



# Her freedom, her voice:

Insights from the Freedom Fund's work with women and girls



The Freedom Fund is a leader in the global movement to end modern slavery. We identify and invest in the most effective frontline efforts to eradicate modern slavery in the countries and sectors where it is most prevalent. Partnering with visionary investors, governments, anti-slavery organisations and those at risk of exploitation, we tackle the systems that allow slavery to persist and thrive. Working together, we protect vulnerable populations, liberate and reintegrate those enslaved and prosecute those responsible.

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# Executive summary

Every day across the globe, millions of women and girls are used, controlled and exploited for commercial or personal gain. They are trafficked into the sex industry, kept in servitude as domestic workers in private homes, forced to work in exploitative conditions in factories and bonded into agricultural labour. They suffer terrible violence and are denied their basic rights and freedoms.

Slavery continues to thrive behind closed doors, despite being illegal in every country. And it is women and girls who are most affected. They make up the majority of victims of forced and bonded labour, human trafficking and forced marriage.

In many countries, the simple fact of being female creates a heightened risk of becoming a victim of slavery. Pervasive gender discrimination means that girls are marginalised, treated as second-class citizens within their communities and viewed as an economic burden by their families. Many are forced to drop out of school early and sent to work in exploitative conditions, or are married off against their will. Women are more likely than men to seek work in unregulated and informal sectors where they are vulnerable to abuse, violence and exploitation.

Over the past four years, the Freedom Fund has sought to identify and invest in the most effective frontline efforts to eradicate slavery. Across 'hotspots' in Ethiopia, India and Nepal we are supporting frontline NGOs to tackle the risks and vulnerabilities that communities face, including the specific vulnerabilities faced by women and girls. From building rights awareness and keeping girls in school, to opening up new economic opportunities and improving conditions in

the workplace, our local partners are working to help women and girls protect themselves from slavery, address the root causes of their exploitation, recover from trauma, prosecute those who abuse them and activate government to take responsibility.

Globally, more research and sharing of knowledge is needed on the most effective frontline strategies to address the gender dimensions of slavery. In an effort to contribute to this knowledge, this report draws together lessons from Freedom Fund-supported interventions to date, including the following key points:

- Many organisations that we support engage in **'awareness-raising'** activities to inform women and girls and their families about the risks of trafficking. Our research and the experience of our partners suggests that these activities are unlikely to be effective unless messages are highly tailored to the real and specific pressures that women face in the local context. For example, women migrating abroad for work may be well aware of the risks but nonetheless embark on dangerous travel due to cultural pressures or because they are unconvinced by warnings from NGOs. One promising strategy is to **engage returning female migrant workers** to talk about their experiences, as they are more likely to be listened to by women in the community and to provide actionable advice.
- Beyond providing information, our partners are working to **strengthen women and girls' 'agency'** - their ability to influence and make decisions that affect their lives. They have seen good results from programs aimed at providing **'life skills'** - the rejection of gender-based discrimination, as well

as the confidence, assertiveness, judgment and other practical skills such as basic numeracy – to make informed choices, join with others and resist exploitation.

- Creating **small peer groups of adolescent girls** is proving to be a powerful means of building their confidence to **challenge social and cultural norms** that underpin gender inequality. This is also yielding results in the workplace, where, for example, our partners have established support groups among adolescent workers in cotton spinning mills to collectively resist violations of their rights.
- Programs must **engage the whole community** to combat gender inequality and harmful norms. This includes **parents, community leaders**, and also **men and boys**. While Freedom Fund partners are working with all of these groups, more research is needed on the most effective strategies to engage these diverse constituencies.
- **Raid and rescue operations** to remove women and girls from situations of slavery can cause **unintended harm** (though rescues are often needed). When possible, providing support services such as drop-in centres, shelters, counselling and job training can encourage a more gradual and informed exit, aiding survivors' recovery and helping to prevent re-exploitation.
- Delivering timely **mental health support for survivors** of exploitation is one of the largest gaps in the global response to slavery. Our research in south-eastern Nepal found that women affected by bonded labour are significantly more likely to suffer from

anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder than men. But little is known about which therapies are most appropriate in different contexts, and access to mental health professionals tends to be limited to capital cities, out of reach of remote communities.

- Frontline anti-slavery NGOs function within deeply patriarchal societies and need to make very conscious efforts to enable **female leaders and managers** to emerge. A shortage of female leadership is holding the sector back. The Freedom Fund has encountered this directly in a number of our hotspots, where only a small percentage of our NGO partners are led by women, and where we have had to adopt deliberate policies to improve our own recruitment of female staff at local level. The Freedom Fund and others in the anti-slavery movement should increase their investment in training and support for women's leadership.

As we work to incorporate the lessons and recommendations contained in this report into our own programs and investment decisions, we hope they will also contribute to the work of other anti-slavery organisations and researchers. It is only by improving our common understanding of the root causes of vulnerability, and the strategies necessary for addressing these, that we can make progress in the fight against modern slavery.

# Introduction

Once considered a phenomenon consigned to history, slavery continues to exist and evolve. Across the globe, an estimated 40 million people are deprived of their freedom and dignity and subjected to abhorrent physical and emotional abuse.<sup>1</sup>

The impact of slavery on women and girls is well documented. Over the past two decades, and especially since the ratification of the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons in 2000, numerous studies have examined the experience of women and girls who have been trafficked across borders, primarily for sexual exploitation. More recently, research has explored the causes and consequences of forced marriage and, to a lesser extent, women and girls subjected to forced labour in industries such as manufacturing and domestic work.

