities for this set of projects.

## Scope of study

GFEMS is funding ELEVATE to deploy a worker voice tool to collect feedback on labour conditions in informal factories in Bangladesh. GFEMS has partnered with *Athena-Itad* to review the intervention in context of the broader project Theory of Change (ToC), with the objective of measuring progress towards a sustainable model for reduction in the prevalence of modern slavery, and using learning from the projects to offer feedback on how to scale and increase its effectiveness over time.

For this review, the *Athena-Itad* consortium follows a case study approach that provides a longitudinal perspective across earmarked components in each project. This approach allows for continuous tracking of changes in the goals and achievements of the project. As these case studies cannot formally be considered to constitute a traditional baseline-endline longitudinal approach, the terms 'First Look' and 'Second Look' case studies have been introduced. Apart from desk reviews, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with the implementing partners in different roles to understand and assess the progress of the project and related issues. Based on these discussions, for the First and the Second Look, the projects will be assessed against the Better Fit Approach (BFA) and the Systems Change Framework (SCF) to ascertain the

a) quality of the innovation against a diverse set of factors, described below, and

---

[1] ILO-IPEC. (2004). Addressing Child Labour in the Bangladesh Garment Industry: 1995 to 2001. Retrieved from http://www.ilo.org/ipecinfo/product/download.do?type=document&id=556

[2] The Ready-Made Garments Sector and Children in Bangladesh, UNICEF, 2015

b) nature of the improvement to the status quo of the system.

## Project overview

ELEVATE aims to increase transparency in the RMG sector in Bangladesh by deploying its proven Laborlink worker survey tool to collect data on working conditions and forced labour risks faced by workers in informal factories. Building on the successful deployment of this tool in formal factories, ELEVATE has customised this anonymous and mobile-based worker survey tool for deployment in informal garments factories. Deployment will be focused in Keraniganj and Narayanganj, two apparel production hubs dense with informal factories, typically orienting production for the domestic apparel market. The Laborlink tool will identify child labour and workers at risk of forced labour, which ELEVATE referral operators (Amader Kotha Helpline) will follow-up with. If this tool is found to be applicable, informal RMG workers in Bangladesh – currently hidden from view – will have an anonymous tool to give direct feedback on exploitive working conditions, and the project will connect them to pertinent information and resources required to remove them from situations of forced and child labour.

From a technical standpoint, the worker voice tool is low-tech and does not require the respondent to be literate or own a smartphone. The community trainers, managed by ELEVATE partners Bangladesh Labour Foundation (BLF) and Phulki, will distribute Laborlink instruction cards with brief step-by-step instructions on how to participate. Workers will call a local number from their phone. They will let the call ring twice and then hang-up (leave a 'missed call'). In less than a minute, they will receive a call back to begin the survey. They will hear up to 20 multiple-choice survey questions and be prompted to answer by pressing a number on their mobile's keypad using Interactive Voice Response (IVR) technology.

Using this survey data, ELEVATE will collect and analyse granular forced and child labour risk data that is otherwise difficult to collect. The workers will then receive a series of informational/educational messages informing them of their rights. Through live referral operator follow-up, the project will then refer the identified victims to local organisations for support, including skill-building services and/or education, to prevent re-victimisation.

ELEVATE coordinates with BLF and Phulki, their local partners for worker engagement and survey facilitation. BLF and Phulki are working in Keraniganj and Narayanganj respectively. Another GFEMS project in the FCDO-funded portfolio, implemented by BRAC, is designed to provide a complementary set of vulnerability-reduction services to the same population of at-risk workers. BRAC will conduct skills training and other worker support in the local area and will accept referrals of survey respondents from ELEVATE.

| The basic Theory of Change (ToC) is that: | |
|---|---|
| *If* | a worker voice tool can be deployed to diagnose and detect forced and child labour in informal factories and/or share information with workers of their rights and/or give access to available skill-building and placement services, |
| *then* | evidence can be collected around the presence of forced labour and/or victims and vulnerable workers to inform them of their rights and the availability of services to support their needs and/or to refer them to skill-building services/NGO support/ education programmes, |

| | |
|---|---|
| *resulting in* | placement of victims and vulnerable workers in jobs with fair labour conditions,[3] |
| *leading to* | reduced key worker vulnerabilities that enable forced labour. |

