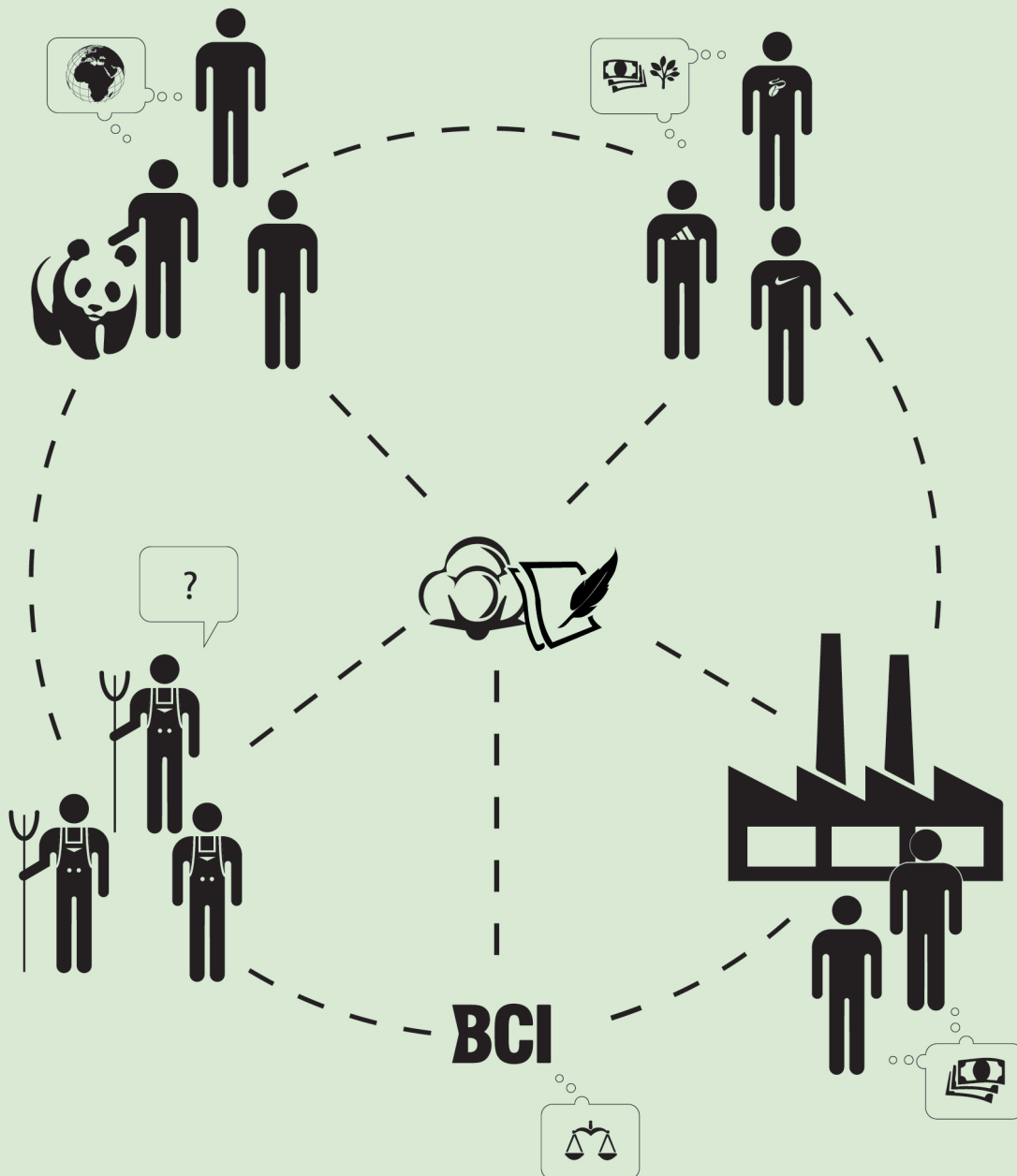


Inclusiveness in Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives

How should a Multi-Stakeholder Initiative strategically be set up and managed in order to create and enable equality among all participating actors?

Derived from a case study of the Better Cotton Initiative



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Abstract

This thesis is a single case study, which utilizes the Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) to identify favorable organizational structures and practices for multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSIs) for creating and enabling equality among the involved actors.

An inductive research approach is used to analyze BCI's organizational structure and practices, who has created sustainability standards for global cotton production, together with the various stakeholder groups of their network. The Actor-Network Theory (ANT), the concept of the 'plot', and the concept of framing and overflowing, form the theoretical framework of this research. It is applied in order to analyze and identify how power structures within BCI's network are identified, how stability is created and maintained, and what framing tools and practices are implemented to manage a large network of diverse actors.

In order to answer the research question the set-up phase of BCI is described and analyzed. Additionally, the same approach is conducted towards BCI's structure, activities, and organizational dynamics of today. The findings are followed by recent literature criticizing MSIs for not having an as inclusive network as they claim – based on dominant power structures existing within MSIs and emphasizing the exclusion of especially 'vulnerable' actors within the initiative. The criticism will show that BCI's structure and various practices contain many characteristics that counteract the criticism and how these structures and practices within MSIs are favorable to lead to equality within its networks. It shows that adaption of the standards to regional circumstances and the cooperation with local partners are of great value in order to establish a network that is able to respond and consequently learn from anticipating and responding to overflows. By doing so it allows the MSI to consider and incorporate multiple perspectives in their standard setting process and their decision making, enabling for a higher degree of equality.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives

The first Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives (MSIs) were a response to growing criticism towards agriculture's environmental and social impacts and have been formed in the 1990s. Since then, MSIs have emerged as a dominant form of governance in the early 21st century, with the purpose to set global standards for agricultural practices. They seek to create standards and a system that is more inclusive, in regards to standard-setting, certification, and auditing. Their claim of legitimacy stems from the balanced representation of the various stakeholder groups and their participation in the decision making processes, especially during standard-setting. In general MSIs are increasingly being seen as the most legitimate private rule-makers because they aim to coordinate the interest of all stakeholders through dialog and non-hierarchical (horizontal) decision-making process (Cheyns & Riisgaard, 2014).

A further cause for a shift towards MSIs, suggested by literature on global governance and private authority, is an increasing inability of governments to regulate economic, social and environmental life. The reasons are the growing complexity and rapidity of change, the transnational and global scope of economic activity, and the decreasing legitimacy of the state, affected by neoliberal ideology. Further, there has been a disseminative shift of production: from more developed to developing countries, which is moving beyond the reach of national regulators, and thus, it is calling for alternatives to the traditional regulations (Ponte et al., 2011).

NGOs and other organizations have recognized that private authority is on the rise, and they have encouraged companies to participate in private multi-stakeholder schemes to create global sustainability standards. Further, MSIs are set out to monitor compliance and certify good agricultural practices (Ponte et al., 2011; Cheyns & Riisgaard, 2014). A variety of commodities are particularly in focus, such as coffee, palm oil, soy, bio-fuels, sugar cane, flowers, aquaculture, and cotton. Private standards previously existed, but were criticized for their non-inclusive nature in an attempt to govern the sustainability of agricultural production and trade. Further, the criticism was directed at the exclusionary effects the sustainability standards had on marginalized actors, such as smallholder farmers (Cheyns & Riisgaard, 2014).

MSIs can further gain legitimacy by joining the International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labeling (ISEAL) alliance. It is a non-governmental organization with the mission to strengthen sustainability standards systems. All multi-stakeholder sustainability standards and accreditation bodies can become members if they meet the ISEAL Codes of Good Practice. The idea is to create a unified movement of sustainability standards throughout all standard systems (ISEAL, 2015). To put it simple, it is a standard for MSIs to create their standards.

In order to have a common understanding of sustainability, the following definition is provided. Various alternative definitions of sustainability have been proposed and many are based on the ‘three-pillar’ concept (Pope et al., 2004). Therefore, sustainability is defined as an integrative concept that considers environmental, social, and economic aspects as the three fundamental dimensions, reflecting that responsible development requires consideration of natural, human, and economic capital (Hansmann et al., 2012). Many MSIs base their standards on these three pillars of sustainability and they should be kept in mind throughout this analysis.

1.2 The Better Cotton Initiative

This research utilizes a single-case study in order to gather information directly from a multi-stakeholder initiative. The organization in question is called ‘Better Cotton Initiative’ (BCI) and is a not-for-profit organization that stewards global sustainability standards for cotton. The cotton that is produced according to the standards is called *Better Cotton* (BCI, 2015a). Appendix 1 shows an overview of actors who are involved and influence the global cotton supply chain, which BCI brings together. Within the supply chain, this research will mostly focus on the growers/farmers and the retailers and brands.

In order to have a better outreach, BCI has divided its stakeholders into four main groups, which are retailers and brands, suppliers and manufacturers, producer organizations, and civil society (Interviewee 2, 2015). The current membership accumulates over 600 active members. Figure 1 below shows where BCI’s active members are distributed in the world and how many members each stakeholder group contains.

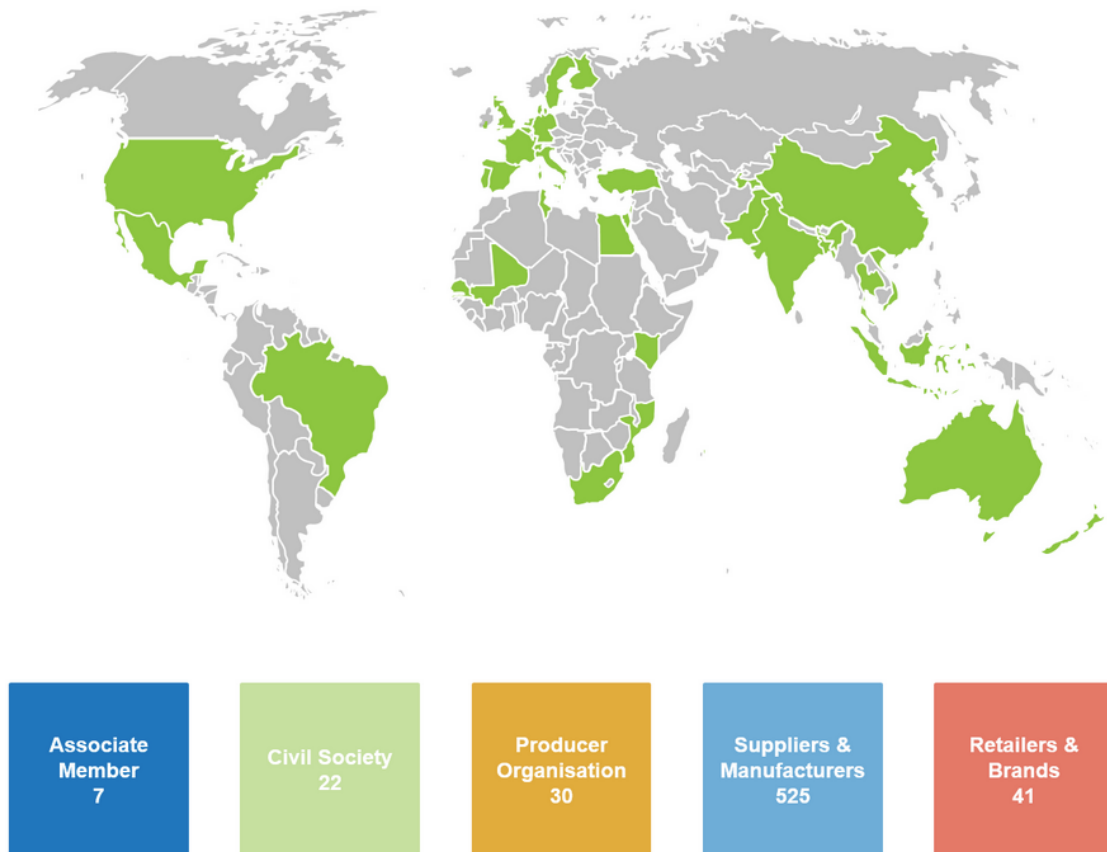


Figure 1 BCI Members and Partners Worldwide (BCI, 2015)
Retrieved on 03.10.2015 from: <http://bettercotton.org/about-bci/members-and-partners/find-members/>

Some examples of BCI's members are the World Wildlife Foundation (WWF), Nike, Adidas, Ikea, Tchibo, H&M, and Levi Strauss & Co. (BCI, 2015a). Additionally, BCI's benchmarked standards reached 1.3 million farmers in 20 countries across five continents, in 2014. Benchmarked standards imply that BCI is working in collaboration with other initiatives and national players, whose standards are aligned with BCI's, and who also produce *Better Cotton*. In 2014, *Better Cotton* accounted for 8.7 percent of all cotton produced globally (BCI, 2015b).

This development is in line with BCI's mission to transform the cotton production worldwide, by developing *Better Cotton* as a sustainable mainstream commodity. This goal is to be achieved by making “*global cotton production better for the people who produce it, better for the environment it grows in, and better for the sector's future*” (BCI, 2015b, p.7). To reach this goal, BCI has collaboratively worked with various stakeholders on the Better Cotton Standard System, which was implemented in 2009. It is a holistic approach to sustainable cotton production and covers all three pillars of sustainability. By complying with the standards BCI farmers achieve better

yields and more financial security, by saving costs and whilst improving the working conditions in their fields.

The system is set together by six elements that provide credibility and support to *Better Cotton* and BCI (BCI, 2015c). These six elements are:

1. Production Principles and Criteria

Providing a global definition of *Better Cotton* through six key principles

2. Capacity Building

Supporting and training farmers in growing *Better Cotton*, through working with experienced partners at field level

3. Assurance Program

Regular farm assessment and measurement of results through eight consistent results indicators, encouraging farmers to continuously improve

4. Chain of Custody

Connecting supply and demand in the *Better Cotton* supply chain

5. Claims framework

Spreading the word about *Better Cotton* by communicating powerful data, information and stories from the field

6. Results and Impact

Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to measure progress/change, to ensure that *Better Cotton* delivers the intended impact (BCI, 2015c)

A graphical summary of the Better Cotton Standard System is provided in Appendix 2. The elements will be elaborated on in the thorough analysis conducted later during this research.

1.3 Purpose of this Research

Institutionalist literature on private standards has mostly focused on identifying and analyzing the sources of private authority and more specifically, on how legitimacy is achieved by standard-setting initiatives. Further, research has set its attention on forms of inclusion and exclusion that multi-stakeholder initiatives generate, by looking more critically at MSIs and the manifestation of power structures through them. The recent literature criticizes existing exclusion of ‘vulnerable’ stakeholder groups, as smallholder farmers, through the misuse of power within MSIs, especially during standard setting processes (Cheyins & Riisgaard, 2014).

The purpose of this research is to create an understanding of how MSIs are strategically set up and managed, and how power structures develop within its network. Through a critical analysis of BCI and an application of the criticism towards MSIs, this research adds value to recent literature by identifying how equality among all stakeholder can be enabled with the appropriate set up. Therefore, this approach goes one step further than the above-mentioned criticism. It not only derives what structure and management within a MSI are more favorable throughout their set up stage to enable equality, but it also focuses on the active implementation of the created standards. More specifically, this research identifies existing practices and structures undertaken within BCI that could lead to more equality throughout its network of actors. Further, factors, as financial pressure and appropriate member leadership, are pointed out that a MSI, and the established entities within it, should constantly be aware of. This approach can be utilized by future researchers in order to validate and extend structures and practices that enable equality across the actors within MSIs.

1.4 Problem Formulation

Based on this reasoning following research question has been developed:

“How should a Multi-Stakeholder Initiative strategically be set up and managed in order to create and enable equality among all participating actors?”

As the analysis will show, BCI’s structure and various practices that are in place contain many characteristics that counteract the criticism of recent literature towards MSIs, emphasizing the exclusion of especially ‘vulnerable’ actors within the initiative. Therefore, BCI serves as an appropriate case company for this research to answer the research question directed at MSIs in general.

Further sub-questions were formulated in order to guide the reader throughout this research:

- How are strategic decisions made within BCI’s network and how are they influenced by internal dynamics?
- How are power relations within BCI set up and what are their strategic tools to manage the network?
- How can a strategic direction be communicated and maintained across all crucial actors in the network?

1.5 Structure

In order to answer the research question and to give the reader a better understanding of how this research is structured, a short outline is given.

The first section provides an overview of the reason why MSIs have become the most legitimate private rule-makers, and a short introduction to the case organization Better Cotton Initiative. It leads to the purpose of the research and the problem formulation. The next section introduces the methodology which was used to conduct this research and is followed by the theoretical framework. Both build the foundation of the research. The theoretical framework utilizes the concept of the actor-network theory in combination with the “plot” to analyze how power structures among the actors emerge and how both concepts can provide stability. Further the concept of framing and overflowing is introduced. At last, different notions of power will be introduced within the theoretical framework to analyze how the exercise of power can lead to exclusion in a MSI. Within the following four sections, BCI is thoroughly described in two phases and each is followed by an analysis, utilizing the appropriate aspects introduced in the theoretical framework. The first phase focuses on the process in which BCI and its stakeholders collaboratively developed the Better Cotton Standard System, and the second phase starts at the implementation of the system in 2009 and looks at BCI’s structure as it is today. Section nine introduces criticism towards MSIs that is based on recent literature and focuses on existing inequalities within MSIs. The analysis and criticism is utilized to identify which structures within MSIs are more favorable to enable equality within MSIs and what needs to be accounted for. The results form the foundation to answer the research question and ends in limitations and recommendations for future research. Finally, concluding remarks to this research will be drawn.

2 Methodology

When deciding on a research design, it is useful to focus on the understanding of the philosophical issues behind the aim of the paper. By following this logical pattern, the reader is more easily guided through the theoretical and analytical reasoning that underpin every scientific paper, until the answers provided to the initial research questions. The chosen positions in this research will be discussed, followed by the

applied research approach and method. At last the form of data collection and its validity will be illustrated.

2.1 Philosophy of Social Science

Within the field of philosophy of science, topics as “what is reality” and “what constitutes knowledge of that reality” focus on issues of ontology and epistemology (Blaikie, 2004a). *Epistemology* establishes what kinds of knowledge are possible and helps to decide how knowledge can be judged as adequate and legitimate, and defines what is regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline (Blaikie, 2004b; Bryman & Bell, 2007). *Ontology* can be described as the philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality, what exists, the conditions of their existence, and the way they are related (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008; Blaikie, 2004c).

2.1.1 Positivism

A traditional view of how social science should be conducted is through positivism. In positivism, objective methods should be used to measure its properties, instead of being derived by subjectively, through sensation, reflection or intuition (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). A positivistic research design incorporates the assumption that true answers exist, and the job of the researcher is to confirm or disconfirm hypotheses about the nature of the world. Alternatively, the researcher seeks data that allows the selection from one out of many posed hypotheses (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008).

