

VF Corporation's Worker and Community Development initiative

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VF Corporation is partnering with CARE International and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) to improve health and nutrition in the supply chain through initiatives to increase health and nutrition literacy of management and employees of supplying factories, and to build capacity both within (in-house canteens and health providers) and beyond (local food vendors) the supplying factories. It is a strand of the company's extensive Worker and Community Development (WCD) initiative.



Scope

The WCD is mainly active in India, Bangladesh, Cambodia and Indonesia, targeting garment workers in supplier factories. This case study focuses on the pilot programs in two factories in Cambodia and five in Bangladesh. In 2020, over 6,500 workers were reached through health and nutrition awareness training and 77 local food vendors with hygiene and nutrition training in Cambodia. In Bangladesh, 29,800 workers had been reached by July 2021 through training and learning sessions on basic nutrition and through improved food offerings in the factories following nutritional trainings for canteen staff.



Motivation

VF Corporation has a stated commitment to upholding human rights in the garment sector. This approach demonstrates and delivers shared value through increased health and nutrition among the workforce, which leads to improved productivity. Additionally, it is a way to invest in the wellbeing of supply chain workers during the slow progress towards providing a living wage, as described in the case study.



Timeline

Both partnerships with CARE International in Cambodia and GAIN in Bangladesh began in 2019 and are planned to continue till 2022. Although there are plans to scale up, these will still have to be firmed up following further analysis.



Impact

In the past, the company has relied primarily on reported results from partners and from the factories themselves, but now this data is gathered by independent third-party assessors. The pilots in both countries show promising results in a sector where workforce initiatives are still scarce. In 2020, a total of 306,000 people in total were reached and the goal for 2022 is set to 600,000. The goal for the WCD is to improve the lives of one million workers by 2025 and two million by 2030.



Motivation

Upholding human rights is a core priority for VF Corporation and one of the reasons why the company launched its Worker and Community Development (WCD) program. The program goes beyond traditional labour rights to incorporate promotion of dignified work, good health and supportive communities. It is extended to all levels of the supply chain and includes a gender lens, which is particularly important when looking at health, nutrition and child rights. The return on investment is also compelling: **where workers are safe, healthy and protected – including through good nutrition – productivity is enhanced.** The program initiatives establish a virtuous cycle of shared value between business, workers and community, which helps to **ensure the long-term sustainability of both supplier and company.**

Moreover, according to the company, progress on achieving a living wage for workers in the supply chain is progressing slowly because of the need to collaborate with many different stakeholders. While working with industry peers on progressing living wage for supply chain workers, this is a way to invest in their wellbeing in the absence of living wages.

The project

After feedback from existing programs made it clear that one size does not fit all when it comes to initiatives, VF Corporation undertook an **in-depth needs assessment to understand the needs of local communities.** Over the course of 18 months, the company interviewed 5,000 workers across different continents to better understand the day-to-day needs of workers in the garment sector. This process highlighted three main concerns: **access to water and sanitation, childcare, and good nutrition** (with the latter being a major cause of occurrences of mass faintings in the factories). These three areas are not necessarily discrete – for example, good nutrition outcomes may be reliant on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) – and pilot projects have suggested **that holistic approaches are both more effective and easier** for factory managers to deliver.

VF Corporation began partnering with [CARE International](#)¹ in 2019 on a three-year health and nutrition initiative with pilot projects in Kampong Cham and Kampong Chhnang, Cambodia. The program had three aspects:

- Working with both management and employees to **improve health, nutrition and financial literacy.**

About VF Corporation

VF Corporation is one of the world's largest apparel, footwear and accessories companies, with around 40,000 employees and 1,400 owned retail stores worldwide. Some of the company's famous brands are Vans, The North Face, Timberland and Dickies. VF Corporation's global revenue was US\$9.2 billion in 2021.

- Upgrading health services provided through **on-site factory clinics/infirmaries** (for example, improving understanding of maternal nutrition to reduce maternal/infant mortality) and to establish better links to outside health facilities.
- **Improving the food choices** supplied by local food vendors, and work with them to **improve food hygiene.** This is essential as most factories do not have canteens and workers instead go outside to purchase prepared food or buy from small local vendors, which tends to be cheap but energy dense, often deep-fried. One example of the intervention is a competition to find the local vendor with the cleanest stall, best nutrition etc., with the leading vendors receiving a certification to put on their stall.