---

[3] This is largely the BRAC component in the original design

**Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic**

### 1) Short-term COVID-19 Survey:

- One of ELEVATE's key referral partners, BRAC, reoriented their focus towards the COVID-19 pandemic emergency response. Thus, a key referral linkage for the Forced Labour Risk Survey was postponed and the collaboration timeline for referral support from BRAC became uncertain.
- As a short-term pivot, ELEVATE designed and helped deploy the COVID-19 pandemic surveys that would inform BRAC's emergency relief response targeting vulnerable informal RMG workers in both Keraniganj and Narayanganj. During field data collection for this exercise, field staff of the local partners found that the pandemic support was well-received by the workers, and helped the local partners BLF and Phulki establish a positive reputation. This was helpful for the local partners to gain access to worker communities.
- In the FGDs conducted for this exercise, adult workers from the informal garment factory said that their income had been halted for three months during the lockdown period. They had not received any additional payment or other support, although some received emergency support from BRAC.

### 2) ELEVATE's Forced Labour Risk Survey:

- ELEVATE, BLF, and Phulki could not deploy the worker survey during lockdown from March to May 2020 due to Government of Bangladesh restrictions on movement and gatherings.
- At the beginning of resuming operations in Narayanganj, Phulki collected contact information of the workers, which their staff used to build a contact database and conduct surveys remotely. Now, Phulki and BLF's staff are conducting the survey in person, maintaining health safety and social distancing measures.
- Phulki noted that in Narayanganj, many workers have migrated from the vicinity as a result of losing their jobs, travelling constraints, and health measures. Worker numbers have thereby reduced across the sector, the implication being that more factories now need to be engaged to meet outreach objectives.
- Because of the reduction in worker numbers, existing workers experience added pressure to meet production targets, heightening the risk of forced labour and suggesting that the need for a worker voice tool is more pertinent than ever.
- Outreach impacts: The initial target was to reach 10,000 workers during the project phase. Considering the time lost due to COVID-19 pandemic and its other impacts on the project such as diversion of funds to emergency support and more time needed for mapping additional referral service provider partners, the total outreach for the project period might come down. However, local partners are hopeful in reaching the initial target in the project phase.

**Status (First Look, December 2020):** In autumn 2020, after experiencing unforeseen delays due to COVID-19 pandemic, ELEVATE and their local partners BLF and Phulki resumed data collection in Keraniganj and Narayanganj. At the time of the First Look, ELEVATE had started analysing the data but follow-up live calls and referral services had not yet begun. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic also delayed BRAC's implementation and shifted their focus to short-term emergency

support activities. As such, since the BRAC project was not ready at the time to absorb referrals, the ELEVATE project began looking for alternative referral service providers.

## Methodology

### Research design

Each 'First Look' case study focuses on

a) understanding the project theory of change as articulated by implementing partners, which may or may not be written down

b) some evidence on specific standards for the services provided by the implementing partners

c) providing contextual information of the current situation before[4] or during an early stage of implementation.

The 'Second Look' case studies will focus on assessing evidence of change, different pathways to change, and other determining contributing and contextual factors. Enquiries into the 'Second Look' case studies will seek to unpack observed behavioural change of stakeholders at the target community and system levels. However, given the timeline of the first and second look (six months), the bulk of evidence is likely to be at the output and immediate outcome level, rather than the longer-term outcome and impact level.

Laborlink is already a proven tool for identifying risk of forced labour[5] and this learning exercise was focused on the suitability of the tool in informal RMG factories and challenges and uncertainties around how to provide support services to victims/vulnerable workers. The main learning questions for this case study are:

1. To what extent and how are adult victims/child labourers identified as working under exploitative conditions, willing to seek help, and participate in skill-building/placement programmes? Are referral services and educational content provided through the worker voice tool valued by workers and able to reduce their vulnerability?
2. What is the best type of information and appropriate channels through which it can be delivered to workers who want to take action and change their current (or future) employment?
   i. What enabling factors need to be in place to ensure the effectiveness of Laborlink?/ Can the worker voice tool effectively be deployed in informal factories?
3. How has the contribution chain between activities on education and referral and outcomes related to victims and vulnerable workers receiving NGO support/skill-building services been affected by COVID-19, and how does the pandemic affect appropriate channels and types of information that beneficiaries are interested in?
4. Will factory owners improve their practices in reaction to the worker voice tool? Other reactions?

Desk review, KIIs, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) will set out to answer these questions.