A critique towards positivism has focused on its inadequate ontological view of the nature of social reality. The socially constructed world is taken for granted by positivists. Further, they construct social worlds that are fictitious out of the meaning it has for them, and do not consider what it means to the social actors (Blaikie, 2004d).

2.1.2 Interpretivism & Social Constructionism

Interpretivism can be seen as contrasting epistemology towards positivism (Bryman & Bell, 2007). It is based on an understanding of the social worlds inhabited by people, who, through their everyday activities together, produce and reproduce meaning with which they interpret the world (Blaikie, 2004e). *Social Constructionism* is an interpretive method that does not perceive ‘reality’ as objective and exterior but

as socially constructed. It focuses on the way that people make sense of the world, and appreciates the different constructions and meanings that they place upon their experience. Human interests are not considered to be irrelevant as in positivism but they are the main driver of science (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). A constructionist research design starts from the assumption that there is no absolute truth. The job of the researcher should therefore be to establish how various claims about truth and reality are constructed. It is a reflexive approach to methodology that is recognized as being particularly relevant for studies considering power and cultural differences (ibid).

For MSIs it is crucial to understand the varying circumstances that the various actors of their network operate in. It influences the actors' interpretations of 'reality' and, consequently, emphasizes that a MSI has to be able to respond and interact differently with each actor. The same is the case when conducting this research in order to identify how equality for the actors within a MSI can be enabled. Therefore, interpretivism/social constructionism is seen as most appropriate view to conduct this research.

2.2 Research Approach & Strategy

Throughout this research an inductive approach will be applied. It is a process in which generalizable inferences are drawn out of observations, i.e. observations and findings lead to theory (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Data, in this approach, is to be collected without preconceived ideas guiding the selection, and generalizations are derived from the data. These generalizations can later be strengthened, or the claim can be verified with further data (Blaikie, 2004f). Further, this research describes the initiation phase and the organizational structure of BCI, as of today, to create the best possible understanding of it. Finally, the gained knowledge will be used in combination with the described criticism of recent literature towards MSIs, not BCI in particular, to generalize how to enable and create equality within a MSI.

Considering the research strategy, a quantitative or a qualitative approach can be chosen. Quantitative research can be seen as a research strategy that usually focuses on the quantification in the collection and analysis of data. It uses a deductive approach to test theory and looks at the relationship between theory and research. Additionally, it includes an epistemological orientation of positivism and views social

reality as an external, objective reality. A contrasting strategy is the qualitative research approach. It usually emphasizes an inductive approach in order to generate theory and not test it. Interpretivism, as an individual interprets the social world, is the key orientation and social reality is viewed as constantly shifting (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Because meanings in qualitative research depend on social interaction, its data is likely to be more varied than quantitative data and therefore, also more elastic and complex (Saunders et al., 2016). Based on the above argumentation towards an inductive approach and focus on interpretivism and social constructionism, this research will utilize a qualitative research strategy. More precisely, a single-case study will be used.

2.3 Single-Case Study

For using an explanatory case study, following conditions need to be in place: the research question needs to be a ‘how’ or ‘why’ question; behavioral events cannot be manipulated; and the focus needs to be on contemporary and not historical events (Yin, 2003).

Based on these criteria, the research seeks to answer *how* a MSI needs to be set up and managed in order to create and ensure equality by analyzing how BCI is structured. Even though one of the sub-questions is a ‘what’ question its utilization can be justified because it aids in understanding the ‘why’ and ‘how’ as the outcome of this research. Data was utilized and interviews were conducted that did not manipulate any behaviors within the organization. BCI is a young initiative and even though some events that are considered in this research have occurred up to nine years ago, they are still of relevance for BCI’s structure and actions today. Therefore, the focus of this research is mostly on contemporary events and the utilization of a case study is appropriate.

A further reason for using a single case study is its uniqueness (Yin, 2003). Compared to other MSIs, BCI has invested a relatively long and intensive time period to establish itself as an initiative and the corresponding Better Cotton Standard System. Also, the clear involvement of all stakeholder groups throughout meetings and Regional Working Groups in order to create the standards is rather unique.

2.4 Data Collection

Within this research, multiple sources of evidence have been used and their respective advantages and disadvantages will be described in this section. The collected data has a direct influence on the validity of the research as will be discussed in the following section.

2.4.1 Documentation

Information gathered from documents is relevant to every case study topic. It can take many forms and can play an explicit role in data collection. They can be used to provide specific details to confirm other sources and are also helpful to deduct questions that can be used, for example, during interviews. Therefore, systematic search for relevant documents is crucial for a case study. However, the information provided by documents must be used carefully, as they can contain reporting biases (Yin, 2003). A key mentality of BCI is to provide transparency. Consequently, documents as summaries and minutes of BCI's Regional Working Groups, consultation reports, its organizational structure, explanation of tools, and annual and harvest reports were, and mostly still are, openly accessible on BCI's website. These documents were utilized to create an understanding of the organization and also built the foundation of the questions asked during the conducted interviews.

2.4.2 Interviews

Interviews are one of the most important sources of case study information (Yin, 2003). One form of conducting interviews is semi-structured interviews, which this research utilized. Multiple semi-structured interviews were conducted to mainly clarify questions and to gather additional information and insights to the obtained and analyzed documents. In these interviews a list of prepared questions – written in a so called 'interview guide' - are used. However, the order and the wordings of the questions are not strictly followed, but naturally arise along with the conversation. Therefore the interview process is flexible (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Two persons, one of which has worked at BCI and the other still works at BCI, have been interviewed within the research process, over a time period of one month. They were chosen based on their involvement with the initiative, especially during periods that are of interest for this research. Interviewee one was the chief executive of BCI until 2013 and played a key role in providing personal insights to the process of

establishing the initiative and creating the Better Cotton System. She established the contact with interviewee two, who is BCI's program director of global supply, and who has been working for BCI since 2010. Multiple interviews were held with her, in which BCI's current structure, dynamics and tasks were discussed. They allowed gaining a deeper insight of relevant topics, and the possibility to involve further respondents from BCI. However, after elaborating what topics were of interest for this case study, interviewee two was fully capable of providing relevant knowledge in all discussed fields. The interview guides to all interviews can be found in Appendix 3.

2.4.3 Secondary Data for Literature Review

Additional to the gathered documents and interviews, further secondary data were collected through an extensive literature review. These were mainly used to build a strong theoretical framework that aided in analyzing the case study. Additionally, a literature review was conducted to gain knowledge about MSIs and recent criticism towards them. Databases as Science Direct, Business Source Complete, Google Scholar, and SAGE Knowledge have been accessed to search for adequate literature.

2.5 Validity & Reliability

The quality of a case study can be established by verifying key factors (Yin, 2003). These are construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability. Internal validity is only of interest for causal case studies, as the investigation if event x leads to event y (ibid), and therefore, will not be considered in this section.

Construct validity in case studies concerns two issues. First, whatever is to be observed and studied must be selected and related to the original objectives of the study. Second, it must be demonstrated that the types of observations, which have been selected to relate to the specific objectives, actually do so. Using multiple sources of evidence can further increase the construct validity (Yin, 2003). In order to analyze how a MSI should be set up to create and ensure equality, BCI, as a single case study, is selected to identify its structure, the reasons why it has been set up the way it was, and the effects that it had. In combination with the criticism towards MSIs, perceived 'best-practices' and areas of attention are identified, in order to provide answers for the research question. By including multiple sources during data collection, as described in the section 2.4, the validity of this case study is increased.

External validity looks into the generalizability of findings outside of the case study at hand. The goal is to generalize a particular set of results to some broader theory. To reach this point, the findings of a case study must be replicated two or three times in order to test a theory. If these replications indicate the same outcomes, then the results can be accepted as providing strong support of the theory (Yin, 2003). Therefore, further case studies about other MSIs should be made to test if the case findings of BCI can be replicated, and consequently, supporting this case's validity.

Finally, *reliability* is confirmed if a case study is replicated and conducted exactly the same way by a different scholar, and if the arrived findings and conclusions of this study are the same as of the initial case study. The idea is to minimize biases and errors in a study (Yin, 2003). All gathered documents and interviews throughout this study, have been recorded and saved and, thus, allow further researchers to replicate this study.

The entire case study has carefully followed the methodological factors, in an attempt to create the best validity and reliability possible.

3 Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of how multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSIs) are structured. The focus lies on understanding how power relations are created and spread throughout the organization, in order to identify structures and practices that are most favorable to ensure for equality throughout the MSI's network.

Five theories have been selected, namely the actor-network theory (ANT), the concept of the 'plot', framing and overflowing, and notions of power. The Ant is utilized in order to understand how the network of actors is set up and how the roles of the actors are defined. It can create stability in the network and helps to identify the structure in place, and the power relations between the different actors. The analysis will be extended by the concept of the 'plot'. It attempts to provide meaning to the network by communicating a certain story or purpose and therefore, can add a further layer of stability to it. Additionally, the concept of framing and overflowing is discussed. It creates insights to understand how the initiative communicates the set roles of all actors throughout its network and establishes that all actors act accordingly. By doing so the stability of the network that was established during its set up, is further promoted. Finally, in order to better understand the criticism directed towards MSIs,

two forms of power are introduced that are utilized to analyze the lack of inclusiveness within MSIs. These theories and concepts aid to understand the gathered data and literature, which will lead to an expanding of the knowledge of how certain structures within an MSI can enable equality among its members.

3.1 Actor-Network Theory

Actor-network theory focuses on emergent social processes which involve, among others, organizational change and link together human and non-human actors in a web of relationships, called the actor network. The interests of the various actors within this network are translated and inscribed into social and technical arrangements, which seek to stabilize the network, at least temporarily (Holmström, & Robey, 2005). Actions that are taken within the network are not seen as an independent choice but as an action that is influenced by a diffused network (Pollack et al., 2012). According to Latour (2005), ANT aims to make the identification and deployment of actors in a network visible. It brings the actors who will be unified through the network to accept the unification of the collective. Relating the ANT to organization studies allows researchers to examine power relationships in networks of actors. It enables the study of how power emerges through organizing (Czarniawska & Hernes, 2005). In this perspective, social change is seen as an emergent process that is started and lead by an entity or actors who have a specific interest, as well as a specific goal, for the network (Holmström & Robey, 2005).

As ANT has been often extended, revised and reinterpreted, there is no unified body of literature (Cho et al., 2008). Therefore, this research is mainly based on the actor-network theory as described and applied by Callon (1986) in order to analyze how power relationships are structured without presuming fixed roles, interest and identities to the actors involved (Bergström & Diedrich, 2011). As defined by Callon (1986, p. 203) translation is a process “during which the identity of actors, the possibility of interaction and the margins of maneuver are negotiated and delimited”. During this process a certain set of actors deliberately try to influence and enroll the other actors to accept the initiators perspective of problem definitions and potential solutions as valid and legitimate, also those who initially might have disagreed with the new agenda (Callon, 1986; Holmström & Robey, 2005). The general process of translation is constituted of *four moments*, which in reality can overlap, as defined by

Callon (1986) – these are problematization, interessement, enrolment, and mobilization.

In the *problematization* stage, the initiating actors define the identities and interests of all actors who will be involved in the network. The initiators define the problems and suggest solutions on other actors in order to position themselves as indispensable resources to achieve those solutions. Through this positioning, the initiating actors establish themselves as the obligatory passage point for the problem solution (ibid).

The next moment of translation is *interessement*. The initiating actors attempt to enroll the other actors in the identity that they have defined for them during the problematization, by attempting to convince the actors that these interests are in line with their own. During this stage new allies can be won and the entities that are not enrolled to this point will have an increased pressure to do so. If the interessement is successful, it proves the validity of the defined identities and interests of the problematization, and also the alliances that are implied in it (ibid).

Enrolment describes how the actors are encouraged by the initiators to adapt to their role, by accompanying the interessement with multilateral negotiations and trials of strength that enable them to succeed. Additionally Holmström & Robey (2005) emphasize the centrality of motivation by introducing the term “ideological control”. It describes how the actors’ current perspective of reality is influenced and notions of more desirable states – and how to reach them – are introduced.

As final stage Callon (1986) introduces *mobilization* as a set of methods, used by the initiators, to ensure that the allied spokespersons act according to the agreement and do not betray the initiator’s interests. During this process the identities and interests of the actors are constantly negotiated and transformed. However, if the actors are mobilized, the network can achieve stability.

An important additional aspect of ANT to Callon’s moments of translation is the notion of actors who can be human as well as non-human. Non-human actors can be anything from devices and objects to organizational tools, rules and guidelines. Callon and Latour (1981, p. 286) define an actor as an “*element which bends space around itself, makes other elements depend upon itself and translates their will into a language of its own*”. Specifically, this means that for ANT humans and non-humans can and should be taken into consideration in the same terms (Law, 1986). However,

Latour (2005) also states that the equalization of non-human and human actors is just an analytical twist in order to demonstrate that there are no purely social actors or objects, which they subsequently act upon.

This research does not intend to discuss the equality of human and non-human actors, it is merely important to understand that non-human actors are a part of the network and its dynamics and, as a consequence, have an influence on actors in the network.

The ANT approach will be applied to the case study of BCI in section 4.2 and 2.5 in order to examine which actors were and are crucial in the network, i.e., in which way actors participate and what their roles are. In some cases the observations deviate from Callon's moments of translation but these will be explained. This analysis aims to demonstrate the existing power relations and structures of the initiative that lead to BCI's sustainability standards and, more importantly, to a seemingly functioning multi-stakeholder initiative.

3.2 The Plot

By applying ANT to identify actors and their roles within the network, considering existing power structures and relationships, the element of "meaning" that connects the actors within the network, is not addressed. As Hernes (2008) describes it, there is a "plot" that leads relations to being performed around an "inclusive whole" that cannot only be reduced to relations alone. It implies that there is an overall story behind an actor network that gives 'meaning' to it, and the actors involved.

The concept of "plot" is based on a chapter of Hernes' book "Organization as Process" (2008) and its goal is to explain and understand how actors in a world of constant change attempt to create and maintain stability. It builds on concepts as connectedness, reiteration, and continuity.

Before going deeper into the concept of the plot, there are two underlying key assumptions that have to be considered. Firstly, the world and everyone, and everything, in it are in a constant state of becoming and not in a final state of being. This affirmation implies constant change. Secondly, actors within this world try to create stability in form of patterns. This state will never be achieved but it is necessary that it is being attempted (ibid).

One key element which helps organizations to create stability is the activity of *connecting*. It is reached through the conscious act of organizing activities and is

derived from models of organizing which are held by the involved actors. Essentially, it is the foundation of all organizational dynamics. The act of connecting occurs during consolidation when established structures need to be stabilized or new elements are to be integrated. This can be the case when an innovation or something new is introduced to an organization. In order to support or challenge the comprehensibility of the innovation, rhetorical devices can be used in order to enable the actors to make connections of existing or proposed forms, which broaden cultural understandings (ibid).

Connecting on its own is not sufficient to create stability and order in a network. The successions and contrasts of patterns, defined as *reiteration* are also crucial. Order is brought forward from the past and through the repeated enactment of an established order, it can be upheld. Reiteration is also necessary to maintain the system of relations and coherence in the connection of heterogeneous elements. Coherence implies, that for organizations it is not important to stay the same over time but to rather to make the established set-up recognizable over time. If organizations are not coherent, they disintegrate. In order to be coherent or to have *continuity* in a changing world, there must be some sort of stabilization, which Hernes defines as the “plot”. The plot, which can be seen as a storyline, gives a sense to actions that are related and can be connected, while turning them into a meaningful whole for those who are involved. If it is perceived as sufficiently enduring for the participating actors, it can form a basis of action and facilitate the achievement of a set goal over time (ibid).

Through ANT the structure of a network and its actors can be analyzed and understood. It shows how various roles are defined and communicated to actors of the network in order to create stability. By adding a ‘plot’ to create meaning and understanding to the network a further layer of stability can be created, depending on the actors and the situation. The following section will focus on the concept of framing and overflowing. Framing can be seen as a tool to ensure that roles and actions defined for the actors are correctly understood and implemented. Additionally, it aids in helping the actors to understand changes these roles imply for their operational activities and in some cases also the organizational behavior. Furthermore, the recognition of overflows allows adapting and reframing if necessary. This is of great importance for MSIs who need to adapt to the various regional circumstances where the standards are implemented.

3.3 Understanding the Process of Change

3.3.1 Sensegiving

For every new actor that joins the network of an MSI, changes within their organization will occur. For some these may be only on an operational level, for others these changes can influence the organization's behavior. A commonly used concept to explain how change within organizations can be communicated is sensegiving.

Sensegiving was mainly defined by Gioia and Chitipeddi (1991) and describes how in situations of organizational change CEOs or top management provide their interpretation of a new organizational reality to actors within the organization. Thereby, they influence stakeholders' sensemaking and meaning construction towards their preferred definition. The CEO is depicted as an architect, assimilator, and a facilitator of strategic change. He or she engages in cycles of socially constructed and negotiated activities, to influence the stakeholders.

Corvellec and Risberg (2007) criticize the thought of "giving" sense to someone because this would lead to the assumption that sense has to be "owned" in some way. They argue that it can only be "given" if it is believed that sense is provided without any intervention of the audience. This acceptance, moreover, would assume that the sense exists before it is even communicated and acted upon by the audience.

Additionally, the concept of the loose coupling assumes that even if everything is set up in order for connections to take place, it reduces the likelihood to make them happen, by giving the actors the freedom to choose (Hernes, 2008). When connecting both aspects, sensegiving or more precisely sensemaking, is something that cannot be controlled. Actors may or may not make connections as they are intended to be made because it is impossible to assume how certain information will be received by others, i.e., how they will make sense of what was communicated.

3.3.2 Framing & Overflowing

Based on the nature of this research, the concept of framing provides a more appropriate alternative to sensegiving. It is used as a tool in situations of strategic change, by framing how the roles of actors are defined and, consequently, how interactions throughout the organization take place.

In order to understand the concept of framing and overflowing the meaning of externalities has to be defined. Callon (1998) describes externalities as an indirect effect of commercial activities on agents who are not involved in a commercial transaction. In other words, if actor A and B engage commercially, externalities are the unintended effects that a third actor C will feel. These agents (as actor C) are not involved and do not intervene in the interaction because they either do not have the possibilities, or they simply do not wish to do so. The underlying concept of externalities is the concept of framing, which allows to identify and to contain overflows. Hereby, overflows can be seen as anything that is trying to be avoided through framing or that was not accounted for during the framing process.

