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ATLA Global strategy report

Executive summary

As part of its 2030 Strategy, Better Cotton has committed to strengthen impacts at farm level across the countries where it works and is currently setting ambitious global targets in key impact areas. In parallel, Better Cotton is exploring whether a landscape approach can deliver better impacts and efficiencies, to facilitate an evaluation of the potential of landscape approaches in the context of the BCSS, Better Cotton developed the Adaptation to Landscape Approach (ATLA) project. The purpose of the ATLA project is to help Better Cotton identify opportunities to evolve its approach and systems to support work at landscape or jurisdictional level in areas where this can deliver the most value.

Key elements of landscape approaches are governance systems, participation and consultation of multiple and relevant stakeholders, shared goals, alignment, and agreement on interventions to achieve these, and accountability through monitoring and reporting on progress. All these elements are to be applied at the scale of a landscape programme. So a landscape approach requires managing resources at a scale that extends 'beyond the farm gate' and has the potential for achieving impact at scale.

For Better Cotton, some of the potential benefits would be,

- Facilitation of broad multi stakeholder support to address systemic issues such as decent work, water stewardship, soil health etc. This would be in line with the need for a supportive environment, as recognised in the theory of change[1] that supports Better Cotton's 2030 strategy.
- Potential new avenues for funding and investment through public private partnerships, thus securing long term funding to address some root causes of challenges in smallholder communities
- Facilitation of longer-term change by fostering ownership and accountability amongst local stakeholders
- Opportunities to work cross commodity, as many cotton farmers grow many other crops also
- Longer term efficiencies in monitoring and scaling

However, counterbalancing these potential benefits are also some challenges in terms of the time and resources required to initiate a landscape approach. It is also important to note that landscape approaches are expected to deliver performance outcomes in the long term, which poses challenges for brands and donors, who often want to see measurable impact in the short/mid-term.. When engaging in landscape approaches, it is important to create the awareness about the process, outcomes and manage expectations of the stakeholders.

[1] Roadmap to Change - Better Cotton

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As part of the ATLA project, two pilots were implemented in Turkiyë and Pakistan. The Büyük Menderes water stewardship pilot was led by WWF Turkiyë and the landscape pilot in Punjab province of Pakistan was led by the Better Cotton country team. Both the pilots were managed differently and had a different scope which offered a great learning opportunity for Better Cotton to adapt the landscape strategy. Some key learnings/observations from the pilots are:

- The choice of entry point is a key factor in shaping the development of the landscape initiative. Having a Better Cotton staff in the region and /or leading the program allows Better Cotton to be more involved and steer the initiative towards impact outcomes. However, this is a resource intensive model. Participating in an existing initiative led by another organisation, as in the case of the pilot in Turkiyë, limits the role of Better Cotton but offers the opportunity to scale across different regions
- Scaling up of a light approach into a full landscape approach appears to be far more challenging than initially anticipated. Supporting an existing MSP to address a single Better Cotton principle could be a credible and cost-effective approach for Better Cotton
- While the Principles and Criteria in the current BCSS standard are relevant at the landscape level, some of the indicators will have to be adapted to focus on landscape level performance.
- Monitoring and Evaluation of the outcomes should be recognised as a separate workstream in the landscape program, which requires dedicated resources and funding
- Private sector involvement is critical in implementing landscape programs. It has the potential to provides resources and a business case for integrating landscape approaches into sourcing strategies. However, at present, it is not clear if companies can realise added financial value from cotton with sustainability assurance at landscape level, over and above farm level assurance provided by the existing BCSS.
- Long term commitment and financial resourcing is fundamental to ensure the buy-in of the stakeholders and the successful implementation of the initiative. This is a prerequisite for any engagement by Better Cotton in landscape approaches both generally, and at the level of specific landscape initiatives.
- Core costs for an Implementing Partner like WWF to implement a landscape approach could vary between €50k and €150k/year, with a further 20-30% for external support during the set up period, depending on the capacities of local actors.

Key Strategic Recommendations for Better Cotton

1. Identify high impact sourcing regions in consultation with Better Cotton members, analyse the potential impact of landscape level intervention in these regions and prioritise investments in existing programs or landscape initiatives where this analysis is positive.

2. Better Cotton need not restrict itself to focus only on holistic jurisdictional approaches. In certain circumstances Better Cotton could also support (or continue supporting, in the case of Büyük Menderes) a ‘light’ landscape approach that focuses on one or two key impact areas relevant to the Better Cotton principles, identified by the stakeholders in the landscape.

3. Better Cotton should continue to play the convener role for the first year of implementation and invest in the pilot in the Punjab province of Pakistan, where an NSC has been established and

there is momentum and interest from the local public sector stakeholders. After the first year of implementation, a partner organisation should be identified to lead the NSC.

4. Better Cotton should continue to engage with the Büyük Menderes pilot in Turkiyë on specific issues such as . Regenerative Agriculture and GIS monitoring). This allows Better Cotton to evaluate the potential of GIS monitoring at landscape level and establish Better Cotton as a model for implementing Regenerative Agricultural practices in Turkiyë. Adopt a proactive approach to engage the private sector players (notably brand members) and public sector, on landscape approaches to create awareness and develop a value proposition to channel their investments into landscape approaches.

5. Explore pilot-testing of targeted components of the Better Cotton Standard System adaptation (principles and criteria, assurance, monitoring & evaluation and capacity building) to support Landscape and Jurisdictional approaches in existing pilots or new project/programs identified.