### Evaluation framework

The *Athena-Itad* case study has taken the project ToC as the main entry point into discussions and will look at which change pathways are working well, and which change pathways are potentially

---

[4] The 'before implementation' information is often problematic in reality, as typically, the intervention will build on some previous work that has been done by the subrecipient, or work that has already begun. In either case, the 'First Look' still provides a point in time against which to assess change in the 'Second Look'.
[5] https://www.3blmedia.com/News/Laborlink-Receives-First-Ever-Best-Social-Enterprise-Award, https://www.sedex.com/sedex-awards-winners-2018/

challenging, or lack up-to-date programming evidence. This **theory-based approach** was followed to design a case study that aims to test, with evidence, the assumed causal change of events and their results, checking each link and assumption in the process to verify the foregrounding theory.

The theory-based approach is accompanied by **contribution analysis**, which provides a systematic way to arrive at credible causal claims about a programme's contribution to change. By verifying the respective ToCs and taking into consideration other factors that may have influenced outcomes, contribution analysis provides evidence about where and how the grantees did (or did not) make effective programme objectives.

The observations in this report showcase the expectations from the project based on the information available during the 'First Look' stage, and not the status of the project at the 'First Look' stage. It is important to note that with further progress in the project and with better availability of information (completion of development, tool implementation and feedback from M&E system), the goal is to develop an accurate as-is picture during the 'Second Look' stage.

## Better Fit Approach

The case study framework integrates the Better Fit Approach (BFA) methodology to help determine the degree to which an initiative is 'innovative' and locally responsive. BFA seeks to either apply a new solution to a given problem, or innovatively adapt a solution from a different context to fit another, locally. It usually involves doing something differently from how it is currently being done and seeks to make the outcome or experience better, particularly in a complex and/or rapidly changing programming environment. BFA is not necessarily evaluative insofar as it may be too early to conduct interventions during the planning stages, or early trial stages of an intervention. The elements of the BFA pathway are presented in Annexure 1. In principle, BFA provides an 'innovation audit' to understand the following aspects of the implementation process:

- Transformative: How, and to what extent, is the programme flexible to offer intended services more effectively
- Inclusive: How, and to what extent, is the programme trying to serve the excluded groups
- Adaptive: How, and to what extent, is the programme collecting and using results for decision-making
- Economically viable: How, and to what extent, has the programme maintained cost-effectiveness and shaped itself as acceptable and scalable.

## Systems Change Framework

Wherever applicable, a theory-based approach will also assess the interventions that help improve system-level capacities and connections that aim to bring forth changes at an individual level. The **System Change Framework** (SCF) appraises the challenges of achieving pathway effectiveness, including structural barriers, and strategies employed for improving structures. The SCF framework scale is presented in Annexure 2. The assessment of SCF expectations for the project was accomplished through a detailed review of the project theory of change and/or logframes, as well as through KIIs with key stakeholders. We tried to assess:
- The capacities of:
  - The stakeholders to deploy the innovative tool, and identify and address risks at the beneficiary level
  - Referral service providers to offer holistic services
- External service providers' connections and coordination in offering holistic services, and in identifying and addressing risk at the victims'/vulnerable workers' level.

While BFA focuses on the design aspects of the project, allowing it to achieve its identified primary and secondary targets, SCF aims to understand how well the project impacts or influences the existing systems and their services and capacities. To assess these capacities of the stakeholders, we explore:

- Capability (ability to provide intended services): How well does the project deliver its services and how does the system and other actors respond to it? How scalable are the activities to other services and other target groups, with quality measured and maintained?
- Incentive model (ability to serve the interests of a diverse group of stakeholders from demand as well as supply side): How well-designed is the project to ensure incentives for the associated stakeholders in both the demand and the supply side to continue? How well does the project identify and address mismatches between the services intended and the services received by the target audience?
- Sustainability (evidence or indications of buy-in for offering intended services): How convinced are the partners to continue the service model? What evidence or indications do we have to prove stakeholders' willingness to continue with the model in the post-project period?
- External Linkages (linkages with government and/or apex bodies): Is the project connected to or aligned with programmes or schemes in the sector and locality that will help ensure long-term success and viability of the project?

## Sample of Stakeholders

The 'First Look' exercise started with extensive desk review of the project documents including the project proposal, ToC, Logframe, and project reporting documents. Primary data collection was conducted in the first half of December 2020. For the 'First look', a group interview was conducted with the main coordination partner ELEVATE. KIIs were conducted with local implementing partners, BLF and Phulki. One FGD was conducted with identified child workers and another with adult men and women workers. Twelve child workers (one girl, 11 boys) and 14 adult workers (seven men and seven women) participated in these FGDs. Semi-structured questionnaires and checklists were used to collect information and the findings were analysed and compared against the updates reported by the project. Similar questions were asked to different stakeholders for triangulation and to explore perspectives.