Callon (1998) draws on Goffman to define the concept of frames. Essentially, frames are utilized to establish boundaries within which interactions can take place more or less without being influenced by their surrounding context. The actors who engage in an interaction agree on the frame in which these interactions take place and which establishes possible actions open to the actors. Through framing, the outside world is put into brackets. But given that the framing process is rooted in the outside world, as by physical and organizational devices, these links cannot be completely eliminated. The same counts for relationships that do not only exist between the actors within the brackets but also to the outside world. Additionally, it is important to be aware that interdependencies within the frame do not only exist between human actors but, as described previously by ANT, are also set up by non-human actors. Callon used the act of signing a contract as an example to clarify the act of framing. In the contract, frames between the actors are negotiated, by defining all relevant conditions, and are necessary in order to reach an agreement.

Callon (1998) provides two possible descriptions of how overflows and framing could be viewed. The first approach sees framing as the norm and overflows as leaks, the second focuses on overflows as the norm. When seeing framing as the norm, overflows are seen as accidents, which can be contained and avoided by strong framing. However, this research agrees with the approach that overflows are the norm and cannot be avoided, resulting in a necessary awareness of overflows.

Overflows as the Norm

In this approach framing is seen as rare and expensive outcome that is costly and time consuming to set up. Overflows are the rule and its omnipresence is acknowledged by the concept of embeddedness. It formulates the hypothesis that actors cannot be disconnected from a network of interdependencies, of which they are an active part. The actors' objectives, intentions and interests are what make up their identity. It shapes their way to respond to a continuous reconfiguration process, which is closely linked to the constant reconfiguration of a network of interactions in which they are involved. Therefore, an actor does not only stay with a rigid set of attributes but constantly changes with the networks that he or she is engaged in. Considering that actors are not only part of one but several social worlds and consequently have links to the "outside" world, even extensive framing cannot completely detach them from these links. Moreover, these links cannot be reduced to personal relationships alone. Hence, the way that actors change and behave cannot be prevented and anticipated by framing, which, as a result, leads to overflows. As this thesis looks at MSIs that consists of multiple actors who are part of many different social worlds, this approach towards overflows is more suitable for this research (Callon, 1998).

Framing can again be demonstrated by the example of a contract. It provides certain actions that need to be taken and defines the conditions in order to monitor the proper performances listed in the contract. Hence, the contract aims to frame the interactions as unambiguous as possible and accounts for reframing procedures that might need to be implemented. A most decisive factor of the contract, however, is the series of tangible and intangible elements (as concepts, involved actors, materials, and objects) that help to create and structure the frame in which interactions take place. Without these elements, the contract cannot be framed and executed. Ironically, these elements that are intended to structure and frame interactions, forming more or less the substance, are also a potential source for overflows because they are connected to the outside world, which forms and influences them. They are not only resources but also intermediaries and represent openings onto wider networks, to which they give access. This was seen as a disadvantage by the first approach, which sees framing as a norm, but offers an opportunity in this approach. It demonstrates that no contract can or wants to suppress all connections and eliminate the dual nature of the elements involved. The heterogeneous elements that frame the contract, and its performance,

lead to overflows and it is exactly this characteristic that makes the contract productive. A frame that is totally successful would keep the contract on the same knowledge level as it started out with, preventing it to evolve (Callon, 1998).

Seeing overflows as the norm does not imply that the act of framing is unnecessary, but it emphasizes the need to be aware of the omnipresence of connections to the outside world, and the resulting overflows that are unavoidable and productive (openness to the effects of framing). Therefore, it is important to be aware of overflows and being able to react to them, for example by reframing in an appropriate manner.

3.3.3 Framing in “Hot” & “Cold” Situations

In “hot” situations everything is controversial, from the identification of intermediaries and overflows, to the distribution of source and target agents. It is an indication of an instable knowledge base and framing appears as a chaotic process, under these conditions. Experts will not be able to map out externalities but they are dependent on “non-specialists” who turn into key players in the process of knowledge production. The identification of externalities and overflows is attempted by “hot” negotiations among the actors.

In “cold” situations the handling of overflows is achieved more easily because most actors and world states are either known or can quickly be identified. Therefore, decisions can be made without much effort. The negotiations of framing the identified overflows are called “cold” negotiations.

Framing, and the process of identifying and responding to overflows, is based on communication and negotiation among the involved actors. For the stability and effectiveness of the network, it is important that all actors of an MSI understand their roles within it and act accordingly. As MSIs are active in multiple regions across the world, it is of utmost importance that they account for and adapt to varying regional circumstances. To understand how this process is carried out within a network requires an analysis of its structure and the influence of power held by the actors. Most of this knowledge can be provided by applying the ANT (as described in section 4.2 & 4.5). However, the notion of power render a particular significance within the criticism directed towards multi-stakeholder initiatives, of exclusiveness through

unequal exercise of power. The following section will thus elaborate on two forms of power.

3.4 Notions of Power

Power has no single “best” definition. It always depends on the theoretical context that it is applied to (Haugaard, 2010). For this research, and especially the utilized criticism towards MSIs, the political-economy approach and the post-structural approach are most suitable, and will be shortly highlighted. The first focuses on dominance that is achieved through political and economic power, and the second sees power as more diffused and established through norms and ideas.

3.4.1 The Systemic and Constitutive View of Power

The *systemic view* accounts for how social systems influence certain capabilities or inabilities in actors, based on broad historical, political, economic, cultural, and social forces. It explains how certain actors have power over others, based on the social system they are in. The *constitutive view* sees power as a form that works *through* people, who naturalize certain belief systems as the “truth” and define what is “normal”. At the same time, certain views and thoughts are made to be seen as unthinkable. Consequently, the people, and not the system they operate in, structure and influence what is seen as common sense and what is not (Cheyns & Riisgaard (2014).

Corresponding to these views of power, Cheyns and Riisgaard (2014) highlight the *political-economy* and the *post-structural* approaches which were utilized by previous authors to analyze sustainability standards and MSIs. It provides different perspectives on how power is linked to, and exercised through MSIs.

3.4.2 The Political-Economy Approach

This approach looks at the more traditional forms of dominance through political and economic power. Literature on private standards addresses how interests groups see and use standard making, in an economic political context, in order to implement their own interests. The relations of standards and standard making related to market dynamics and the influence of special interest, play a crucial role in these processes (Ponte et al. 2011). Standards have been examined in context of economic structures, interests, and outcomes (ibid) and power is seen within a materialist framework which

manifests itself, for example, through unequal access to resources, or the ability of transnational companies to push the cost of compliance with the standards onto the suppliers (Cheyns & Riisgaard, 2014).

3.4.3 The Post-Structural Approach

Literature with a post-structural approach analyzes forms of dominance where power is “widely diffused” and manifested through norms, ideas, and discourses. In this line, narratives can be used to reflect worldviews and to legitimize decisions that are made (Cheyns & Riisgaard, 2014). Applied to standards, constitutive and cognitive devices, as narratives, can be used to promote certain ideals towards sustainability (Nelson & Tallontire, 2014). The post-structural approach does not associate social structures with the distribution of power but with forms of knowledge that are framed as legitimate. Therefore, it challenges the strict view of interest proposed by the materialist field. It looks at what is necessary for the individual actors to conform to the format of interest, and how this format shapes the individuals (Cheyns & Riisgaard, 2014). A framework to analyze the constellation of norms, practices, and institutions that provide coordination with a direction and justification is called *convention theory*.

3.4.4 Convention Theory

This theory is based on the hypothesis that coordination between individuals is not only connected to the market coordination but also necessitates a common cognitive frame (Cheyns & Riisgaard, 2014). To justify the legitimacy of the forms of coordination Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) identified six conventions that characterize the common good. These are ‘*market*’ competition, ‘*industrial*’ efficiency, ‘*fame*’ in the public opinion, ‘*domestic*’ trust and reputation-based customs, ‘*civic*’ solidarity aiming at a greater equality, and creative ‘*inspiration*’. The various conventions give recognition to the different kinds of power that they can be associated with and they give them legitimacy (Thévenot, 2011). By using power, specific conventions can be pushed to some form of “normalities” and simultaneously other conventions might be disregarded (Cheyns & Riisgaard, 2014).

To conclude, the utilization of the ANT allows understanding the structure of a network, the roles, relationships, and purposes of the various actor groups within it. Furthermore, it shows how a well defined set-up can lead to stability within the

network. The plot can add a further layer of stability in situations of uncertainty by creating ‘meaning’ and a sense to actions taken within the network. Framing is applied in order to agree upon set rules and regulation that are implemented within the network and is additionally used to define the roles of the various actors. It directly relates to seeing overflows as the norm and creates the awareness of the need to react and adapt to unforeseen situations and circumstances.

The theoretical framework allows analyzing BCI in perspective to the research question. Additionally, chosen approaches towards power and convention theory, create an understanding of the literature criticizing MSIs, and more specifically, how exclusion and therefore, inequalities within MSIs can develop. By combining both perspectives, structures and practices can be identified that are more favorable to enable equality within MSIs.

4 Organizational Analysis of BCI

4.1 Creating a Network & the BCI Global Production Principles

The following section describes BCI in two chronological phases. The first phase focuses on the early development of BCI and how the network was structured in order to create the BCI System, which was successfully implemented in 2009. This stage directly leads to the second phase, in which today’s organizational structure and the key actors within BCI’s network are thoroughly described.

The description of BCI was divided into two phases based on its clear distinction of different activities within each phase. It helps in creating a better understanding during the analysis and the application of the relevant theory, and the latter discussion.

4.1.1 Founding of BCI

In 2005, the World Wildlife Foundation (WWF) initiated a roundtable together with other commercial and civil society organizations, which built the basis of the Better Cotton Initiative (BCI). In 2006, WWF employed Allan Williams, and shortly after Lise Melvin, who had no connections to the organizations that were already involved (Interviewee 2, 2015). It initiated the preparation phase from 2009 when the Better Cotton Standard System and the Production Principles and Criteria got published (BCI, 2015b). Allan Williams grew up on a cotton farm, knew the cotton industry,

and also developed Cotton Australia's Best Management Practice program, which has many similarities with the later BCI approach. This prior engagement gave him a large network in the cotton industry (Interviewee 1, 2015; Interviewee 2, 2015). He later became the BCI Technical-Environmental Coordinator (BCI, 2009a). Lise Melvin's expertise lays in managing international projects and running and designing dialogue processes. She applied for a consultancy position, advertised by WWF, and later became the chief executive of BCI. In 2013 she left the initiative. According to Interviewee 1 the combination of Williams' and Melvin's very different skill sets enabled them to organize BCI as they did. Williams brought the technical knowledge and the access to the industry network, and Melvin brought the understanding of NGO and business processes. The team that they formed, and which added more employees throughout the years, would be known as the BCI secretariat (Interviewee 1, 2015).

Initially their task was to approach people around the world that the steering committee (including WWF) pre-selected and considered as having an impact on cotton production. The goal was to engage in fund raising, find new partners and to create a process plan to improve the cotton production in those areas, especially for the farmers (Interviewee 1, 2015). In order to gain a diverse knowledge about cotton production, the idea was to obtain information and opinions from various actors involved in the process. During that time other organizations and roundtables – focusing for example on sustainable palm oil, soy, or sugar – coped with the task of accumulating expertise knowledge by setting up technical working groups. These groups were highly technical and content focused, and were structured around people who were experts in their field. Meetings were usually held in Europe, where specific sustainability standards were discussed (ibid).

In BCI's case Regional Working Groups (RWGs) enabled a more practical and direct insight to the production of cotton by gaining knowledge about the reality directly in the different countries. In comparison to technical working groups, not only experts are involved but also farmers, governmental representatives, NGOs, and other actors of the cotton industry and production of the respective countries (Interviewee 1, 2015). The focus of the initiative is on the cultivation of cotton and on working together in an open, participative and collaborative manner with local cotton farmers and other stakeholders and experts. The RWGs were used to hold meetings to jointly

define, develop, and support the implementation of *Better Cotton*. It helps to ensure that BCI's overall framework is compatible with local needs and specificities and recognizes that the ability to reduce the impact on cotton growing varies across regions and farming methods (BCI, 2008a). Therefore, the RWG approach provides a more diverse perspective to the entire subject that goes beyond only technical working groups (Interviewee 1, 2015; Interviewee 2, 2015). To establish RWGs in areas that are crucial to the cotton production, four pilot regions were chosen. These were West and Central Africa (WCA), Brazil, India, and Pakistan (BCI, 2009a).

The Steering Committee

Before elaborating on the further process of the RWGs, it is important to understand the organizational set up of BCI and how strategic decisions were made. A steering committee existed that ensured a clear strategic direction of BCI to achieve the goal of developing and implementing *Better Cotton*. As the RWGs intend to incorporate all stakeholder groups, the steering committee was represented by all relevant sectors and key actors, which were necessary to achieve BCI's mission. The five groups were Producers, Retailers, NGO's, International Organizations, and Others. Each group could hold a maximum of five members and the entire committee could not exceed a total of 20 members (BCI, 2007c). An advantage of having representatives of the various groups was that the actors have a focus on different issues and therefore a broader field of issues is taken into account. For example, H&M and Levis needed child labor to be addressed in the standards, and WWF put importance to address restricted chemicals (Interviewee 1, 2015). It enables the principles and criteria to be more diverse.

Figure 2 below shows a graphical structure of the steering committee.

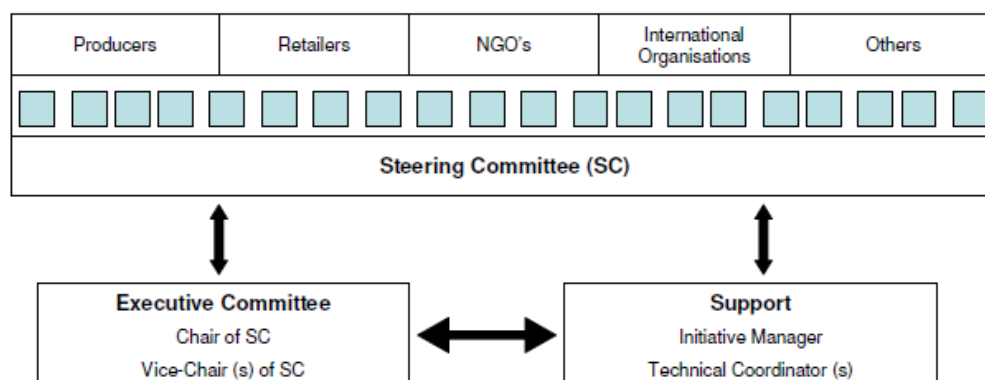


Figure 2 The Structure of the Steering Committee (BCI, 2007)

The specific roles of the steering committee included all policy, strategic guidance, and governance related decisions, frequently reviewing the improvements and changes of the principles, representation and communication, management performance review and oversight, and financial oversight and remuneration (BCI, 2007c; Interviewee 1, 2015).

4.1.2 Arranging Regional Working Groups

When establishing RWGs, it is crucial to identify key actors and find the best way on how to approach them. For this purpose, Allan Williams developed local contacts with ex-FAO consultants, local offices of Oxfam – an international confederation of organizations around the world, working against poverty–, local offices of WWF, and other contacts of this nature (Interviewee 1, 2015; Oxfam, 2015). Together with these contacts, Williams and Melvin intensively discussed whom to invite to the RWGs, while emphasizing that each of the various stakeholder categories needed to be incorporated (Interviewee 1, 2015).

For each of the pilot regions, Brazil, Pakistan, and India, two working group meetings were scheduled between the time period of 2007 and 2009 (see a more detailed consultation plan in Figure 3). An exception was West and Central Africa (WCA) who held three meeting and is set together by six countries that are, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali, Senegal, and Togo (BCI, 2008a). The reason for the extra meeting in WCA is that BCI had to hold a first meeting, to discuss the challenges that growers were facing, and whether they wanted to work with BCI and promote the concept in their region or not. Eventually, it was agreed to pursue efforts to forward the initiative (Interviewee 1, 2015; BCI, 2007a).

Increasing Awareness to Regionally Adapt

Prior to the RWGs in the pilot areas, the participants received a draft of the BCI framework and principles (also called version 0.5 of the global principles), which were used as a basis of discussion throughout the meetings. (BCI, 2008b; BCI, 2008c). The idea of the first working group was to discuss and create a shared understanding about the goals of BCI and its organizational structure, the role of the working groups, the draft of the global principles, and how BCI intended to develop *Better Cotton* in each region (BCI, 2007b; 2008a; 2008b). Additionally, cotton companies, the governments, the cotton growers' representatives, researchers,

intergovernmental agencies, and non-governmental organizations were involved in the process. Basically, it included all major stakeholders concerned with the economic, environmental and social sustainability of cotton cultivation (BCI, 2008a). The experience and knowledge of the participants was used to identify the current standard practices, and to discuss and receive recommendations on best practices and relevant tools in the respective regions about soil, water, pest and fiber quality management (BCI, 2007b; 2008b). Furthermore, the RWGs were intended to accumulate and use the existing knowledge and practices of programs that already existed and build upon that knowledge, in order to avoid a “reinvention of the wheel”. BCI also learned to understand that the applied practices and technologies do not only have to be varied between the four major regions of the pilot projects but also within these regions. As in India, for example, the same technology cannot be applied to four different cotton species that grow in 15 different agro-climate zones (BCI, 2008b), and emphasizes the need for adaption.

During the first RWGs, BCI profited from the input of the various participants in the workshop, but also the participants got to know other point of views and perspectives on the topic, at least within their regions. It gave them the possibility to share and discuss their views and reach consensus on possible best practices (BCI, 2007b). One suggestion was stated from participants, that brands should be present for the next and final round of the RWGs (BCI, 2008a).

BCI's Consulting Role during first RWGs

Throughout the first phase of the RWGs, BCI led a consultation process to develop and improve the draft of the global framework and criteria, which can be seen in Figure 3, below.