In Bangladesh, the company is working with the [Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition](#)² (GAIN) since 2019, a partnership focusing exclusively on nutrition. Here, the aims are:

- To provide **nutrition education** through trainings and learning sessions on basic nutrition.
- To establish **healthy factory canteens** or improve the offer where a canteen already exists.
- To **improve affordability and access to good nutrition.** Some workers living in slums are forced by landlords to buy from a specific (more expensive) grocery store. VF Corporation and GAIN are undertaking advocacy to change this. The partners are also working to ensure access to a 'fair price shop': workers (primarily women) can indicate what groceries they need from a list of essential items, which are then picked up for them during working hours. At the end of the day the workers collect the grocery bag and the bill is taken out of their salary.

¹ CARE is an international humanitarian agency with a mission to save lives, defeat poverty and achieve social justice.

² The Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) is a Swiss-based foundation launched at the United Nations to tackle the human suffering caused by malnutrition.



Impact

The WCD initiative is underpinned by a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) framework, which enables the effectiveness of WCD as measured through **assessment of output, outcome, and impact**.

In the past, the company primarily relied on **reported results from partners** and factories to monitor progress. Some encouraging results have been collected thus far:

- Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, over **6,500 workers had been reached through the health and nutrition awareness and training** in Cambodia. Since March 2020, **another 4,000** were reached. **Hygiene and nutrition training had been provided to 74 food vendors** based near the factory.
- The project assessments showed in Bangladesh has **reached 29,800 workers** to date. It showed an **increase of hemoglobin levels by 0.7%, a weight and BMI increase by 2%, increased nutrition knowledge by 50%, and a 22% reduction of anemia among workers**. The project also reported a reduction of contagious diseases in factories, reduced absenteeism related to sickness, and increased line level performance, worker motivation, satisfaction and retention.

The impact data will be gathered and assessed by third-party assessors. Outcomes of the projects will be collected through end-line assessments, which are yet to be done as program implementation has not been completed in any factory.

Challenges and lessons learned

Some of the challenges identified by VF Corporation are:

- **Understanding the daily realities of lives of workers** is a challenge but is also an essential baseline for effective action. The extensive global needs assessment on which the nutrition program (and WCD more broadly) is based, has meant that the intervention can be more effectively tailored to local context and needs.

- **COVID-19** has pivoted the training to being delivered online, and COVID-related information and education materials have been distributed through posters, hotlines, and videos. All training teams were informed of WHO guidelines and infirmiry staff were provided with virtual coaching support.
- An important learning is that, rather than starting from scratch and developing parallel systems, it is more efficient and effective to build on current systems, such as the existing health facilities in the factory. For example, the onsite clinic can test for anaemia and then provide relevant nutrition advice.
- It can be challenging to engage suppliers, who are already under pressure to deliver, and who must also provide some of the investment in (for example) any new canteen. If these programs are to be adopted either temporarily or permanently by the suppliers, it is essential to **build a strong case for management that this will lead to improved productivity and greater long-term sustainability**.
- Holistic programs that **address multiple challenges** through horizontal rather than vertical programming are more effective and easier for factory managers to deliver. For example, addressing both WASH as well as nutrition works beneficially, because nutrition outcomes are often reliant on WASH conditions

Next steps

This program is **providing proof of concept** in a sector where, to date, little has been done on nutrition. The ambition of the program is to scale up to 10 factories and 25,000 workers over three years, reaching factories in five provinces in Cambodia: Kampong Cham, Kandal, Takeo, Kampong Speu and Kampong Chhnang. The program in Bangladesh is aimed to be implemented across 5 factories, reaching over 30,000 workers by 2022. Expansion of the nutrition initiatives are just part of the wider WCD ambition: in 2020, a total of 306,000 people in total were reached and the goal for 2022 is set to 600,000. The program aims to **improve the lives of 1 million workers by 2025 and 2 million workers by 2030**.

More information and tools

VF Corporation, 2020 CHRB Supplemental Response

https://media.business-humanrights.org/media/documents/files/webform/VF_Corp_2020_CHRB_Supplemental_Response.pdf

VF Corporation, blog, 'VF Corporation Worker & Community Development Program supports workers beyond the factory walls' (March 2021)

<https://www.3blmedia.com/news/vf-corporation-worker-community-development-program-supports-workers-beyond-factory-walls>

VF Corporation, 2018, Made for Change <https://www.vfc.com/news/media-assets>