# Key Results/Findings

## Summary of results against key learning questions

(Findings as of mid-December 2020)

**1. Willingness of identified adult victims/child labourers to seek help and participate in skilling/placement programmes**: The worker risk survey started very recently and follow-up communications regarding referral services have not been initiated. However, during the FGDs, some child workers and adult workers expressed their interest in a better workspace and earning opportunities. Most of them are working in informal facilities because they need money, even though they are not happy with the facilities and work environment. So, if there are better options, they will be happy to try them out.

**2. Type of information and appropriate channels that ELEVATE can deliver to workers that want to take action and change their current (or future) employment**: The staff of Phulki and BLF have been trained and are now visiting the workers and conducting the worker voice survey using tablets. The IVR method was found to not be appropriate for this community as all workers, particularly the child workers, do not have a mobile phone. The survey questions needed to be explained first as the workers found the questions complicated to understand. However, upon processing the data,

ELEVATE sent educational messages directly to all survey respondents via IVR. Over 1,200 workers (as of 2 December 2020) have received such messages. The project plans to introduce live calls in the future to provide personalised guidance and to link the workers with appropriate referral services.

2.i. **Enabling factors needed to ensure the effectiveness of the tool**: Both of the local implementing partners believe dedicated staff are required to conduct the survey by visiting the workers in person, consistent with the current survey deployment model. As noted above, workers were challenged to use the IVR technology independently and staff first needed to explain the context to the workers and then guide them through the questions. Apart from the staff directly engaging with the workers, no other initiative to promote the survey tool is in place as of mid-December 2020.

 3**. Effects of COVID-19 pandemic on the ToC causal pathway for activities on rights awareness and referral service outcomes for victims and vulnerable workers** : BRAC has partnered with ELEVATE to provide referral support services and engage government bodies in sustaining the project's goals. However, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated BRAC to shift their priorities to focus on providing emergency support. The alternative referral support system mechanism has still not been finalised. The project is identifying alternate support service providers and has shortlisted six organisations. The selection process is yet to be completed (as of mid-December 2020).
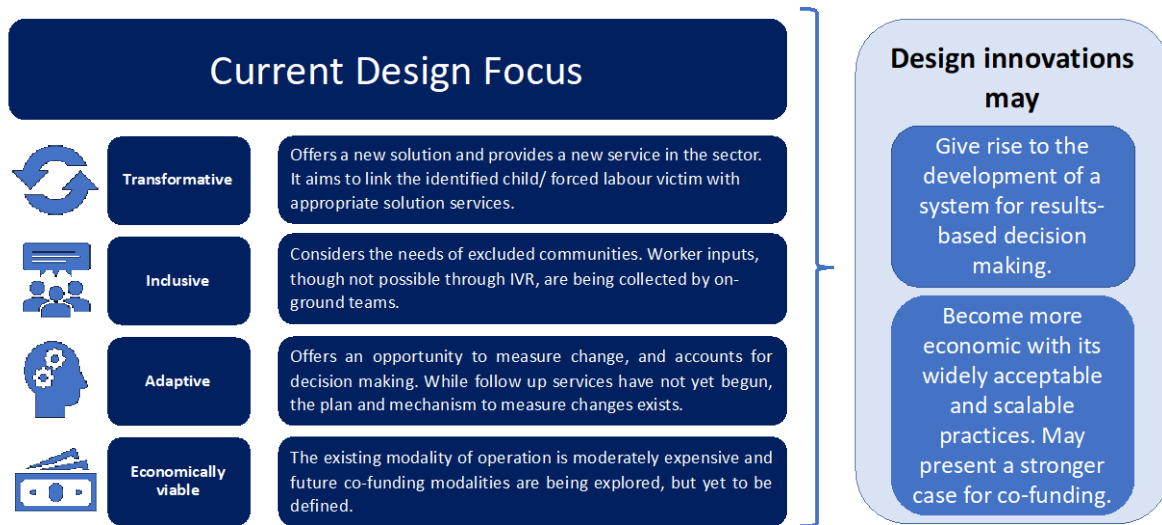
**4. Willingness of factory owners to improve their practices in response to the worker voice tool:** Local partner BLF stated that informal factory owners prefer not to engage child workers because productivity among adult workers is higher. Child workers are mainly engaged as 'helping hands'. The other local partner, Phulki, informed that the factory owners in Narayanganj also want to improve their working environment as they are interested in upgrading to a higher supplier tier to grow their business. However, these factory owners lack necessary knowledge and guidance around the required compliance issues. Awareness-building activities for factory managers are planned as part of the complementary BRAC project in the same communities.