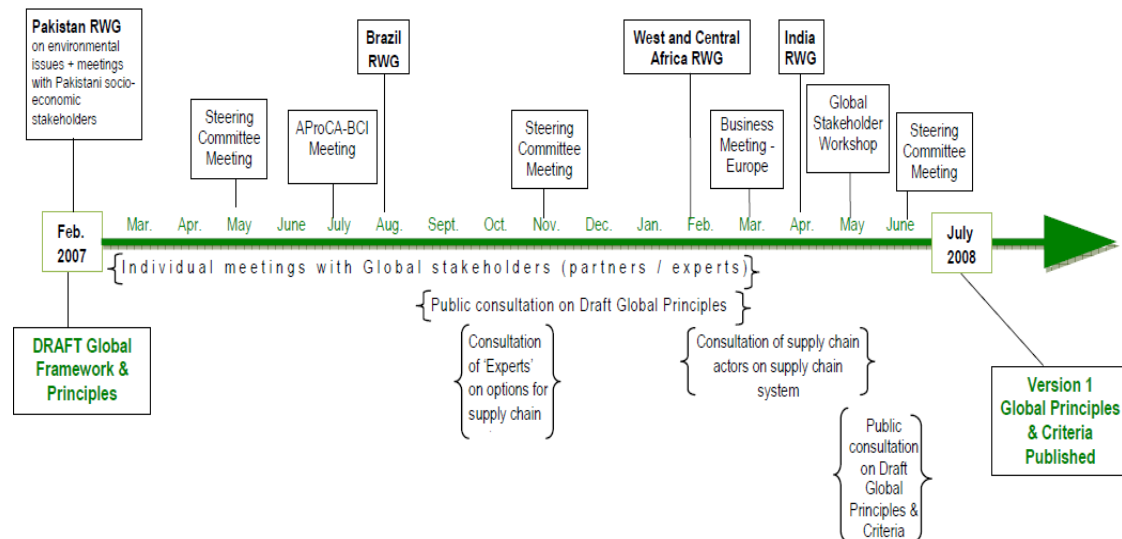


Figure 3 BCI Consultation Timeline 2007-2008 (BCI, 2008)

In addition to the input and consultation, several stakeholders were involved to develop version 1.0 of the principles, criteria and enabling mechanisms for *Better Cotton*. These stakeholders included the four RWGs, the input and consultation from BCI advisory committee members (knowledgeable individuals who provide advice and act as sounding board for the SC), Better cotton partners (organizations with an interest in the goals and objectives of BCI), various experts, and the public (through the website) (BCI, 2008c; BCI, 2009a). The consultation was supported through face-to-face meetings, multi-stakeholder workshops, RWG meetings, questionnaires, telephone calls, and e-mails. In July 2008 the global principles and criteria was published and open for public consultation for 90 days. Throughout the following year version 1.0 underwent consideration in the second round of the RWGs and by the advisory committee members, to develop a version 2.0 that would be used on the first field testing in the 2009 growing season (BCI, 2008c).

The time in between and after the working groups was used by BCI to further engage the existing stakeholders and build partnerships with new ones across the cotton supply chain (BCI, 2009a).

Revising Global Principles & Criteria in second RWGs

Before the second round of the RWGs every single member received version 1.0 of the global principles and criteria in order to discuss them during the meeting (Interviewee 1, 2015).

As mentioned above, brands and retailers were not present during the first RWGs, before the request by the other stakeholders to involve them in the second RWG

round was made. Some regions such as WCA, for example, had bad experiences with other organizations such as Fair Trade and Organic, which consequently led to mistrust towards foreign initiatives. Therefore, the farmers wanted to see brands and retailers being physically present to prove that they are interested and committed to the initiative (Interviewee 1, 2015).

As a consequence BCI made brands and retailers participate in the second round of the RWGs because they understood the existing mistrust across the supply chain, and the feelings of unbalanced power-distribution held by the farmers (Interviewee 1, 2015). Interviewee 1 (2015) stated that: *"we [BCI] said, everybody [talking to brands and retailers] has to go to one [RWG] and you have to choose which country you are going to go to. Here is the schedule, tell us when you are going. So we basically made it obligatory for them [brands and retailers] to go"*. Accordingly, brands and retailers were at that time able to communicate their perspective on *Better Cotton* and why they were involved in BCI. The openness and commitment showed their strong interest in sourcing *Better Cotton* and made all the other actors understand that the initiative was serious and real (BCI, 2009a; Interviewee 1, 2015).

The meetings were used to provide an overview of the BCI System, to identify and agree upon management practices and implementation strategies in the respective regions, and to ensure a shared understanding of version 1.0 of the BCI global principles, criteria, and enabling mechanisms (BCI, 2008d; BCI, 2009a). In more detail, the discussion of the management practices focused on the identification of any specific conditions that enable implementation, constraints that restrict farmers to use them, and the potential benefits of using them. The discussion of implementation strategies was concerned with the identification of existing activities that could contribute to and promote the growing of *Better Cotton*. Additionally, it considered how to structure the training of trainers, and discussed promotional activities (BCI, 2008d).

Emphasizing the Importance of the Farmers

When working with a diverse field of actors who have different backgrounds and varying interests and intentions, it is important to create some sort of meaning behind this complex network. As Interviewee 1 (2015) points out, one overall mindset across all actors does not exist. Some care about the environment, some only about economics, and others about reputation. However, *"there is the fact that you have to*

align them. It is like everybody is on a ship and they are all caring about something else but the ship is going in a particular direction and our job was to keep it in the right direction. So I would do things all the time to remind people why we were here" (Interviewee 1, 2015).

Therefore, they started every meeting with a story from the field, or with a farmer giving a presentation. The goal was to remind all the participating actors that these meetings were taking place because of the farmers, the environment, and the workers from the farms. The achieved decisions were to create change at the farm level. Each conversation that BCI had with other actors started on that subject, before other issues were discussed (Interviewee 1, 2015). BCI was aware that highlighting the importance of the farmers only influenced the decisions of the other actors to a certain extent, because their own individual needs still dominated. As Interviewee 1 puts it: *"At least they [the actors] see them [their own needs] in the context of the whole. So they probably are little less pushy, maybe a bit more willing to compromise, and hopefully a bit more willing to negotiate because they see it as part of a bigger picture"* (Interviewee 1, 2015).

Enabling a Balanced Discussion & Interaction among all Actors

When attempting to establish a network of actors with a flat hierarchy, the important actor groups have to be present or represented, and a dialogue has to be created in a way that gives everybody the same possibility to be heard. It requires engagement of the individual actors and trust among the participating actors. BCI faced various challenges in the attempt to incorporate smallholder farmers already in the RWGs. It started with the difficulty to find farmers, or representatives of the farmers, who might be able to have this type of conversation. Additionally, it had to be considered if they even wanted to come or were allowed to come to meetings, based on gender issues, etc. One possibility of enabling more farmers to participate in the meetings was by covering the costs of producers coming to the meetings, and erase financial constraints (Interviewee 1, 2015).

A further difficulty was to make everybody feel comfortable enough to speak out in a board meeting. Some politically inexperienced actors, and especially women from specific cultures, could have felt uncomfortable to speak. As anything new, it took time for people to get used to the process and to the fact that anybody could say what was on their mind. Trust had to be created and a high level of process detail had to be

maintained (Interviewee 1, 2015). BCI always prioritized to get the producers engaged even though it took them a lot of effort to get the producers to come to the meetings, to get them to speak out, and get them to engage (ibid). A method that Interviewee 1 followed throughout every meeting was to strategically think of who she wanted to let speak first because she knew what everybody thought about a particular topic, based on prior conversations she had with each individual actor. Additionally, she would let those actors go first and second, etc., who had a more positive and holistic thinking, which would normally set the tone for the rest of the discussion (ibid). It necessitates the ability to see who has a more active or passive behavior and to give each actor and each group the opportunity to equally participate in the process.

In general, BCI considered the role of each actor and tailored their engagement according to actors' supply chain. The actors were asked to contribute something different to the network, depending on their position in the supply chain and their expertise. For example, farmers and implementation partners can provide regional specific knowledge considering the cotton, and businesses would be able to offer their economic and commercial expertise. It was based on BCI's judgment and discussions with others to decide what in particular each actor could be able to contribute to the network, and to have an open dialogue, rather than having a powerful entity telling others what to do. Therefore, the communication was distinctively adapted to the different actors within the supply chain (Interviewee 1, 2015).

Finalizing Version 2.0 of the Global Principles

After the second round of the RWGs was held, feedback and improvements on version 1.0 of the global principles and criteria was taken into account. The revised version was sent by e-mail to all stakeholders and was publically available on the websites for comments (Interviewee 1, 2015). Additionally, BCI had hired the international not-for-profit organization CABI, to prepare a report on the available best-practices on cotton production, especially in BCI's focus regions. The intention was to have a better awareness and understanding of the field activities, which directly impact the cotton production. These best practices were compared to conventional cotton production and assessed to BCI's production principles. It revealed various projects and programs that addressed issues of environmental and/or

social sustainability, providing benefits, which were environmental, social or economic (Page & Ritchie, 2009).

A final global workshop with donors, brands and NGOs was held to give these actors the possibility to comment on the revision of the Global Principles and Criteria. Based on the accumulated feedback, a final version went to the steering committee. Before it was approved and signed off, the steering committee was changed to the BCI council and BCI was officially established as an independent organization, in July, 2009. At this point in time the Better Cotton Production Principles and Criteria were published and the implementation phase began (Interviewee 1, 2015; BCI, 2015d).

In 2010 the first *Better Cotton* was harvested and the implementation phase lasted until 2012. In this period BCI tested and improved the concept of *Better Cotton* in order to prepare for further expansion. The focus until 2015 was to increase supply and demand by gaining more members throughout all levels of the supply chain (BCI, 2015d). As a result BCI reached 1.3 million farmers in 20 countries around the world and has a membership of over 450 organizations (BCI, 2015b).

4.2 Creating Stability in the Network

As BCI switched to an established independent organization, its own purpose and focus changed, from setting up an organization, to implementing the structure and growing on it. This analysis will focus on the described first phase and draws on relevant aspects of the theoretical frameworks. These include Callon's moments of translation and the utilization of the plot.

4.2.1 Defining the Actors' Roles & growing Centrality of the Secretariat

Even though WWF initially started what later became BCI, and until today is one of its members, the BCI secretariat managed to establish itself as an independent entity within the network. The *problematization* stage started when Williams and Melvin engaged with multiple actors to identify crucial stakeholders for understanding and making changes in the cotton production. Although there was no clear goal to begin with, it was certain that a diverse set of various stakeholders should be involved and that all actors should be treated equally. Varying from Callon's *problematization* stage, the initiating actors, Williams and Melvin, did not singularly define the identities and interest of all actors. However, they were the ones bringing all actors together and creating communication and collaboration among them. It made the duo,

and later the secretariat, crucial for the network and enabled them to establish themselves as an obligatory passage point. Throughout the creation and utilization of the RWGs and other activities, as meetings of the steering committee and consultations, not only BCI's goal became clearer but also the roles of the actors were collaboratively discussed and agreed upon. By agreeing on the various roles, *interessement* occurred, as defined by Callon. The roles of each actor group, that became more specific throughout the process, were simultaneously accepted by the actors and therefore, also validated the interest of the *problematization*. In BCI's case, these two stages go almost hand in hand, as the precise goal of the initiative and the roles of the actors are discussed and accepted in the same process. The most clearly defined role, and also one of the most crucial actor groups in the network, is the role of the farmers. Tools and best practices were thoroughly discussed and revised, based on the three pillars of sustainability, in order to ensure the well-being and interest of the farmers. A further important factor was having working groups in multiple regions in order to adapt decisions to circumstances on a regional level. If the farmers would have felt mistreated or would not have been able to see positive change through the implementation of the standards, then, the initiative would have failed.

The stages of *enrolment* and *mobilization* to this point in time can also be identified. The actors start to adopt their role as defined during the *problematization* stage and the spokespersons of organizations that are actively engaged in the initiative, act according to the agreement. However, these two stages become more evident and relevant after the BCI standards were initiated and the actors' roles were clearly defined and incorporated. Therefore, they will be discussed in more depth after BCI's structure and operations today are described in section 4.5.

4.2.2 Utilizing the Farmer's Perspective to provide Meaning

A method that is worth pointing out is to involve the farmers before every meeting that BCI organized. It can be connected to the concept of the plot, as many parallels can be seen that helped to provide the network with a certain extent of "meaning". For all actors, joining the network of BCI was something new. The activity of *connecting* was used by BCI, by communicating why BCI was being established and why each participating actor is important. By having a farmer introduce a relevant topic at the beginning of every meeting, or showing a story from the field, *reiteration* and *continuity* were created throughout all meetings. Even though, as Interviewee 1

mentioned, the focus of each actor was still on his or her individual need, the farmers' perspective was constantly present in one way or another. Therefore, the incorporation of the stories provided the entire network with a certain degree of direction. As a result, it gave a certain stability to the initiative, which acknowledged the farmers' view in its decision making process. It led to a joint agreement on the Global Production Principles.

To conclude the 'first phase', decisions were reached collaboratively among the participating actors and therefore, do not completely align with Callon's moments of translation. However, the results are similar because the extensive process of creating the standards and facilitating the involvement of the various actor groups is one of the reasons that BCI was able to reach an indispensable position within the network. As a MSI's purpose is to create equality among the actors and to have a flat hierarchy, BCI's role as a single decision maker would have been inappropriate. Further, it is crucial that BCI was able to make the various actors come together and interact. As an example, by giving brands and retailers the opportunity to actively participate in the second round of the RWGs, the producers and farmers started believing in the legitimacy and abilities of the initiative. This collaborative interaction fostered the foundation of the initiative and, as a result, also its stability. It is of utmost importance that everybody within the network is able to see himself and others as equal, and it is a factor that needed to be established and constantly communicated by BCI.

4.3 BCI's Organizational Actors and Operations Today

This section will introduce the entities and programs in place, which this research took into account, and their roles within BCI's organizational structure. It includes the BCI council, who make strategic decisions and consist of the various stakeholder groups; the BCI secretariat, which is in charge of the operational activities; the implementation partners (IPs), who work with farmers in order to implement the standards; the assurance program, safeguarding the effectiveness of the standards; and the Fast Track Program/Growth Innovation Fund, that is largely responsible of the financial funding of BCI. After the activities and operations are described, a further analysis, utilizing the theoretical framework, will be conducted. The analysis using the ANT will be extended and finalized. Additionally, the use of framing and the consideration of overflows will be contextualized and verified.

4.3.1 BCI Council – The Strategic Decision-Makers

As the BCI council replaced the steering committee its roles are very similar (Interviewee 1, 2015). It governs BCI and is the core of strategic decision-making (BCI, 2013a). The council consists of four membership groups, which are Producer Organizations, Suppliers and Manufacturers, Retailers and Brands, and Civil Society. Each category holds three seats and elections for new council members take place every two years during BCI's annual general assembly (BCI, 2013a; BCI, 2015e). The individuals, who are elected by all of BCI's members, have the responsibility to communicate with the members within the category they represent, in order to accumulate and understand how and what to represent for their specific group. Additionally, the contact details of the council members are published and BCI encourages members to approach the relevant council members with specific issues that then can be brought up in the council (Interviewee 2, 2015). The idea is to have an approachable council that can adequately represent the interests of the various groups, and as a whole, represent BCI.

If critical issues arise, BCI usually runs consultation and working groups beyond council to enable participation from actors that may not be represented on council (Interviewee 2, 2015).

4.3.2 BCI Secretariat – The Connector & Communicator

As the council represents BCI's strategic body, the BCI secretariat is responsible for all operational decisions. In a broad sense, they are a convener and quality assurer, whose task it is to ensure integrity of the Better Cotton System and integrity in all actions taken by the initiative (Interviewee 1, 2015; BCI, 2011). It sees that the BCI standards are implemented according to its rules and that the assurance program is delivered as it should be. Therefore, BCI is a third party that gives credibility to the product *Better Cotton*, which companies are trading and are making claims on. Further, it stimulates the supply and demand of *Better Cotton* across the supply chain but it does not get involved in actual commercial negotiations between the actors. Decisions that are linked to strategy and have strategic significance have to be taken to the council for approval. Operational decisions that are aligned with previously approved strategy will merely be submitted to the council for information (Interviewee 2, 2015).

A crucial factor that has to be considered as one of BCI's responsibilities is the ability to listen and engage with a vast amount of very different actors within the network. According to Interviewee 2 (2015), BCI's stakeholder engagement strategy is built on identifying and mapping stakeholders within the network based on their organization, their role in the system, and the level of engagement between the stakeholder and BCI. Here a difference is made between stakeholders that need to be consulted and stakeholders that need to be informed. Even more important is to make all stakeholders see and understand that they are given the opportunity to communicate their opinion, and that it is always considered. If BCI rejects any contribution that was made, it is made sure that an explanation of a particular decision is given.

"The philosophy is if everyone is happy then we have done something wrong. When everyone is deeply unhappy, of course it is not workable. [...] As long as everyone can live with it [the decision], and as long as a suitable section of stakeholders are slightly uncomfortable then we are probably doing the right thing. We are about creating change, and change is always uncomfortable" (Interviewee 2, 2015).

The key is to always provide transparency and to communicate. Stakeholders need to understand a made decision and do not necessarily have to fully agree with it (Interviewee 2, 2015).

4.3.3 Implementation Partners – The Facilitators & Adapters

An important criterion for BCI's operations is to consider and adapt to the regional differences. Therefore, BCI uses local Implementation Partners (IPs) whose role is to use their expertise in agricultural extension to create an enabling environment in a given country or project area to support farmers in participating in the Better Cotton Standard System. Based on the Better Cotton Production Principles and Criteria, the IPs organize and train smallholder and medium sized farms to grow *Better Cotton*. The smallholder farmers are educated in learning groups of approximately 35 farmers that meet to learn from each other and receive training from IPs. A collection of learning groups and medium farms (between 3.500 smallholder or 100 medium sized farmers) is called a producer unit. Each producer unit has an internal management system and its own manager. Large farmers that have the necessary structure and the manpower to support themselves can have their own grower association to run the program (BCI, 2012; BCI, 2015b; Interviewee 2, 2015). By using a cascade system

BCI or chosen partner organizations train mostly producer units or high-level managers to become IPs, who then are able to train the farmers (Interviewee 2, 2015). Theoretically, every BCI member can be trained to be an IP (BCI, 2013b). These so called ‘train-the-trainer’ programs use active, participatory learning with a technical focus to create a pool of qualified trainers. The IPs are trained to know the content of the standard system, the reporting structure throughout the initiative, and how to organize the farmers. Afterwards, it is up to the IPs to use their local expertise to determine what the focus should be on beyond the basic of the standards. It could be on social issues, or more advanced water management practices. Whatever the IPs decide on, it is their task to develop national guidance material and establish a training that teaches farmers how to best implement the Better Cotton System locally (BCI, 2014b; Interviewee 2, 2015). Different methodologies and materials are used that correspond to the needs of the farmers. Examples are decent work programs that are podcasted on local radio, decent work committees in villages that address social issues with entire communities, or wall chalking in villages that describe good practices or raise awareness of harmful impact (see Appendix 4 and 5 for examples) (BCI, 2012). If BCI spots a good practice by one IP they make sure that other IPs are able to benefit from that knowledge with examples of best practice. On the other side IPs are also assessed for their performance and recommendations are made how they can improve (Interviewee 2, 2015).

To conclude, the essential role of the IP is to provide a better form of outreach expertise and also experience. They enable BCI to affectively reach a large amount of farmers throughout the world and are a critical actor within the entire system (ibid).

