

## Call for Papers



BETTER WORK

### **Better Work Research Conference** ***Workers, Businesses and Government:*** ***Understanding Labour Compliance in Global Supply Chains***

**26–28 October 2011**  
**International Finance Corporation, Washington DC**

The last decades have witnessed a growing concern over labour rights and working conditions in developing country locations supplying for the global market. The Better Work research conference ***Workers, Businesses and Government: Understanding Labour Compliance in Global Supply Chains*** aims at analysing the impact of labour standards compliance in global supply chains on businesses and workers, looking at the “business case” as well as at the “development case” for labour standards.

#### **Background**

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A large proportion of production of goods and services takes place through global supply chains that span boundaries of nation states. The rapid growth of global supply chains has created opportunities for developing countries to participate in global markets, transfer and receive know-how, increase the skills of their workforces as well as foster higher formal labour force participation among women and men. It has also allowed global companies to meet market demands quickly and cheaply. But many acknowledge the potential downsides as well. Pressures on prices, quality and speed of delivery often translate into precarious and exploitative conditions for workers operating at the lower end of global supply chains in developing countries.

Such concern about working conditions in developing countries has spawned an industry of its own in corporate social responsibility and government initiatives aimed at improving protection of workers. Very few of these efforts have been rigorously evaluated. Even fewer have been considered in terms of the lessons they provide to public policy or development effectiveness. Perhaps surprisingly, even the impact of compliance efforts to businesses has not been well measured.

This conference seeks to take stock of what we know and don't know about efforts to improve working conditions and adherence to international labour standards in global supply chains. It is sponsored by one of those efforts, the Better Work programme. Better Work grew out of the experience of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Better Factories Cambodia programme in monitoring the garment sector in Cambodia under the 1999 US-Cambodia bilateral trade agreement. The Better Work programme was launched in August 2006 as a joint initiative of the ILO and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) with the goal of improving compliance and competitiveness in global supply chains. In addition to the ongoing Better Factories Cambodia programme, Better Work currently operates in six countries: Jordan, Haiti, Indonesia, Lesotho, Nicaragua and Vietnam.

Better Work strives to make a significant impact in the lives of workers, the success of businesses, and the social, human and economic development of countries. The programme also invests substantially in measuring the change it seeks to achieve. This conference will include specific discussion of results to date, baseline data collected and research plans going forward.

#### **Objectives**

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The Better Work research conference ***Workers, Businesses and Government: Understanding Labour Compliance in Global Supply Chains*** seeks to draw on analysis and experience from around the

world, including lessons learned through the first years of operations of the Better Factories Cambodia and Better Work programmes, as well as to analyse the implication of improving labour standards compliance for supplier competitiveness, worker wellbeing and broader development goals. In particular, the objectives of the conference are:

- to bring together rigorous evaluation results and analysis on labour standards compliance in global supply chains in order to draw lessons on key success criteria;
- to disseminate and discuss analysis of the impact of Better Factories Cambodia, Better Work and related initiatives aimed at improving working conditions, and to share information about data collected and the indicators that are used in measuring labour compliance;
- to engage in debate concerning labour rights compliance and broader social, human and economic development objectives.

### **Thematic areas**

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The conference will be articulated across the following thematic areas:

1. Labour standards compliance and the supplier business. How does compliance relate to the competitiveness of suppliers? Does it facilitate access to markets? Is there a subset of labour standards for which productivity gains are directly observable?
2. Labour standards compliance and workers. How do improvements in working conditions and protection of worker rights translate into benefits for workers and their families? What are the implications for worker mental and physical health, household income, education attainment of family members and other indicators of wellbeing? What difference does improving compliance make to worker voice, representation at the workplace and bargaining power?
3. The impact of Better Factories Cambodia/Better Work and related initiatives aimed at promoting better working conditions on compliance with labour standards, employment, industrial relations, worker wellbeing and broad development indicators, as well as on competitiveness, profitability, export markets and economic upgrading.
4. Implications for public policy and industrial relations. What is the role of Better Work and other private and multi-stakeholder regulatory mechanisms as instruments of global governance? What is the public-good case for labour standards that may not directly enhance productivity? Where does the business case for labour standards end and the public-good discourse begin?

Proposals of special sessions or panel may also be submitted specifying the rationale for the topic.

### **Guidelines for submission of abstracts and papers**

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Completed papers or substantial abstracts (3–5 pages) should be submitted in English. Abstracts should include title and content of the paper, name and affiliation of the author(s), email and addresses for the corresponding author and the proposed thematic area addressed.

Abstracts should be submitted to [betterwork@ilo.org](mailto:betterwork@ilo.org) together with a short CV of the author(s). The email should reference “Better Work research conference” in the subject line.

### **Deadlines:**

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Abstract submission: 31 March 2011

Communicating acceptance: 10 June 2011

Full paper submission: 31 August 2011

### **Funding**

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Funding to cover travel expenses for conference speakers and discussants is available. Submissions should indicate whether funding for participation is requested.