## Framework-based findings:
### Better Fit Approach

As this was the 'First Look' assessment, the main focus was on the design aspects of the interventions, and to seek to understand their intended potential impact across the standards of Transformation, Inclusivity, Adaptability, and Economic viability. The learnings from here will dovetail into the larger-picture view provided by the Systems Change Framework.

**Image 1: Better Fit Approach - Design Innovation in the Worker Voice Project**



**Current Design Focus**

**Transformative**: Offers a new solution and provides a new service in the sector. It aims to link the identified child/ forced labour victim with appropriate solution services.

**Inclusive**: Considers the needs of excluded communities. Worker inputs, though not possible through IVR, are being collected by on-ground teams.

**Adaptive**: Offers an opportunity to measure change, and accounts for decision making. While follow up services have not yet begun, the plan and mechanism to measure changes exists.

**Economically viable**: The existing modality of operation is moderately expensive and future co-funding modalities are being explored, but yet to be defined.

**Design innovations may**

Give rise to the development of a system for results-based decision making.

Become more economic with its widely acceptable and scalable practices. May present a stronger case for co-funding.

**Transformative**: To our knowledge, this is the first use of a worker voice tool to detect the risk of forced labour and child labour in the informal RMG sector of Bangladesh. The evidence gathered by the ELEVATE worker survey will serve to fill a major knowledge gap in the RMG sector on working conditions within informal factories. The 'worker-centric'/bottom-up approach of the project intends to capture direct and reliable feedback directly from workers, instead of engaging factory management or buyers/brands. To eradicate child labour and forced labour, both the workers and the factory owners play crucial roles. The workers need to know their rights and the factory owners need to be aware of the compliance criteria and the necessity of maintaining these. Until now, the major focus has been toward surveying the workers and serving their needs. Nevertheless, given BLF's wide range of work in the target community of Keraniganj, they have continued to seek engagement with the local owners' association and workers' association as an alternative entry point.

Data collection and analysis has been focused on identifying forced labour risk among target communities. Survey respondents also receive a series of educational/informational messages on their phones with insights about labour rights and working conditions. Till date, live calls with identified victims have focused on validating the information collected via surveys to create a database or workers and child labourers potentially interested in joining the referral services once they become available. Through the deployment of educational/information messages to workers' phones, ELEVATE collects information on whether workers open and hear the messages to increase awareness of their rights and betterment of working conditions.

**Inclusive**: ELEVATE offered both BLF and Phulki different survey tools/channels to test and determine the best approach to reach the highest number of workers. While Laborlink technology deployed via workers' mobile phones was thought to be one of the most effective tools to deploy surveys, other tools considered included "voting machines" and tablets (iPads). When the project team tried to deploy surveys via Laborlink using IVR technology, they realised that these communities of workers in the informal RMG sector were not as comfortable with IVR as workers in a formal factory setting are. Due to high illiteracy rates and low-education backgrounds, many workers faced challenges understanding the survey questions or did not have a mobile phone of their own. As a result, the staff used tablets to collect responses from the workers.

**Adaptive**: ELEVATE will connect identified at-risk respondents, including vulnerable and victimised children, with appropriate welfare entities such as child labour schools, skills-development projects or

government/non-government facilities that deal with issues of harassment and malpractice. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and shifting priorities towards emergency response needs, BRAC has been delayed in supporting referrals from ELEVATE. GFEMS is working closely with ELEVATE to find alternative solutions (as of mid-December 2020). The project is ready to adapt the new service delivery channels to cope with the practical limitations.