4.3.4 Assurance Program - Securing Quality, Credibility, & Improvement

The Assurance Program is a critical component of the Better Cotton System and is a tool to assess if farmers can grow and sell *Better Cotton*. Part of the program is the Better Cotton Performance Scale, which combines minimum requirements and improvement requirements (BCI, 2014a). A summary of the various requirements can be seen in Figure 4.

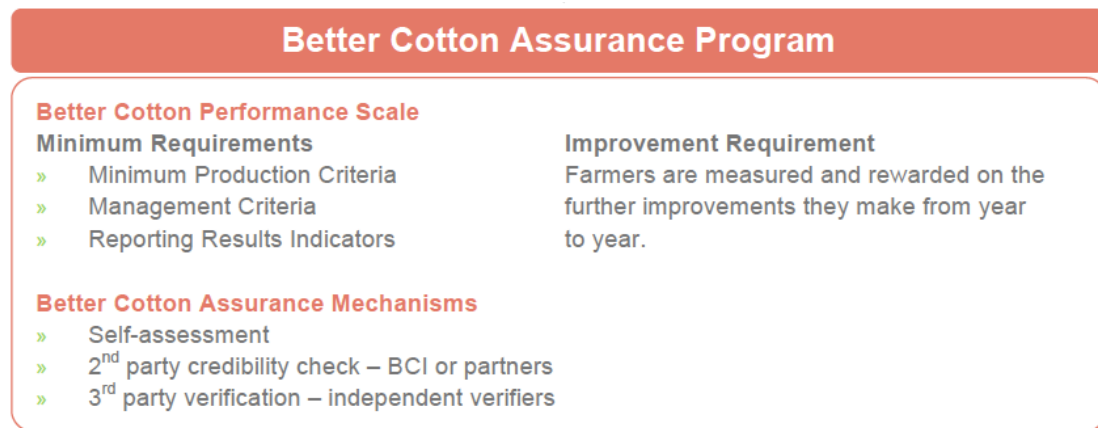


Figure 4 Better Cotton Assurance Program (BCI, 2013)

In order to receive a license of growing *Better Cotton*, the minimum requirements have to be reached. Simultaneously, farmers can develop further through improvement requirements. These are measured through a questionnaire, aiming to tell the ongoing story of how things are changing for the better. The higher the score, the longer a farmer can extend his license (BCI, 2013b). What the exact requirements will be for the next harvesting season, is agreed upon within each producer unit (for smallholders and medium farms) or by the individual large farms. Everyone within one producer unit is assessed on the same criteria (Interviewee 1, 2015; Interviewee 2, 2015). Further, to ensure credibility the assurance program builds on three complementary mechanisms, called the assurance mechanisms. These are the self-assessment at producer unit or individual level, credibility checks by BCI or organizational partners (also IPs), and third party verification by independent verifiers (BCI, 2013b).

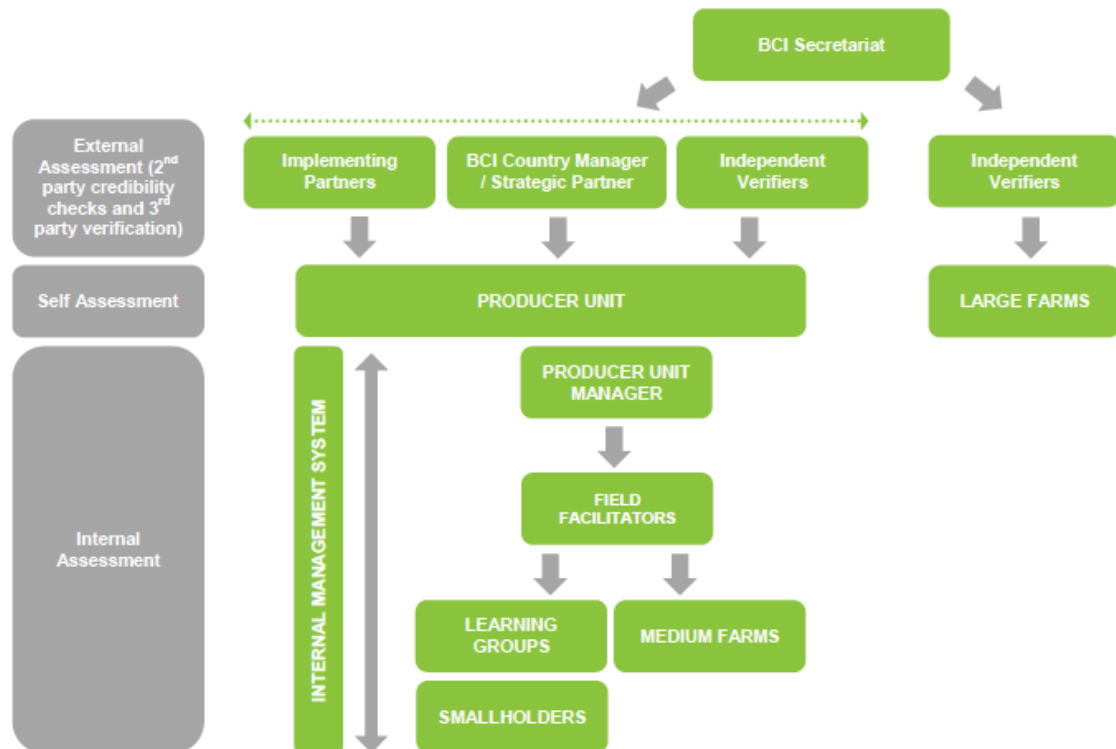


Figure 5 Key Stakeholders and Type of Assessment (BCI, 2013)

One important tool that needs to be highlighted on the producer unit level is the Farmer Field Book. It is a template provided to the farmers to collect data and information throughout the season. The template indicates which sort of information is to be recorded and is tailored to what is most suitable to the local farmers by each producer unit. Large farms have their own record keeping system in place. At the end of a season all data from medium and large farms is collected. Due to the large amount of smallholders, a sampling methodology was developed and introduced (BCI, 2014b).

4.3.5 Financing – Enabler to increase Outreach

For BCI it was clear from the beginning that financial aspects outside of the secretariat were not to be highly considered, in order to avoid a conflict of interest. Microfinance institutions and banks were not brought into the conversation when BCI started to engage with future stakeholders (Interviewee 1, 2015). Consequently, farmers do not receive any financial support from the initiative in form of cash (Interviewee 2, 2015).

BCI works together with farmers in order to teach them how reduce their input costs and to improve their margin. By changing their practices and participating in the

assurance program, farmers gain a financial benefit. Therefore, BCI's core competency and focus does not lie in being a funding organization or implementer. It is thus important to have clear defined roles and to avoid any conflict of interest by including finances in the BCI's responsibilities (Interviewee 2, 2015). BCI does also not engage in any price negotiations or regulations, which make the price for *Better Cotton* purely market driven (Interviewee 2, 2015).

Costs that arise through the functions of the BCI secretariat are mostly funded through membership fees, grants from public funding sources, and service fees. The sources of BCI's income stream and the percentage each stakeholder group pays in membership fees, can be seen in Figure 6.

WHERE DOES THE MONEY COME FROM?

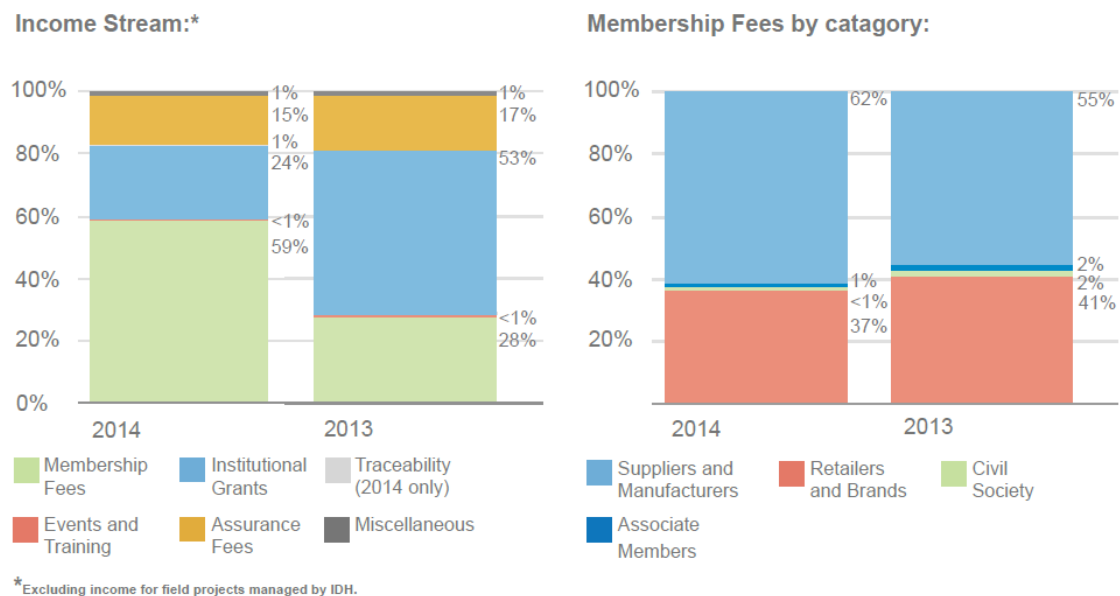


Figure 6 Income Stream and Membership Fees 2014 (BCI, 2015)

These activities, among others, include organizing parts of the application, collecting data, and producing global reports of the data. The costs of field implementation projects are funded by grants from brands and retailers, and match funding provided by donor organizations (BCI, 2015f). Every actor that becomes a BCI member has to pay membership fees and additionally, retailers and brands are required to give contributions to the field programs, i.e. the capacity building programs for the farmers. IPs or the funders of a project have to cover part of the costs that arise through BCI's involvement and large farms have to pay for their own third party verifications (regarding the assurance program). Smallholders have no cash costs (Interviewee 2, 2015).

Funding Programs

Although BCI receives membership fees and grants, further investment is needed to truly accelerate the implementation of Better Cotton projects. Due to that reason IDH (Dutch initiative for sustainable trade) initiated and manages the independent program, called the Better Cotton Fast Track Program (BCFP), working closely with BCI (IDH, 2014; BCI, 2013a). The program is a coalition of private and public organizations, which channels the funds of the members to farmer training and improvement programs that are designed around the Better Cotton Standards. Being a demand-driven program, the retailers and brands invest their funds according to the demand of their own consumers in BCI projects of their choice (BCI, 2013a; Interviewee 2, 2015). Thus, they have direct effects on supply creation within the BCI network but not on actions or decisions made by BCI (BCI, 2013a; Interviewee 2, 2015). The Fast Track Program enabled BCI to reach many smallholders in a short period of time and without it BCI would have grown much slower (Interviewee 2, 2015). However, the Fast Track Program has a charter of five years, which runs until 2015. In anticipation of this closure IDH and BCI worked on a solution to be fully set in place from 2016 onward. The result is the Growth and Innovation Fund (GIF) and the transition phase from the Fast Track Program to the GIF started already in 2014. It will be also lead by IDH but structural changes will occur. Among others, the GIF will report to the BCI council instead of a separate board. A clear separation from the BCI secretariat will be further upheld to avoid conflict of interests. However, the GIF will work closely with the secretariat, which will simplify an alignment of the strategies, making the collaboration more effective (Interviewee 2, 2015).

As of now, the FTP relies on voluntary contributions, donations and grants paid by retailers and brands that are interested to contribute more. 10 out of about 40 member retailers are FTP members and they cover a large majority of the funding that goes to the field. In order to ensure that all retailers contribute according to the size and benefit that they pull out of the system, the GIF will be based on a Volume-Based Fee (VBF) model (Interviewee 2, 2015). The VBF builds on the Better Cotton Tracer, which is an online volume and transaction-tracking tool used by members across the BCI supply chain. It is a crucial tool to trace *Better Cotton* going through the supply chain. In order to use the system retailers and brand members need to map their supply chain and engage with their suppliers to join BCI and access the Better Cotton

Tracer. This way their procurement can be tracked and the Volume-Based Fees are charged against the registered procurements (BCI, 2015b). As a result the GIF contributes to supply creation and the more benefits an individual member has, the higher the costs will be. In contrast to organizations as Fair Trade who attach a premium to their product, BCI side steps the supply chain and collects funds directly from retailers and directs them straight into the capacity building of farmers (Interviewee 2, 2015).

4.4 Activities & Mindsets of BCI's Supply Chain Actors

After describing key entities and tools within BCI, this section will focus on selected members within the BCI network, how they are integrated in the network, and what role they play. Additionally, light is shed on the dynamics and mindsets (from BCI's perspective) within the network. The application of the relevant theory and the resulting analysis will follow hereafter, in section 4.5.

4.4.1 Training & Integrating the Farmers into the Standard System

As the standards for the farmers are based on the three pillars of sustainability, BCI had to consider how to integrate the pillars in the minimum requirements and the improvement requirements. It was clear that the minimum requirements would need to bring economic benefits for the farmers in order to lead to progress. Farmers who are already poor would not start investing, for example in their workers, if their profit does not increase to begin with. Therefore, the minimum requirements build on the three pillars of sustainability but also bring economic benefits for the farmers, in terms of saving money. This can be, for example, by learning how to save water, or reducing fertilizer costs. Once the farmer's profit increases they have the financial ability to make progress (Interviewee 1, 2015). All three sustainability pillars are also considered within the improvement requirements (Interviewee 2, 2015). The degree to which each pillar will be emphasized is assessed by the IPs or farmer associations and depends on the specific needs of the region. The focus varies on a case-by-case basis and can later be adapted due to current circumstances (Interviewee 1, 2015). The importance of being flexible can be demonstrated by following example of farmers in India:

“Farmers were asking questions about the fact that they had wild pigs that were eating their plants. Of course we didn't have a standard requirement of stopping animals eating your plants because it is not a global issue. There isn't even a

requirement around it but you have to work on it because it is what the farmers care about. At the moment they are not making any money because at the moment every time they plant something the pigs eat it” (Interviewee 1, 2015).

Farmers that join the BCI network (without needing to become a member) are usually recruited by BCI’s local partners and not by the BCI secretariat. This membership process is led by the secretariat. The individual farmers are driven by the local partners to implement the program and to actively participate. Also the implementation and the local adaption to the corresponding needs, is done by the IPs. As soon as farmers decide to join the initiative they need to participate in Capacity Building programs. In the program the farmers receive training on key topics about the standard. Moreover, they have to form Learning Groups with other farmers. Additionally, the farmer field books are set up to fit the regional needs, and the farmers are taught what data to collect from their practices so they can show what they are doing. BCI’s goal for every farmer is to work on continuous improvement, which requires change, especially in the farmer’s behavior. It includes their general attitude, a certain understanding of the system, and a change in the way that they see their farms. Initially there is only a superficial change, where farmers are told to do something a certain way without fully understanding why they are doing it and what the long term change will lead to (Interviewee 2, 2015).

Currently the vast majority of farmers participating in the initiative, after one or two years of participation, follow the standards to receive their license (Interviewee 2, 2015). As Interviewee 2 (2015) puts it *“the intention is to keep working with farmers and Implementing Partners [...] so over time the farmer actually goes through behavior change”*. The impact of that change is hard to evaluate given the fact that BCI has only been operating since five years. Academic, light outcome evaluations have been done by BCI, using interviews and engagement to create and validate their results. Currently impact studies have been launched to assess how deep the changes go and what the impact of the program on the farmers is (ibid).

4.4.2 Benefits for Brands & Retailers to join BCI

BCI’s network of cotton suppliers consists to 99 percent of smallholder farmers who cultivate *Better Cotton* on between one and two hectares of land (BCI, 2015b). The small amount of *Better Cotton* that one individual farmer provides to the network, implies that the cotton utilized by one producer or brand is accumulated from many

projects of various regions. For brands and retailers it would be very costly and time consuming to run similar projects on their own and to call it into their supply chain. Scaling cotton with a certain standard, as an individual organization, is therefore rather difficult. A further obstacle for brands and retailers to produce their own sustainable cotton is that they would be making a claim that verifies themselves. As a result, the credibility towards a brand's customers would not be very high. Among others, these are main reasons for brands and retailers to join BCI. It connects them to a large organized network of suppliers and by joining BCI they also join civil society and producer groups. In return their claims to be a responsible business towards their customers becomes also more credible (Interviewee 2, 2015).

Recruitment & Engaging with the Supply Chain

One of BCI secretariat's responsibilities is the recruitment and implementation of new members into the BCI network. Therefore, the recruitment of brands, retailers, and civil societies is undertaken by the secretariat. This group of actors can join BCI if they sign up for membership and pay the necessary membership fees. Additionally, every commercial and non-commercial member needs to sign BCI's Code of Practice. By signing it, members commit to support BCI's mission, the cotton strategy, and for commercial members, how much *Better Cotton* they will use (Interviewee 2, 2015).

The recruitment process and its length depend on the organization that BCI is engaging with. It can vary between one and ten meetings and between three months and two years. The variation in time depends on the internal decision making process of the organization and where it stands in its sustainability journey. For organizations that, to that point in time, are not actively engaged, it takes much longer to understand what it means to be sourcing a sustainable raw material (Interviewee 2, 2015). By joining BCI certain processes change for brands and retailers. In order to be successful, BCI chooses not to dictate to brands and retailers what to do but advises them how to engage in their supply chain. The reason is that it is usually easier if the brands and retailers openly communicate and engage with their suppliers to discuss and reach the targets that they have set. It increases the knowledge of their supply chain and with increased knowledge comes a different attitude. The brands and retailers therefore understand how their supply chain works, where they are sourcing from, and what the weak and strong points are. Consequently, it allows them to build better relationships and also trust (ibid).

4.4.3 Procuring Better Cotton - The Middle of the Supply Chain

The reasons for actors of the middle of the supply chain to join BCI are normally based on commercial arguments. If the brands and retailers that they source to, become BCI members and demand *Better Cotton*, the suppliers normally set themselves up to be able to meet these demands. It is not necessary for these actors to become BCI members. They only need to fill out an Output Declaration Form and follow the Chain of Custody Guidelines. Further, they have to be able to implement and use the Better Cotton Tracer so the procurement of the *Better Cotton* can be followed (Interviewee 2, 2015). The ginnerers hold a slightly more crucial role. Especially in Africa they play a collaborative role in their interactions with the cotton farmers in their region. Many ginnerers work closely with the farmers and support them in various aspects and therefore BCI delivers training and a monitoring program at gin level in all countries of operation. It includes an explanation of the requirements for ginnerers in the Better Cotton Output Declaration Form and Chain of Custody Guidelines and instructions on how to declare transactions through the Better Cotton Tracer (BCI, 2014b).

4.4.4 The Role of Representatives

BCI usually does not communicate and discuss with an entire organization but only with representatives of the various entities. Depending on the organization and the stakeholder group that they are a part of, BCI has to adapt their way of communication. Also the tools that the representatives are equipped with to communicate back to the organization are adapted. For example, BCI has little convincing to do of their cause when talking to a sustainability manager. It is more important to equip the representatives with the appropriate tools to make them able to argue within their organization why they should engage. The provided tools could be slides or business cases, which then are tailored to the organization. In the end it is not about the organization but about the individual person that the organization sends (Interviewee 1, 2015). However, representatives can sometimes turn out to be unqualified and do not always bring the promised advantages. For example, BCI invited a representative of an Indian farmers organization without really knowing who he was. They were looking to for a farmer's representative engaged at the board level and at the strategic decision making level. It turned out that he was more interested in traveling around the world with BCI than in the true interests of the farmers. After

receiving multiple warning letters from the secretariat the organization's membership was terminated (ibid).

4.4.5 Legitimacy, BCI's overall Mindset & Revision of the Standards

A crucial factor for BCI's activities is to build and maintain legitimacy. It is not only important in regard to the actors that are already BCI members but, in general, also for new recruits and externals. BCI does this through three different sources. The first is by using the results that the BCI network has accomplished over the years, especially on farm level. A further source of legitimacy is the existing memberships that BCI has throughout the various stakeholder levels. Additionally, BCI strives themselves on being a member of ISEAL which is of high validity for MSIs. However, BCI does not often talk about proving their legitimacy. Their focus lies more on maintaining credibility in what they do (Interviewee 2, 2015).

Considering the overall mindset of the initiative, BCI focuses on having the three pillars of sustainability behind their actions and to make *Better Cotton* a mainstream commodity. Generally speaking, sustainability is a joining factor that brings some of the actors together, but it is not defined in the same way by everyone. The middle of the supply chain is not tuned in to sustainability, and it is mostly the retailers and brands that are asking for it. However, the varying importance given by actors towards sustainability is not seen as an issue by BCI but rather as the reason for involving various groups of stakeholders. Different perspectives and concerns within the network enable them to see and focus on multiple issues. The BCI community is seen as quite open and collaborative. Especially within each stakeholder group, collaboration to understand processes as the supply chain, the exchange of practices and information, and to facilitate learning is very common (Interviewee 2, 2015).

The improvement of the livelihood of farmers through the standards is still a main concern within BCI and by now an established fact. Stories about the farmers are still presented at annual meetings but not as frequently as during the standard making process. Through the consistent growth and enabling large-scale operations, the credibility and strength of the assurance program is a topic that grows of importance and needs continuous repetition and grounding (Interviewee 2, 2015). This holds especially true during the upcoming revision of the BCI Production Principles and Criteria.

Being a member of ISEAL, BCI's standard has to be revised at least once every five years. The standard review process is in 2015/2016 and is done according to the ISEAL code of standard setting on how to conduct a standard review. The process is lead by a standard review committee that makes recommendations to the BCI council who decides on the final changes (Interviewee 2, 2015). As during the first period of setting up the standards, there will be up to two rounds of stakeholder consultations to allow everyone to provide comments and contribute to the process (BCI, 2015g). The timeline is shown in Figure 7. It will be an open consultation process, which makes it difficult to anticipate the outcomes. Through the process issues may arise which were not on BCI's radar before.



Figure 7 Standard Revision Process - Timeline (BCI, 2015)

Retrieved on 15.08.2015 from: <http://bettercotton.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Untitled.png>

4.5 Ensuring Stability through clear Roles & Adaption

As of today, BCI has established itself as a known organization across the cotton industry and continuously maintains to grow. The roles and functions of each actor within its network have been established, and they are not discussed and negotiated frequently, as during standard setting process. Callon's moments of translation will be used to add to the analysis made for the first phase. Additionally, the concept of framing and overflows is applied in order to understand how the actors within the network are managed. The accumulated knowledge from the first and second phase will be combined to reach concluding remarks regarding the actors and BCI's organizational, and resulting power structures in section 4.5.3.

4.5.1 Enrolling Actors in their collaboratively defined Identities

As previously described the *problematization* and *interessement* stage were in focus while BCI and its standards were collaboratively established and frequently changed up to the implementation of the Global Production Principles in 2009. *Enrolment* and

interessement took also place for the actors who were already participating in the network. As many decisions were made and implemented together with the standards, a majority of the moments of translations have to be seen in a slightly different angle after 2009. The reason is that with the implementation of the standards, both, the roles and functions of BCI and all actors were not discussed and changed as frequently as during ‘phase one’. As it is now, actors within the network are encouraged to communicate any disagreements. However, up to the current revision of the standards, no major changes have been made.

As BCI is and has been continuously growing, the moments of translation can be repeatedly observed whenever new members join the initiative. The only exception is the *problematization* stage, as the identities and interests have been defined and agreed upon and will most likely not be changed until, if at all, changes through the revision of the standard are implemented in 2016.

The stage of *interessement* can be seen, for example, in the recruitment process of brands and retailers. During the initial discussions of the recruitment process between BCI and an organization, BCI tries to make the organization understand what it means to be sourcing a sustainable raw material. Within this process BCI attempts to enroll these new actors in the defined identity for brands and retailers. As soon as they commit to BCI, these brands or retailers often take it upon themselves to enroll further actors of their own supply chain to the initiative. Regarding BCI’s outreach, this ‘chain-reaction’ of new members makes brands and retailers even more valuable to be targeted and recruited as new members. As for the *interessement* towards farmers, the role is taken over by the local implementation partners. It allows adapting to regional circumstances and therefore, increases the effectiveness of the standards. A strong trust between BCI and the IPs is required and for that reason BCI has developed (in collaboration), and often also executes, IPs’ training (train-the-trainer program). IP assessment processes are also in place to ensure and improve their performance.

Various tools and methods are used by BCI to encourage and make new actors adapt their role. A stage defined by Callon as *enrolment*. This stage also strongly correlates to the act of framing, which will be elaborated in the next section.

For brands and retailers this stage is underpinned, for example, by the active support of BCI on how to align one’s own supply chain. It is a form of ‘ideological control’, whereby the actors’ current perspectives are influenced and more desirable states are

introduced. The idea is that if brands and retailers follow BCI's advised attitude, increased communication and openness throughout the supply chain can lead to increased knowledge and understanding of it. Brands and retailers current perspectives have to change and if done properly a desired state of transparency within BCI's network can be achieved. For farmers, the assurance program, including the minimum and improvement requirements, have a similar effect. Although, BCI could not prove any resulting behavioral changes within the mindset of the farmers yet, the way of farming and harvesting cotton has changed, resulting in environmental, economical, and social benefits. This is also a desired state of the initiative.

Mobilization is used to ensure that an organization's spokesperson acts as agreed upon. Examples are the slides and business cases given by BCI to the representatives to be able to argue within their organization why changes should be made. As described above, communication and provided methods strongly depend on the individual representative and the opinion that he or she holds towards sustainability and BCI's goals and actions. In cases as of the Indian farmers' representative, BCI's interest was betrayed and he was expelled from the initiative. It demonstrates that a constant re-evaluation or at least an awareness of the behavior and intentions of all representatives has to be done and be present.

By following a strict implementation process and adopting it to the appropriate circumstances, BCI achieved to continuously grow their network without any strong disruptions. A seemingly strong structure is in place through which a majority of the actors follow their given 'roles' to the extent that they are defined. It creates the intended stability of the network, as described by Callon.

4.5.2 Ensuring Adaption to Roles for a Stable Network

It is in BCI's interest that actors within the BCI network adapt to their roles in order to have a functioning and stable system. To support the stage of *enrolment*, frames, under which interactions within the network take place, are agreed upon and used. For commercial and non-commercial BCI members, as brands and retailers, a framing tool is BCI's codes of practice that needs to be signed and complied with by the members. Framing of the brands and retailers also takes place during recruitment when BCI explains to the organization what it means to source sustainable raw

materials and when they advise the organizations how to engage in their supply chain. For representatives of organizations the framing tools are for example the provided slides and business cases to argue within their organization. Actors in the middle of the supply chain need to fill out Output Declaration Forms and they need to sign and follow the Chain of Custody Guidelines.

Making the Standards Work

Much time and effort has been and is invested into developing a system and standards that ensure that *Better Cotton* is by all means (environmental, social, and economical) a sustainable product. A major part of this claim is dependent on the actions and procedures undertaken by BCI's farmers. Therefore, it is natural that these are the most strongly framed actors within the BCI network.

The assurance program is one of the key framing tools for the farmers, including the minimum and improvement requirements. Hereby it is of utmost importance that the requirements are decided upon and adapted to regional circumstances by the respective producer units and implementation partners. Being an initiative that is active in multiple countries around the world, having one global standard, which is applied equally to all farmers, would do BCI's mission more harm than good. As described by the concept of framing and overflowing, actors constantly change with the network that they are engaged in. For the farmers this does not only imply BCI and its network, but also their own local network that has an influence on them. Even with strong framing the farmers cannot be decoupled from the networks that they are a part of. The same counts for the tangible and intangible elements (as water and pesticide usage, and also social changes) of the standards and assurance program that structure and frame the farmers. These are also connected and influenced by the varying regional aspects, and these connections ultimately will lead to overflows. Strong framing would attempt to eliminate all external influences and would not allow for changes to take place. Therefore, it would keep the initiative on a same knowledge level without the possibility to evolve. BCI recognizes these effects and as a result works with IPs. The IPs know and use the external influences of the respective region, to adapt and implement the Better Cotton System to best fit the relevant regional circumstances. The utilization of IPs, and the consequent regional adaption, enables the entire network to learn and grow. Of course overflows, as demonstrated by the wild pig example, can still occur but it is more important to

respond appropriately and learn from these external influences and the resulting overflows, than trying to eliminate them.

Further examples that demonstrate BCI's awareness to adopt framing tools are the Farmer Field Book, which is adapted locally and used to share identified best practices, and a change in the financing system to a Volume-Based-Fee, to ensure that all retailers contribute according to their gained benefits.

'Cold' & 'Hot' Negotiations

The negotiations that frame the identified overflows, as the pigs and the adaption of the Field Books, can be recognized as the previously described 'cold' negotiations because they are easy to identify and to handle. Therefore, BCI and all participating actors do not have to put a lot of effort into these negotiations and changes. Up to 2009, the negotiations, which led to the Better Cotton System, or to the more recent change to the Growth and Innovation Fund, were more controversial negotiations and contain more efforts to identify the overflows. These are 'hot' negotiations that should include actors of multiple backgrounds and expertise during the identification of externalities and overflows. BCI provides this by always incorporating multiple but still relevant stakeholder groups and actors.

BCI's entire framing system profits from its acknowledgment of overflows and the resulting actions taken, when they occur or are identified.

4.5.3 Key Elements of BCI

The foundation of the BCI network is based on the collaborative process to create BCI's structure and the Better Cotton Standard System, which is still in place today. It demonstrates the importance of being a network that consists of diverse actors that are treated equally and who should also see themselves in that way. This aspect is frequently communicated by BCI and is one of various factors that provides the network with stability.

Dynamics & Organizational Structure of the Network

An advantage of BCI's network is the diversity of its actors and the different mindsets that they bring. Even though sustainability is not equally important to all actors, it provides BCI with multiple angles towards each task they face. Having different voices in such a large network can only be an advantage if they are heard and taken into account. The BCI Council is one entity that is set in place to provide equality by

fairly representing all stakeholder groups and collaboratively agreeing on strategic decisions. A further very important entity is the BCI secretariat, who among other activities, focuses on stakeholder engagement and bringing all actors together. Even though they do not provide the strategic decisions of BCI, they are large part of holding the network together, making it grow, and simultaneously give the network part of its legitimacy. These factors put the secretariat in a unique and important position in the BCI network. A further strength is that the secretariat recognizes its limitations considering its expertise and the ability to single-handedly manage the network and approach each actor of a large and complex network in the appropriate way. Working together with partner organizations to increase the outreach of *Better Cotton*, the use of the Fast Track Program and the Growth and Innovation Fund to externalize financial decision-making and enabling to reach and affect more smallholder farmers, are only few examples. Most crucial in utilizing local knowledge are the IPs. Their role in adapting the Better Cotton System to appropriate regional circumstances optimizes the standards sustainability impact and allows BCI/the IPs to react to overflows. It substantially increases BCI's learning and improvement abilities.

Human & Non-Human Actors

The effectiveness of the IPs directly influences the farmers, who are the actors that should be impacted the most from the initiative. All frames and standards that are in place should positively influence the well being of the farmers on all three sustainability levels. If the farmers are not able to produce *Better Cotton* and do not benefit from the applied methods, the entire system would be worthless. The actors in the middle of the supply chain do not have to be BCI members but they are still important of procuring the *Better Cotton* from the bottom to the top of the supply chain. A crucial tool in this process is the Better Cotton Tracer that must be understood and correctly applied by all actors, including the brands and retailers. Through engagement in the supply chain and open communication, the brands and retailers area a large part of creating transparency and making the supply chain more efficient. They are also central in funding financial support to increase the impact and outreach of BCI.

It is important to emphasize the non-human actors that frame and therefore, have an influence on human actors within the network. This is for example the assurance

program that gives BCI credibility and influences the behavior of the farmers and therefore, is a crucial tool of the initiative. Also the Better Cotton Tracer influences how actors interact with each other throughout the supply chain, especially when the Volume-Based-Fee, that is dependent on the Tracer, will be fully implemented. A last example refers to the tools provided on BCI's website as best practices, or communication tools. The influence of these tools on human actors within the network should not be underestimated and need to be considered.

In conclusion, it can be said that the approach to framing the network, equally during the recruitment of the actors, or during the implementation of the various tasks and responsibilities, leads to a stronger stability of the network. Indeed, it is supported by the ability to recognize and adapt to regional differences and acknowledging and appropriately responding to (potential) overflows. The framing does not just serve as a mechanism to guide actors to a certain role but to enable learning and continuous improvement throughout the network. It furthermore helps BCI to frame for equality among its members and actors in the network.

5 Criticism Towards MSIs

As this research utilizes an inductive research approach it will shift from a micro-level perspective, by analyzing BCI, to a macro level and look at criticism towards MSI in general. The criticism will support the choice of BCI as case study, because many of BCI's practices and its structure counteract the criticism of recent literature that will be described. Based on the analysis and the criticism, section six will discuss how equality of the actors within MSIs can be created and ensured.

MSIs are increasingly being seen as the most legitimate private rule-makers for private standard making. However, recent research and case studies have questioned the ability of MSIs, and the new standard-making norms, to provide inclusiveness for all stakeholders. This holds particularly true in regards to the inclusion of the interests and perspectives of marginalized stakeholders, such as smallholders (Cheyns & Riisgaard, 2014; Utting, 2002). The following section will utilize the political-economy and post-structural approaches to sustainability standards and MSIs, as introduced in section 3.4. Thereafter, BCI's structure and practices will be combined with the academic criticism towards MSIs, in order to derive an overall perspective of how an MSI, that aims to create and ensure equality, should be set up.

5.1 Intended Structure of MSIs

MSIs' perceived legitimacy is part of a broader liberal pluralism model in which power is spread among a variety of interest groups of stakeholders, who are defending a specific interest and are competing for influence. The idea is that the public good will result from bargaining and a balance of each particular interests. The political differences are intended to be neutralized through a participative and consensual process based on a democratic deliberation model (Cheyns & Riisgaard, 2014). The model assumes that "through open and reasoned argument, free from manipulation and the exercise of power, better and more legitimate decisions will arise" (Bäckstrand et al. 2010, quoted in Schouten et al., 2012). The following criticism addresses if inclusiveness is truly incorporated in the standard negotiations and implementations in MSIs.

5.2 Asymmetries in MSIs

Even though MSIs are thought to create a balance of interests, it is often business or specific interests groups that engage more strategically and therefore, also implement their interests more efficiently (Cheyns & Riisgaard, 2014). Often 'disadvantaged' or 'vulnerable' groups are not represented sufficiently, especially in the standard-setting process, and sometimes are ignored. It leads to the concern that MSIs and their standards do not address the priority concerns and problems of southern workers. The reason is that the representing organizations, mostly from the North, are more focused on representing global issues that are also relevant to the North. Further, it is often difficult for them to fully understand the circumstances of the vulnerable groups that they represent, and with which they mostly only share indirect links. It leads to an inability of the MSI to regulate the balance of power between the various stakeholders (Utting, 2002; Cheyns & Riisgaard, 2014). Additionally, an asymmetry in participation can be linked to an asymmetry of resources. In this case, access to resources does not only refer to the rights of admittance but the actual ability to benefit from something. Consequently, it is argued that the benefit that each actor receives from MSIs shapes their use of MSIs. Thus, different actors benefit differently from MSIs (Köhne, 2014). Consequently, it implies that because the resources from the farmers are mostly limited relative to the resources of business actors, farmers' benefits from MSIs are also limited (Cheyns & Riisgaard).

It is often claimed by stakeholders in MSIs that created global standards are objective, value neutral, and science-based. However, Selfa et al. (2014) have demonstrated that in practice, local politics and power relations do play a role how the standards are enacted on the ground. Therefore, it is argued that standards are not implemented in a political-economic vacuum.

Considering these asymmetries, it is important that they are recognized and acted upon by MSIs. By ignoring them, MSI regulation will further reinforce these already existing inequalities (Cheyns & Riisgaard, 2014).

5.3 Domination of ‘Market’ & ‘Industrial’ Conventions

The nature of MSIs and their diverse network of actors can lead to significantly diverging visions of sustainability. In order to find an agreement, the heterogeneous actors attempt to reduce the diversity of perspectives. Multiple cases have shown that the result is mostly a sole focus on conventions of ‘market’ competition and ‘industrial’ efficiency. Therefore, the plurality of conventions is reduced in order to specify the content of sustainability. As a result sustainability standards have been supporting an agro-industrial and intensive model of production. Systems in favor of family agriculture or agro-forestry, for example, are thus not considered (Cheyns & Riisgaard, 2014). Nelson and Tallontire (2014) argue that through the focus of current MSIs, private sustainability standards are technically focused and priority is given to expert knowledge. It frames expert, scientific and engineering knowledge as the appropriate knowledge within MSIs. Forms of evidence in standard setting and auditing are mostly quantitative and discredit forms of evidence provided by communities and smallholders, which are predominantly qualitative. Communities and smallholders are mostly concerned about social issues or inequalities, which are easier to communicate in qualitative evidence, as opinions and stories (Cheyns & Riisgaard, 2014). The critics argue that it results in the impossibility for smallholders to implement their vision of sustainability and criticize the focus on the ‘industrial’ market, which has been naturalized (ibid).