**Economically viable**: The in-person survey method is resource-heavy and future co-funding modalities are not currently clear. Deploying IVR could be comparatively cost-effective because it does not need physical deployment of a workforce in targeted areas to collect data in person. Further efforts are required to make the intervention cost-effective and sustainable in the longer-term. However, the Laborlink tool is widely used by ELEVATE amongst the workers in formal garments factories, with support from brands. This tool and data collection processes have been customised to serve informal sector workers. BLF is already thinking of the probable use of the tool for other sectors where workers' issues are common, such as at tanneries.
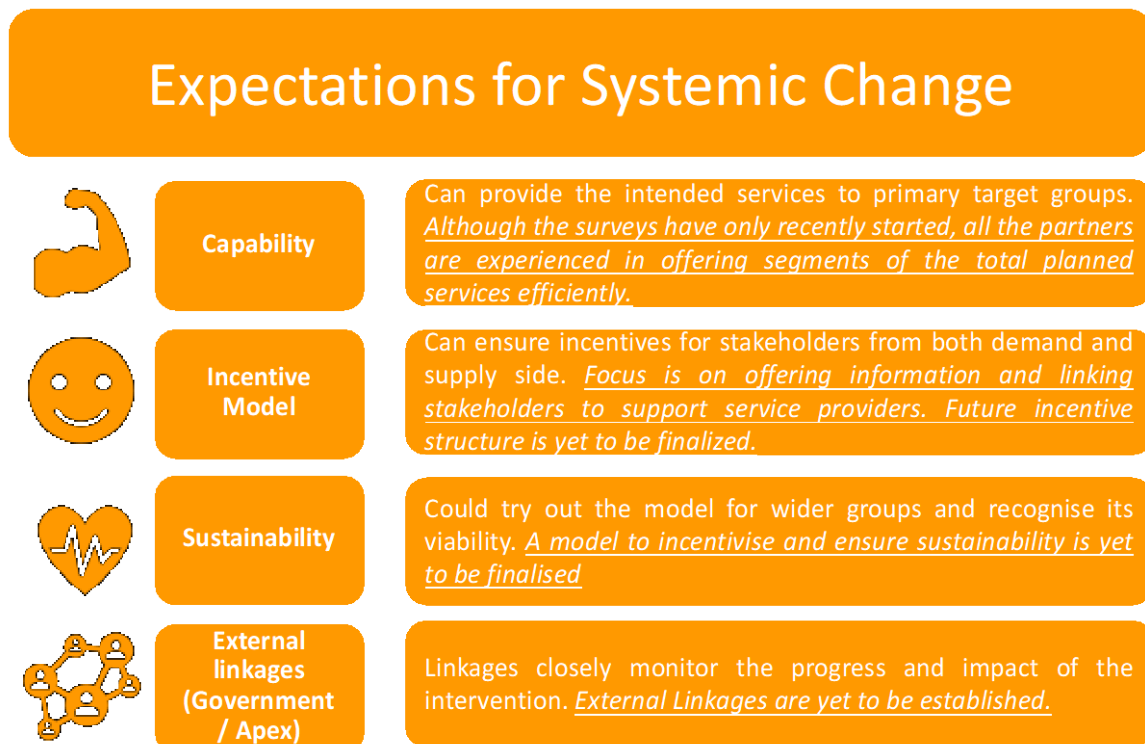
**Systems Change Framework**

The SCF explores elements of the intervention for sustained long-term impact and improvements in the existing systems that govern the industry or space targeted by the intervention. This framework identifies the ability of the intervention to affect system-wide change and how advanced the project is in the pathway-model described in Annexure 2.

**Systems Change Framework indicator table:**

Since the project is still at an early phase, the SCF analysis only identifies the expectations or indicate the projected state of the intervention beyond the life of the project period once effective components are identified for scale.

**Image 2: Systems Change Framework – Expectations of the ELEVATE worker survey to influence the RMG Sector**



## Expectations for Systemic Change

| | |
|---|---|
| **Capability** | Can provide the intended services to primary target groups. *Although the surveys have only recently started, all the partners are experienced in offering segments of the total planned services efficiently.* |
| **Incentive Model** | Can ensure incentives for stakeholders from both demand and supply side. *Focus is on offering information and linking stakeholders to support service providers. Future incentive structure is yet to be finalized.* |
| **Sustainability** | Could try out the model for wider groups and recognise its viability. *A model to incentivise and ensure sustainability is yet to be finalised* |
| **External linkages (Government / Apex)** | Linkages closely monitor the progress and impact of the intervention. *External Linkages are yet to be established.* |

**Capability**: The survey component began in August 2020, and not all follow-up services have been introduced yet. The project sends educational messages (five unique messages are sent – four on labour rights and one on child labour) directly to the phone numbers of the identified workers under forced and child labour conditions. The workers receive a call and an IVR message; these had been sent to over 1,200 workers by the end of November 2020. After the suite of educational messages has been deployed, the workers receive live calls from operators. There will be a final step of in-person outreach for the most at-risk or hard to reach respondents. ELEVATE has a proven track record in deploying Laborlink for auditing work environments in formal garments factories. BLF and Phulki are also amongst the organisations that have access and capacity to work in the targeted communities, that are hesitant to accept interventions by external actors due to their non-compliant business modalities.