Therefore, contrary to MSIs’ claim of ‘horizontality’, critiques stress that power in MSIs is used in forms of knowledge, information and engagements, which lead to diffuse oppressions (Cheyns & Riisgaard, 2014). Proven by multiple studies, market and industrial conventions are favored together with related forms of knowledge

(scientific, expert, and generalizable) over other forms in MSIs. By governing through limited conventions, some definitions of sustainability become normality and others are not considered.

5.4 Liberal Pluralism & Democratic Deliberation

Within MSIs post-structuralist scholars emphasize the tension between the liberal model, which focuses on the strategic engagement of stakeholders, and the improved democratic deliberation, which is supposed to neutralize power in order to reach broad agreement. Although the combination of the two is a response to differences among stakeholders, it can have negative effects on disadvantaged groups. Related to the access to, or influence of the decision making process, the liberal model does not account for inequalities among different groups (Cheyns & Riisgaard, 2014). Both models overstate the level of neutrality and consensus reached in MSIs, which in turn covers up the abuses of power and inequalities. It allows more powerful stakeholders, who act strategically, to manipulate and control disadvantaged groups in the network, who are exposed due to the misconception (Edmunds & Wollenberg, 2001). In other words, by portraying all actors as equal, those who have more power (financially, or by access to resources as knowledge and information) are in advantage of using their position to influence the disadvantaged.

It has been analyzed that when powerful actors with dominant interest communicate their ideas well enough, these ideas can be adopted without much opposition. As a result the impression is created that decisions were made on general agreement (Cheyns & Riisgaard, 2014). Linking these dynamics back to the conventions being utilized, it allows for the possibility to define sustainability by specific interests, without difficult debates. A final ability that actors in a liberal pluralism model necessitate is the ability to communicate their needs and objectives, in order to be ready for a bargaining process. It implies that the actors view should be detached from emotions to confirm to procedural objectives, and be considered as valuable by others (ibid).

Concluding, recent research about sustainability standards and MSIs has shown that even if MSIs intend to equalize power structures, more traditional forms of domination are often still in place, with focus on political and economic power. Additionally, more subtle forms of power are being utilized, by favoring some forms

of knowledge or conventions and modes of engagement over others. More specific, it needs to be emphasized that the standard setting and its implementation process in most MSIs fail to consider multiple conventions, and that ‘market’ and ‘industrial’ are often favored, at the expense of other conventions. Further, the chosen conventions influence which information formats are legitimate, leaving ‘macro’ variables as the only recognized form of evidence. It further disqualifies rural community voices.

6 Discussion – How can Equality be Created & Ensured?

In order to be able to provide an answer to the problem statement of ‘how an MSI should strategically be set up and managed in order to establish and maintain equality across its network of actors’, following steps were conducted. BCI was used as a case study to obtain a deeper understanding of how the structure within an MSI can look like and to understand what entities, standards, and mechanisms are in place to strategically establish and maintain equality. Further, an opposing view in form of criticism towards MSIs was provided to demonstrate that certain forms and actions of power, used to the advantage of few actors, can still be found in MSIs. For this section, the accumulate knowledge will be utilized to identify an organizational structure and practices that can allow MSIs to counteract or at least reduce misuses of power, identified during the criticism. Further aspects will be pointed out that are crucial to the creation and insurance of equality in MSIs.

6.1 Creating the Backbone

The start-up phase, which creates the structure of the initiative, sets the tone for all participating actors of how problems are approached and how the network can and will work collaboratively in the future. It builds the backbone of the initiative and can create stability within the network that enables it to continuously grow. In order to achieve this state the appropriate framing, transparency, structure, collaborative action, communication, representation, and openness to multiple conventions is necessary.

6.1.1 Establishing Roles & Frames

When setting up an initiative, an instable knowledge base exists. It can be described as a ‘hot’ situation in which all perspectives can be seen as controversial and the identification of overflows and the process of framing is chaotic. Therefore, it is important to involve multiple actors of the various stakeholder groups to better

identify and respond to overflows. To this regard, it is of essence to involve people with the best knowledge, not only scientific experts, but actors who work in the field, as farmers and producers. Additionally, government representatives and other external actors who know about specific circumstances in the particular regions should be incorporated in this stage. A suitable solution to enable these meetings is the creation of working groups. Thus, in the various regions of engagement, it would be possible to identify and respond to local circumstances. Through framing, all actors within the network accept and act according to their given role. These roles and the resulting framing should be reached and agreed upon collaboratively. The better the framing is accomplished in this stage, the easier the identification or anticipation of overflows and the appropriate reaction to them will be, as soon as the system is in place. As a result there will be more ‘cold’ and uncomplicated negotiations, allowing for continuous improvement throughout the network. Further, it provides certain stability within the network.

6.1.2 Utilizing Framing Tools

Not only is it important to frame the various roles, but also to clearly identify the tools set in place to communicate the agreed frames. For each group of stakeholder there will be different tools that can influence the actors’ behavior. This can be in the form of contracts, web based tools, possibilities to engage with one’s supply chain, systems to trace the specific product, and various items to help to implement and improve the standards. Properly framed tools enable new actors who join the network to faster understand their role and to participate in the network, in the most efficient way. Especially in the farm level, where the regional circumstances vary considerably, an appropriate adaption is necessary, as will be further elaborated in section 6.3.

6.1.3 Communicating the Importance of Equality

The communication of equality to all actors of the network is not only crucial during the starting phase of the initiative but has to be upheld in the organization’s actions and its mindset. The involved actors should always understand that everyone should be treated equally and that all opinions matter and are taken into the same account when decisions are taken. During the standard creation awareness can be created and upheld, at least to a certain extent, by utilizing a plot, i.e. a story that allows connections, and establishes reiteration and continuity. In this context it should be

utilized on an overall level to remind all actors about the reason and the goal of the initiative. The same method should be applied when the standards are being revised to provide a general direction that the initiative should take. It is a process that takes time to evolve, and can be supported by stakeholder wide communication and transparency in taking decisions and actions. Furthermore, it creates an additional layer of stability within the network and can also be used to acknowledge multiple conventions, leading to further equality.

6.1.4 Promote Multiple Conventions

In order to ensure that multiple conventions will be incorporated within the standards, it is important to enable that all conventions will be discussed and considered when the standards are formed. The working groups provide a good platform for all stakeholder groups to be heard and express their interest. It emphasizes the importance that many different actors are present at these meetings, to diversify their considered perspectives. Additionally, it is important that a neutral entity is present and leads these meetings, as a secretariat of the initiative. As a relatively neutral actor, it can help to avoid that strong actors or stakeholder groups push for conventions that are only in their perspective favor. Furthermore, a secretariat can monitor if all three pillars of sustainability are accounted for within the standards. The reason is that specific conventions, and also addressed topics of sustainability, influence what will be measured in order to monitor and improve the effects of the standards. This determines if quantitative or qualitative measures are more appropriate. As previously described, brands and retailers push harder for quantitative indicators and farmers usually report on qualitative issues. Consequently, ensuring a diverse incorporation of conventions, sustainability factors and measurement indicators in the standards, will lead to the consideration of a broader field of stakeholder groups, without favoring just one. Further, it will enable farmers to more easily argue, based on intangible factors, for aspects that are important to them.

6.1.5 Facilitating the Meetings

As just mentioned, a secretariat of the initiative, as a relatively neutral entity, is of value for meetings, especially in the creation phase. It has the ability to keep an overall perspective of the initiatives goal and is able to facilitate and create collaboration and interaction among the participating actors. As these meetings can be

new and uncomfortable to some actors, a secretariat can ease the tension, make everybody feel more comfortable in their role and therefore, increase the interaction within the group. It also has the responsibility to invite important actors and make sure that they participate to guarantee a versatile approach towards discussed issues. Further, it demonstrated that all stakeholder groups are committed to the initiative, giving it more credibility. If necessary, the appropriate representatives of a stakeholder group should be chosen and invited to ensure equal representation when key decisions are being discussed. The facilitating entity, therefore, has the important role of demonstrating openness of the initiative and the responsibility of including the working groups and its actors throughout the decision making process of the standard and later during its revision.

Therefore, the set up stage should lead to clearly defined roles for all actors throughout the network, and framing tools that secure the implementation and adaption of the respective actors of these roles. It should be achieved through constant collaboration and communication and allows for continuous improvement when the system is implemented. A 'neutral' entity should take over facilitation and responsibility of organizing the process and ensure that all stakeholder groups can express their interest. Additionally, the implementation of multiple conventions should be promoted to create a more versatile standard that does not favor specific actors.

6.2 Crucial Organizational Entities

Almost all actors within an initiative have their own individual interest and, at most, that of their stakeholder group in mind. No matter how much framing is done around it, the self-interest will always prevail. Therefore, it is crucial that organizational entities are in place, which have the overall, global picture and goal of the initiative in mind. In particular these are the council and a secretariat. The council is voted by all members and consists of representatives of each of the existing stakeholder groups. Through having members of all stakeholder groups, the council is set up to enable various perspectives to an issue when strategic decisions have to be made. The other crucial entity should represent the initiative itself and, for example, can be a secretariat of the initiative. Therefore, it can be seen as relatively neutral, which allows having a more objective point of view. The council is focused on all strategic decision being made and the secretariat on the operational decisions. Both entities

have the responsibility to control actors that do not respect the set agreements, as codes of practice.

Although it does not make strategic decisions, the role of the initiative's secretariat cannot be underestimated. Additional to its role in the creation phase, it is the communicational center of the network. The secretariat and its employees is the only single actor that is in constant interaction with actors of the various stakeholder groups and facilitates a connection of the actors throughout the supply chain. They have the ability and the responsibility to be aware of the dynamics within the network and to provide a platform in which everybody has the possibility to be heard. Therefore, an adequate stakeholder engagement is of big value to the secretariat and the initiative. To do so, they need to be able to identify the strategic importance of the various actors.

When recruiting new members it has to be ensured that the defined roles are clear to the new actors and that methods of communicating these to the actors are in place. The secretariat should also be able to adapt to representatives, sent by organizations, and to know with what sort of information and tools to supply them.

A further characteristic of the secretariat should be the ability and awareness that it is impossible for them to know and control everything single handedly and that there is no one international best solution to its approaches. It is crucial that it is aware of and accounts for overflows and that it spreads this attitude throughout the initiative. The secretariat and the entire initiative needs to understand that with various regions and connections to other networks, tools in place, as the standards, will have different affects depending on the region they are implemented in. The MSI has to respond to the overflows in an appropriate manner and has to account for their lack of expertise. Therefore, it is important to administer the task of recognizing and responding to overflows among various actors in the field. This way, power is automatically diversified across the initiative and allows reacting to different situations the appropriate way.

Having such a centrality within the network can also bare potential risks. Even though the secretariat does not have individual, economical incentives as for example brand and retailers, they do think of what will improve the initiative and what will make it more successful. Of course financing plays a strong role when considering growth and

this can lead to potential threats to the secretariat's neutrality. For example, decisions could be advertised within the network that are in the interest of a strong financial provider as a big brand, in order to further receive funding from the brand. As the council makes strategic decisions, the risk is reduced, but the favoring of certain actors can still take place. Therefore, it would be advisable that the council keeps this in the back of their mind and consider the secretariat's behavior.

Finally it is of strategic importance to separate the funding, which is directed towards the MSI, from the secretariat's responsibility. It avoids conflicts of interest and enables the secretariat to focus on its core responsibilities. However, the funding structure should be regulated properly and align as closely as possible with the initiatives strategy. It is also an advantage to diversify the sources of the funding to avoid that few core actors carry a majority of the financial weight. By doing so, no actor will feel entitled to more decision making rights.

6.3 Adaption & Organizing Smallholders

The utilization of working groups in the various regions is already one important step to recognize and adapt to regional circumstances. As soon as the standard is created and implemented, the collaboration with regional implementation partners that work directly with the local farmers is a further crucial step towards adaption. These factors include, among others, political-economic conditions, the climate, and social dynamics and allow the partners to react and respond to existing inequalities. They are the direct link between the farmers and the developed standards and through appropriate training they are able to know in which way to approach the farmers and to implement the standards. Additionally, these partners have the responsibility and expertise to establish, in close collaboration with the farmers, and to identify the most suitable pillars of sustainability within the standards, while still considering the others. It is a very effective way of creating knowledge and comprehension of the standards on the farm level, and given the appropriate amount of time and engagement, the implementation partners have the most realistic chance to create behavioral change in the farmers. Through the partners the initiative has the capacity to reach a larger number of farmers effectively and to implement the standards to the given regional circumstances. Furthermore, the initiative can accumulate the practices and can establish best practices, which can be communicated throughout the entire

network. It allows for continuous improvement and transparency of the initiatives actions.

The implementation partners cannot only facilitate adaption of the standards and utilized tools to implement them but they can also serve as an instrument of organizing the farmers. By creating learning groups and producer units the needs and issues of farmers can better be understood and communicated throughout the network. It also enables the farmers to learn from each other and share their knowledge with farmers in their region. In order to communicate their concerns in a way that it is heard throughout the network, representatives of these groups are necessary.

6.3.1 Representation

As the actors within a network form what is seen as common sense and which views are considered or not, it is crucial to enable for multiple conventions to be incorporated within the mindset of an initiative. This emphasizes the explained role of implementation partners and the ability of the entire initiative to adapt and frame around inequalities in order to equalize them as much as possible. Considering, the farmers to be heard and fully implemented in the network, an adequate representation of the various groups, is of essence.

Qualified representatives of the farmer groups, at least the producer units, should have know-how and experience. On the one hand, they should fully understand the circumstances and needs of the farmers, and on the other, they should be able to strategically engage with all stakeholders, as brands and retailers, who might have difficulties understanding the farmers' needs. It provides them with sufficient leverage to strongly represent seemingly 'vulnerable' stakeholder groups and enables the farmers to be heard and taken seriously in the network. Additionally, manipulation from more powerful stakeholders can be prevented by the utilization of adequate representation and the representative's experience to argue for the incorporation of conventions that are also in the farmers' favor. It has a direct influence how sustainability is seen and defined within the network.

Therefore, it is of even more importance that the representatives are chosen carefully. As shown by the example of the Indian representative who only had his own interest in mind, not all representatives automatically fight for the benefits of the group that they are representing. During the startup period of the initiative this responsibility

should be performed by the initiative itself and as soon as the system is established, the farmer groups (learning groups and producer units) should be able to choose their own representative.

6.3.2 The Farmer's View of Sustainability

Critiques have stressed that the farmers' perspective of sustainability are mostly not considered within an MSI, especially during the creation of sustainability standards. An aspect that has to be taken into account is that many farmers do not initially join initiatives because they are concerned about sustainability but often focus on the economic benefits that come from joining an MSI and following the minimum requirements. Therefore, an initiative should firstly focus on teaching farmers of how to fulfill the minimum requirements and to fully understand the benefits, beside the economic ones, which following the standards can bring. Only then are the farmers fully able to truly participate and influence the discussion about sustainability within the initiative. It stresses the importance of representatives that are able to build the bridge between understanding the farmers and communicating it the right way to the rest of the network.

Baring these various aspects in mind when forming and managing an MSI, there is a better chance of establishing a higher degree of equality than the criticism indicates.

7 Limitations & Future Research

From a methodological point of view, it would have been of added value if actors from the various stakeholder groups, who are part of BCI, could also have been interviewed in order to incorporate their point of view. Based on limited resources the decision was made to focus on only one actor within the network. Through its centrality in the network, and being the only single actor in the network actively communicating with all stakeholder groups, the secretariat was chosen as actor to focus on. With the secretariat in focus, the research was able to provide valuable insights into the general structure of MSIs, and to answer the problem statement. However, future research can go into further depth by analyzing the perceptions considering the opinions and equality within the network, throughout the various stakeholder groups. Of special interest are the farmers, given that the standards and most of the frames are set up to improve their effectiveness and well-being. It would be interesting to focus on various regions around the world to analyze how well the

adaption of the standards and tools function, and what effect they have on the behavior of the farmers. Further, this focus could demonstrate if the structure and management of the network, perceived as mostly positive by this research, holds true when critically analyzed from a farm level. By conducting research on these topics, a more complete picture of the general influences of an MSI on its network may be available.

By only interviewing members of the BCI secretariat, it was possible to get an in depth view of their standpoint, but it could have also lead to a biased point of view of the research. To decrease this bias, research criticizing the power structure was accumulated, analyzed and incorporated in the discussion.

Considering the external validity of this research's outcomes, one has to understand that the dynamics of a MSI depend a lot on the resource upon which the initiative is focused on. The practices to harvest different natural resources and each respective supply chain differ significantly from resource to resource. Therefore, this research is not about applying specific technicalities to the actions taken by other MSIs but to identify general approaches and mindsets that favor the creation and up-keep of equality in MSIs.

The formulation of the research question had a direct influence on the chosen theoretical framework and chosen literature. By changing the question different perspectives would have been taken into account, which, consequently, would lead to different research outcomes. Therefore, this can be seen as a theoretical shortcoming.

This case study should be conducted by further researchers, utilizing the concept of the ANT and framing to validate this researches outcomes. Additionally, the same approach should be applied to analyze further MSIs, to identify their structure on the same basis in order to evaluate if the findings of this research can be generalized.

Finally an analysis of the current negotiations regarding the revision of BCI's Production Principles and Criteria would be interesting. Hereby, the implementation and perception of the various actors would be of interest. It could demonstrate if BCI has continuity in its approaches, and what degrees of stability within the network would result from these actions.

8 Concluding Remarks

It can be said that by enabling transparency, communication, and listening to the various stakeholders, a multi-stakeholder initiative already provides a solid base to enable for equality among its participating actors. Hereby, the creation phase of an MSI is one of the most crucial phases in setting the tone on how the initiative and its actors will collaborate and operate with each other in later stages. Actors who might be perceived as ‘vulnerable’, as smallholder farmers and actors at the bottom of the supply chain, should be able to participate in meetings and also have appropriate representatives who are able to make the voice of these actors heard and incorporated in the strategic decision making process. The recognition and engagement with all stakeholder groups allows for a plurality of conventions being incorporated in the sustainability standards of the MSI and also for all three pillars of sustainability to be sufficiently involved. If this can be established, it can aid in reducing structural and political power inequalities within the network.

A further crucial characteristic of an MSI, to enable equality, is the ability to adapt to varying regional circumstances. The framing tools set up during the standard making stage, with the intention to define the roles of the various actors, have to be adapted according to the perspective regional circumstances. Because the secretariat of an MSI will not have the capacity, knowledge and outreach to properly do so, regional implementation partners should be trained and utilized. That way the standards can be implemented most effectively, increasing its positive impact. These partners can additionally organize the farmers in groups and apply tools to communicate the farmers’ progress and needs to the rest of the network. It is a possibility of processing the more qualitative data and information provided by the farmers and the societies they operate in and using it to continuously improve the initiative. Additionally, it is a form of representation to further support the farmers to not being marginalized by more powerful actors in the network.