**Incentive model**: The project aims to serve interests of the workers on the demand side and factory owners on the supply side. Workers will be provided with actionable information around their rights and ELEVATE operators will connect children and adults at risk of forced labour to services from where they can seek help. Not all follow-up services have begun yet. The project team sorts respondents into one of four groups, based on their responses: a) Child labour, below 14 years of age b) Child labour between 14-17 years of age c) At-risk of forced labour, above 17 years of age as defined by ILO d) Non-forced labour (though this does not necessarily mean they work legally and in safe, rights-based working conditions). As mentioned above, some workers have received follow-up information from IVR calls but overall, the project has not yet matured enough to be evaluated for service delivery gaps. Given that referral and skill-building services are likely to be different for child and adult workers, the project is trying to engage multiple support service providers and skills-building facilities to cater to diverse needs. In collaboration with BRAC, the project aims to generate robust evidence to support advocacy efforts for improving conditions in the informal sector; if successful, in the longer run, the project could contribute to improving overall labour compliance in the sector.

**Sustainability**: The sustainability model has not been finalised yet. In collaboration with BRAC, ELEVATE had originally planned to leverage the data collected for advocacy efforts to support bringing informal factories under labour monitoring schemes, including government labour inspection and private labour monitoring by companies. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, engagement with the government of Bangladesh through BRAC's advocacy efforts, factory remediation, and therefore sustainability model for this project may be slower. This being said, ELEVATE conducts over 15,000 audits a year, and about 750 of these are in Bangladesh, with the number growing. Therefore, ELEVATE can leverage this infrastructure to conduct regular monitoring of these informal factories. Both BLF and Phulki have stated that they have the capacity and set-up to move forward and continue to collect data by themselves from workers beyond the term of the project. The feasibility of this will be further explored in Second Look.

**External linkages (Government/ Apex bodies)**: At the time of the First Look the project identifying alternative support service providers since BRAC's timeline has shifted. BRAC will engage with government and non-government stakeholders, and they remain committed to using the ELEVATE evidence for advocacy efforts. Both BLF and Phulki are also capable of such stakeholder engagement/policy advocacy which they are performing for their other similar projects.

# Implications & recommendations

## Success stories

While the worker survey to detect forced labour and child labour was delayed due to the pandemic, ELEVATE was able to use the Laborlink tool to support the design and implementation of a COVID-19 survey for targeting vulnerable informal RMG workers for emergency relief support (to be provided by BRAC) in both Narayanganj and Keraniganj. BLF and Phulki helped deploy the COVID-19 survey which has further increased their acceptance and access to the targeted informal RMG worker communities.

## Enabling factors (Strengths)

Due to non-compliance with labour standards, the informal sector is sensitive in allowing access to external actors. BLF has been working formally in Keraniganj since 2015 and Phulki has established its presence in Narayanganj in the last eight years. They benefit from a high level of acceptance which is critical to work in these areas. Both BLF and Phulki have earned trust from the community by supporting the interests of both workers and factory owners. This foundational trust is crucial for this specific project. ELEVATE is experienced in administering worker voice technology and managing live operator referral systems. They are also able to reach out to at-risk workers and do high quality follow-up/linkage.

## Challenges

- The initial plan was to deploy IVR technology to conduct the worker voice survey, but the implementation team learned that for this target group IVR may not be the most appropriate approach. Workers found the questions hard to understand and the questions needed to be explained in real-time. Consequently, the BLF staff in Keraniganj went directly to the workers with tablets and conducted in-person interviews. Similarly, Phulki staff in Narayanganj first collected contact information from the workers, called the workers to conduct the survey, and reached out in-person to cater for discrepancies in understanding survey questions.
- The team is introducing adaptations in the implementation design as a result of budget reductions and practical complications such falling out of implementation timeline alignment with their key referral service provider, BRAC (due to the COVID-19 pandemic), which limited the scope of the initial plan. The project is looking for alternatives and now (mid-December, 2020), has shortlisted six organizations that can potentially serve this purpose. However, this has not been finalised till date.
- Due to implementation delays in 2020, intervention activities were delayed and/or postponed. Evidence from the project to support engagement with government and non-government stakeholders is delayed. This raises the question of longer term sustainability of the project given not all stakeholder needs and interests have been accounted for yet.
- The project is not yet sure about the continuation plan beyond the current project phase ending in June 2021.