By collaboratively establishing the appropriate structure, framing and mindsets within the network and its management, can lead to stability within the initiative. It allows that equality among its actors can be obtained and maintained, and should be the goal of every multi-stakeholder initiative.

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Interviewees:

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Figures

Figure 1: *BCI Members and Partners Worldwide* (2015). BCI website. Retrieved on 03.10.2015 from:

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Figure 2: *The Structure of the Steering Committee* (2007). BCI Report of the First Technical Working Group (Pakistan) of the Better Cotton Initiative. BCI. Multan, 13-14 February, 2007.

Figure 3: *BCI Consultation Timeline 2007-2008* (2008). BCI Consultation Report – Global principles, criteria, enabling mechanisms. Consultation from February 2007 to July 2008 – Phase I. BCI.

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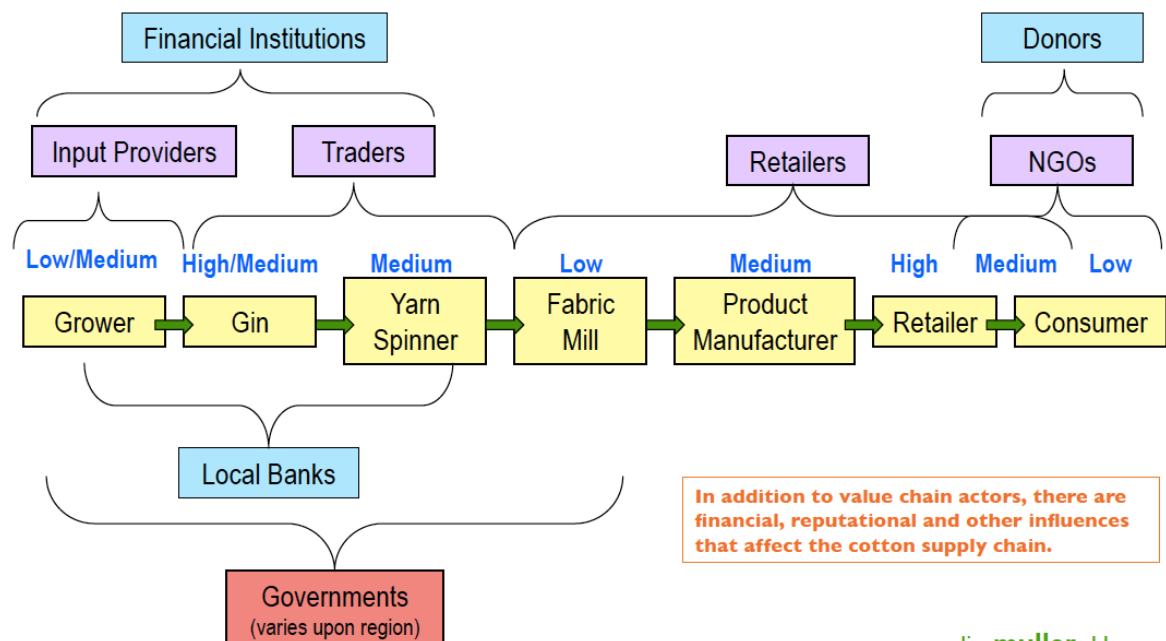
Figure 5: *Key Stakeholders and Type of Assessment* (2013). The Better Cotton Assurance Programme. BCI. November, 2013. Retrieved on May 15, 2015 from: http://bettercotton.org/wpcontent/uploads/2014/01/Better-Cotton-Assurance-Program_final_eng_ext.pdf

Figure 6: *Income Stream and Membership Fees 2014* (2015). Better Cotton Initiative 2014 Annual Report. BCI. Retrieved on 15.05.2015 from: <http://bettercotton.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/ANNUAL-REPORT-2014-FINAL-1.pdf>

Figure 7: *Standard Revision Process - Timeline* (2015). BCI website. Retrieved on 15.08.2015 from: <http://bettercotton.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Untitled.png>

10 Appendix

10.1 Appendix 1 – The Global Cotton Supply Chain

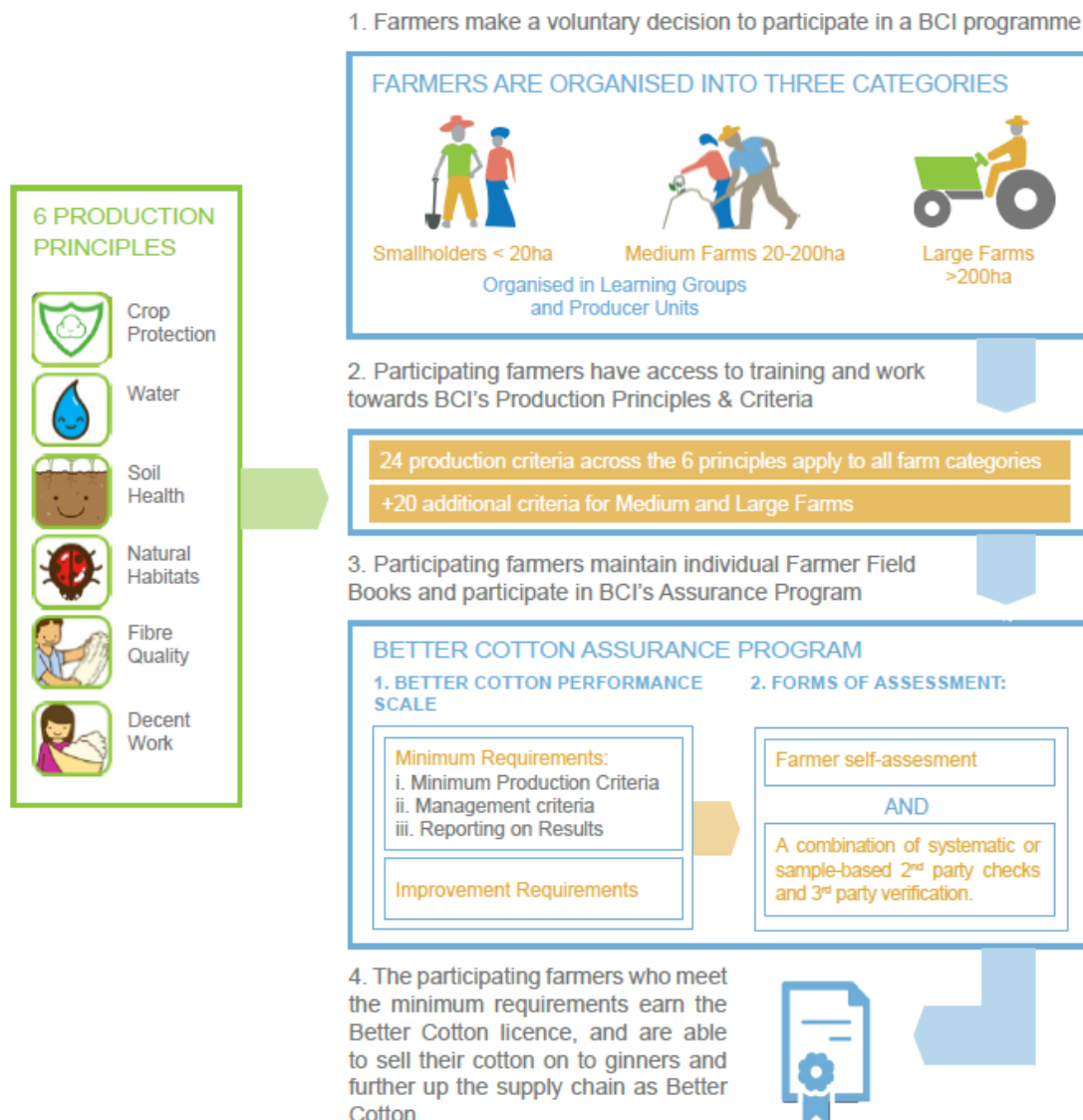


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10.2 Appendix 2 – The Better Cotton Standard System



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10.3 Appendix 3 - Interview Guides

Interviewee One

About yourself

- What was your position at BCI when you left and when did you leave?
- What was your line of work (area of expertise) when WWF approached you?

Starting point of BCI and the standards

- Who were the key partners that participated in setting up the standards? Which actor groups of the supply chain were represented?
- In which way were farmers involved in the process?
- Did you have any issues with over/under represented actors? Were you concerned of that?
- Who were the various stakeholders that you talked to in order to create a basis for the standards?
- What was done to create the standards, how did the actors involved agree on the final standards? How was approval reached?
- What was the overall mindset of parties involved in the process and what was the main common goal and driving factor?
 - How high was the need to adapt communication to the specific groups? In which way?
- When setting up the structure of BCI, how were the three pillars of sustainability (economic, environmental, and social) balanced? Did the focus on one dominate and did that focus change over time?

Power structures and equality

- Each party tries to implement their point of view as much as possible. How did you deal with the various pressures and how did you try to maintain equality for all actors involved? Was it successful?
- Was it hard to bring all actors with varying mindsets together?
- Were there more powerful actors who significantly influenced decision making (also just through their degree of engagement)?
- Is there some sort of pressure towards BCI or any of the actors within the supply chain to adapt to the preferences of the large brands and retailers who invest a lot of money and are crucial for the demand side of the network?
- Are the smallholders intimidated by larger firms when it comes to decision making? How is this prevented?

Interviewee Two: First Interview

Emergence and Structure of BCI

- Various organizations decided to initiate Better Cotton in 2005. How were the initial employees of BCI set together and chosen?
- Did relationships between some of the members throughout the supply chain already exist or were they established through BCI?
- Did BCI do most of the work when setting up the standards? How much were the other founding members involved?
- The farmers have to fulfill the standards in order to maintain their license. What are regulations, rules and guidelines for the other members?
- Who defined the roles of the different set of members and in which way are they defined?
- Who has the power and makes the decision to expel members from the initiative?

Perceptions within the Network

- How would you describe BCI's main role within the network and how is its role crucial to the network?
- Making Better Cotton a sustainable mainstream commodity is substantial to BCI. Is this view shared by most of the members that are part of the initiative?
- Is it a challenge to align all members behind the common goal and what is done to align them?
- Is there a big difference how BCI is perceived among its various members?

New Members and Recruitment

- What are the main reasons for the different stakeholder groups to join the initiative (e.g. external pressures, true belief in the values of BCI)?
- Are most of them new to the concept of sustainability? Do most members have to change their approach of doing things and do they go through organizational change?
- When did the active process of member recruitment start?
- Was it initially difficult to find new members and make them commit to BCI?

The Council

- What decisions can the BCI make independently and what decisions are made by the council/all members?
- Who represents the farmers?
- In which way does BCI's work differ from the council's work? What role does BCI play in the council?

The Farmers

- How are farmers able to implement changes? Do they get financial aid? How are the working conditions improved?
- Membership fees are to 62% from suppliers and manufacturers. Do farmers also pay membership fees?
- How long can farmers that do not fulfill the minimum requirements of the standards, in order to receive a license, stay members?
- Do BCI farmers also collaborate/share information with farmers connected to organizations with benchmarked standards as CmiA?

Implementation Partners

- The implementation partners play a crucial role within the initiative. How much freedom do they have to make their own decisions considering the approach of their work and how much guidelines do you communicate to them?
- Who trains the Implementation Partners?
- Is the success or efficiency of the Implementation Partners and their used methodologies measured? Is there any improvement system in place?
- How much does the work of the implementation partners change between the different regions and can it be a problem if their work differs too much?

Better Cotton Fast Track Program & the BCI Growth and Innovation Fund

- What was the main idea behind the programs and why was it not managed through regular membership fees?
- Are the funds of brands and retailers in the Fast Track program funneled to specific programs of their interest or does BCI distribute it to projects around the world?
- What improvements do you see from the Better Cotton Fast Track Program to the BCI Growth and Innovation Fund?

Better Cotton Tracer

- What standpoint does the Tracer have within the network?
- How crucial is it and how many decisions are made based on it?
- How does the Better Cotton Tracer differ from the Unique Bale Identification Codes?
- Why is closer work of retailers and brands with the supply chain expected, as a result of phasing out the UBICs?

Critique

- Is there any criticism towards BCI? What would you improve?

Interviewee Two: Second Interview

Quality and Supply Chain Dynamics

- Who are all the actors of the supply chain?
- Do brands and retailers only use actors from the BCI network, throughout the entire supply chain?
- Are farmers guaranteed that their BC will be bought by the network or do they carry the risk that it will not be bought?
- Why is it interesting for actors of the middle of the supply chain (e.g. ginner and spinners) to join BCI?
- To what extent does the customer of the retailers and brands influence the process and dynamics of BCI?
- Do you feel that the council is able to represent all the members within the network?
- Was there a situation in which you felt that some important voices might not have been heard?

Power Dynamics and Trust

- How is the level of trust between farmers and brands/retailers today and what is done about it?
- Has it improved over the years between current members and how is it when new members join?
- How do you manage to build up and maintain trust between the actors?
- Are the smallholders intimidated by larger firms when it comes to decision making? How is this approached by BCI?
- Are farmers who have been in the network communicating more openly?
- How big is the role of the council in regards to expressing the farmers' needs?
- How does the interaction and communication among the actors throughout the supply chain change when they join BCI?

Three Pillars of Sustainability

- How are the three pillars (economic, environmental and social) balanced within BCI and did the focus shift over time?
- How big is the economic focus of BCI and how much does it interfere, if at all, with its sustainability aspect?
- To what extent do actors like WWF, with a strong environmental focus, and brands, with a rather economic focus, agree and disagree and how does it influence BCI's progress? How difficult is the process of aligning them?
- From an economic perspective, how big is the pressure to consider the demands/suggestions/ideas from retailers and brands who provide the financial support?

Recruitment

- How does a typical recruitment process look like? For farmers, suppliers, brands?
- What are the selling points that you communicate to the different actors?
- How deep to changes within actors go, when they join BCI? Is it on an operational level or behavioral?
- On which level are you trying to change the perception of the farmers with IPs and their methodologies?
- Is it difficult to manage expectations of what actors expect when joining BCI? How are problems in this direction managed?

Standards

- How well does the BCI standard adapt to regional circumstances?
- If something goes wrong or a problem comes up within the network or the standards, how easy is it to restructure processes, standards, relations?

Assurance Program

- Who are the third party controllers who check on the farmers, according to the Assurance Program?
- How does this process work and how often is it?

Growth and Innovation Fund

- If retailers and brands have to pay a price per volume, won't the end price of the final product increase? Is there a limit of how much extra they can charge on customer level?
- Is BCI involved in commercial management of cotton supply chain?

Institutions

- How is it to work with governments?
- How does it differ from working with actors in the supply chain?
- How much of BCI's freedom does it take?

What is the role of governments and their influence on decision making?

Interviewee Two: Third Interview

Institutional settings and governments

- If BCI standards are intended to be implemented in a new area or country and strong local (political or other structural) inequalities are found, how does it influence BCI's decision to engage?
- What are usual steps to oppose/improve these inequalities for BCI members?
- How does BCI deal with these inequalities?
- To what extent do local politics and power relations play a role in how standards are enacted on the ground?
- Is it mainly up to the Implementation Partners to handle these inequalities or does the BCI secretariat intervene and help?
- There is an example of a sustainability roundtable where the suppliers of the network and also the local government were trying to weaken deforestation regulations that were supposed to be implemented in the standard. If it is the local suppliers and governments who try to weaken certain sustainability aspects, what can or would be done about it?

Recruitment of brands and retailers/all "types" of actors that the BCI secretariat is directly responsible for

- What is BCI looking for in new organizations?
- Is there some evaluation system before BCI approaches an organization? What are the criteria and minimum requirements?
- How does BCI initially communicate to new members, especially to brands and retailers?
- Are new members framed/ taught during the recruiting process how to work with and understand the supply chain in a different way? What do you do?
- Is it hard for some new members to understand the equality and interaction that they will have with all the different actors throughout the supply chain?
- Do big gaps sometimes exist between what you expect of new members and what actually is the case? How are these gaps closed?
- How much do new members consider BCI's legitimacy and how can it be proven?
- How much effort does and did it take for BCI to build up and maintain legitimacy?

Strategic Decisions

- How do you get all actors to head in the same direction? Is there something similar (a story or a focus) that you constantly repeat at meetings, discussions, conferences that you want the actors to remember or at least keep in mind?
- Have any big strategic changes been made between 2009 and 2015? Was the role of BCI during this period mainly about making everything work, growing, and seeing that every actor fulfills their role?

Inequalities

- How would you describe the overall community of BCI? Is there an “everybody on his own” mentality in which the network is only used for one’s own benefits, or is there a mentality of helping each other and working together, to a certain extent?
- Are there prejudices or issues (incompetence and lack of knowledge) about actors in the lower part of the supply chain that need to be openly discussed and communicated in order to confront them?
- How are the power relations of the various actors perceived by BCI and what is done to keep them as equal as possible?
- How concerned is BCI about extensive opportunistic behavior and is anything in place to detect it and what would be done against it?

Farmers

- Farmers and workers are trained to learn about improving production. To what extent are good practices communicated?
- Does BCI support farmers to mobilize unions or other activities for farmers to undertake collective bargaining?
- If some workers or farmers of a certain region could not be working according to the ILO standards, how could they reach out to BCI and what would be done?
- For tools as the farmers hand book, content is made in collaboration and adapted by the IPs. Do structural ideas for tools like this come from BCI or from random actors?

Social sustainability aspects

- Which actors are most concerned about social impact in the standards, and who pushes it forward the most (is most persistent about it)?
- Could more be done in the social aspect? What and how could it be measured?
- What field of economic, environmental and social sustainability are farmers and suppliers most concerned about?
- Do you in any way account for what to do or try to prevent, that regions focus too much on cotton production (that it erodes any alternatives as diversified agriculture or agro-forestry systems)?

10.4 Appendix 4 – Material from Implementation Partners



Better Cotton training material developed by Abrapa, WWF-Pakistan, Solidaridad, ASA, Arvind, AFFRO and AProCA.

BCI (2012). *Better Cotton Initiative 2011 Annual Report*. Retrieved on 14.04.2015 from: http://bettercotton.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Annual_Report_Final_MedRes_v1-2011.pdf

10.5 Appendix 5 – Mural from Implementation Partners



Mural on safe application of pesticides, MYKAPS, Solidaridad, India

BCI (2012). *Better Cotton Initiative 2011 Annual Report*. Retrieved on 14.04.2015 from: http://bettercotton.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Annual_Report_Final_MedRes_v1-2011.pdf