## Recommendations

- As the IVR plan may be challenging in this locality, the project needs to think about appropriate alternatives for how the surveys can be conducted without face-to-face staff engagement. The promotion of the tool and awareness-creation among the workers about Laborlink could be one such alternative to ensure that workers become interested and engaged. To make the survey popular among the targeted community beyond this project period, there is a need for effective mass promotion.
- As noted above, currently the survey requires a high-touch support system that can explain the questions and record the responses. Engaging other government and non-government entities

effectively with the project can be one possible way for future anchoring of the project since they may already be present to provide this support.

- This stakeholder engagement strategy needs to be carefully designed and implemented to make the project sustainable beyond the project phase, particularly since this tool needs complementary mechanisms to act on the survey findings to provide services such as rehabilitation for children or better work/skill-development opportunities for adult workers. The project should search for actors who have the mandate or incentive to sustain the pilot project. At the national level, other organisations interested in eliminating child labour and forced labour should be engaged. For example, BLF recently organised a roundtable (not under this project) where government and non-government stakeholders expressed their commitment to eliminate child labour from these sectors by 2022. This project needs to be coordinated with such initiatives.
- The project can think of both 'pull' and 'push' strategies. To improve situational awareness, factory-level communication campaigns are crucial as factory owners have limited knowledge of labour compliance criteria. Informal RMG is not typically targeted by government and non-government actors who are working for eliminating child and forced labour from Bangladeshi industries. If these government and non-government actors can be convinced, the situation can improve over time. If the project can do so, it will be complementary in bringing forth results because they are the pressure groups who can push for change.

## Annexure 1:

Detailed Observations: Expectations based on the Better Fit Approach

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Transformative** | Maintains status quo | Would improve an existing service | Would create a new service, or substantially improve an existing service<br><br>*(This such tool is a new one and has a target to link the identified child/ forced labour with appropriate solution services)* | Would radically improve a service or create a new service – and could unlock change in other services. |
| **Inclusive** | Serves one group within the community | Considers the needs of excluded communities<br><br>*(Most of the workers are not able to participate the survey via IVR, so the project staff are collecting information from the workers by in-person interviews)* | Creates a clear role for excluded groups | Creates a role for excluded groups in leadership, planning and accountability |
| **Adaptive** | Does not offer effective measures of change monitoring | Offers some opportunity to measure and monitor change | Offers an opportunity to measure change, and takes into account for decision- making<br><br>*(The follow up services are not started yet but the plan and mechanism for measure changes exist)* | Results can be measured and incorporated directly into targets and a system established for results-based decision making |
| **Economic viability** | Identifies potential resources and sources only to circumstances in one community or locality. | Explores alternative resources and sources to make implementation more economic and may apply in some other communities. | Negotiates effectively to make the deals economic and timely to make it widespread and uses | Has been implemented in an economic and timely manner<br><br>Co-funding pipeline is strong |

| | Costs for further development are prohibitive | Co-funding is promising<br><br>(The existing modality of operation is moderately expensive and future co-funding modalities are yet to be defined) | approaches which are likely to be widely acceptable.<br><br>High likelihood of co-funding | |
|---|---|---|---|---|

## Annexure 2:

Detailed Observations: Expectations based on the Systems Change Framework

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Capability** | Can provide the intended services to primary target groups<br><br>*(The survey has been started very recently and the follow up calls are yet to be started but all the partners are experienced in offering segments of the total planned services efficiently)* | Can offer additional services related to the intended services with quality/<br><br>Can offer the intended services beyond the primary target groups with quality | Offers additional related services with quality/ beyond the primary target groups with quality.<br><br>Other competitors/ similar service providers are showing interest/ gaining ability in offering the intended services | Other competitors/ similar service providers are offering similar services |
| **Incentive model** | Able to ensure incentives for stakeholders from both demand and supply side<br><br>*(The focus is on offering information and link to the support service providers)* | Additional gaps in service delivery for the targeted groups are minimised to ensure more incentive for both demand and supply side | Other competitors/ similar service providers are showing interest in ensuring both demand and supply side incentives | Other competitors/ similar service providers are ensuring both demand and supply side incentives |
| **Sustainability** | Try out the model for wider groups and recognise the model as a comparatively viable one<br><br>*(Future incentive structure is yet to be finalised)* | Make the model their mainstream practice | Other competitors/ similar service providers are recognising incentive from the new model | Other competitors/ similar service providers are making the model their mainstream practice |
| **External linkages**<br>**(Government/Apex)** | Linkages closely monitor the progress and impact of the intervention<br><br>*(External Linkages are yet to be established)* | Linkages provide well defined support and incentives to ensure programme/ intervention success | Linkages encourage similar programs/interventions or linkages with other similar programs/ interventions | Linkages have made the intervention model a system norm |