The 2017 Global Estimates of Modern Slavery, published by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Walk Free Foundation, illuminate the extent to which women and girls are disproportionately affected by slavery: approximately 71% of the total number of victims are female.<sup>2</sup> The figures reveal that more women than men are subjected to forced labour in the private sector, women comprise the overwhelming majority of victims of commercial sexual exploitation and women are more likely to be living in a forced marriage.

Slavery is not solely a female issue. It is estimated that over 11 million men and boys were victims in 2016, mostly forced or bonded through debt into manual work. However, women and girls enter slavery in particular ways, experience exploitation differently than men and have distinct needs that arise as a result of gender norms. The gendered experience of slavery flows from female-specific vulnerabilities; for example, discriminatory attitudes and practices restrict the life choices available to girls and make them more likely to leave school early and pursue low-skilled jobs in unregulated sectors.



The critical need for gender-specific strategies to tackle modern slavery is well recognised among practitioners. It is also encouraging to see a growing body of academic literature to support these field-level observations. We have seen useful studies published on anti-trafficking initiatives and sector-specific programs to tackle forced labour. Yet few evaluate the effectiveness of these interventions and even fewer have comprehensively assessed how best to respond to the unique needs of women and girls.

Over the past four years, the Freedom Fund has supported more than 100 NGOs to deliver a broad range of interventions to combat slavery in countries where it is most prevalent. This report summarises our experience in working with women and girls - as victims, survivors and change agents - to exit situations of exploitation and to challenge the systemic factors that enable slavery to exist.

Given that we are only a few years into our programs, this report does not make conclusive recommendations on best practices. Rather, it provides insights from our hotspots, based on research we have commissioned and the experiences of our staff and frontline partners. Ultimately, we hope this report will encourage a constructive dialogue on how to develop and deliver effective anti-slavery programs for women and girls.

The report begins with an overview of the key risk factors that shape women and girls' vulnerability to modern slavery. It then looks at the types of slavery affecting women and girls in the locations where the Freedom Fund works, the range of interventions we are supporting and the lessons we have learned. The report concludes with our priorities for further research and action in order to strengthen and expand current efforts.

# Why are women and girls disproportionately affected by modern slavery?

On any given day in 2016, approximately 28 million women and girls were forced to work against their will or live in a forced marriage.



Approximately seven out of ten victims of modern slavery are female.



71% of known victims of human trafficking in 2014 were women and girls.<sup>3</sup>



99% of reported victims of commercial sexual exploitation are women and girls.



84% of those estimated to be living in a forced marriage in 2016 were female.



The majority of the approximately one million child victims of commercial sexual exploitation are girls under the age of 18.

What makes women and girls particularly vulnerable to slavery? Poverty, marginalisation and weak rule of law are root causes that affect both men and women, driving them to seek work in informal, unregulated and high-risk sectors.

There are some key factors, however, that are generally recognised as exacerbating female vulnerability.

### Gender inequality

Across the globe, and especially in high prevalence countries, women continue to be treated as inferior to men in most aspects of social, economic and political life. Discrimination against women and girls restricts their choices, limits their potential and leads many to make personal sacrifices for the benefit of their family, such as leaving school early to marry, perform domestic chores or take up low-paid employment. A study by Winrock International found that women and girls living in communities with endemic poverty and gender inequality face a heightened risk of being trafficked.<sup>4</sup> The exclusion of women from leadership and decision-making positions only serves to reinforce their marginalisation, allowing discriminatory attitudes and practices to go unchallenged. Those most at risk are members of communities that already face discrimination due to caste, ethnicity, race or religion.

Cultural or social marginalisation of women is exacerbated by legal discrimination. Research by the World Policy Analysis Center shows that 54 countries allow girls to marry between one and three years younger than boys, while many more allow exceptions to the minimum age of marriage with parental consent or on the authority of a court.<sup>5</sup> In some high prevalence countries, dowry systems further stigmatise women as a source of income for the husband's family and an economic liability to their own.

### Forced and child marriage

The causes of forced and child marriage are myriad and complex. Prevalent in communities with high rates of poverty and insecurity, forcing a daughter to marry is often seen as a way to secure her economic future.<sup>6</sup> Forced marriage is also a widespread cultural practice, based on stereotypical views of sexuality and a woman's role in society.<sup>7</sup> The sense of 'ownership' that

a forced marriage may give the husband or his family can encourage other forms of slavery, such as sexual exploitation and domestic servitude.<sup>8</sup>

Studies have shown the consequences that forced and child marriage can have on a girl's sexual and reproductive health. Often unable to negotiate safer sex, she is vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, as well as early pregnancy, which carries its own complications.<sup>9</sup> It is estimated that two million women in developing countries suffer from obstetric fistula as a consequence of early childbirth.<sup>10</sup> This condition often leaves them ostracised from their families and communities, abandoned by their husbands and unable to access medical treatment.<sup>11</sup>

### When is child marriage slavery?

It is a common practice in many parts of the world for girls to be married before they turn 18, through marriages arranged by the family.

At the Freedom Fund, we do not consider all child marriages to be slavery, despite the negative consequences girl brides can experience. A girl's marriage may be considered forced if she did not give her **free and informed consent** to the union, is subjected to **control and threats from her husband**, is **exploited for sexual or labour purposes** during the marriage, or **cannot realistically or safely leave**.

The younger a girl is when she is married, the greater the risk that she will be vulnerable to non-consensual and exploitative practices.

### Gender-based violence

Subjected to abuse and violence at home or by an intimate partner, women and girls can be pushed to accept risky or suspect job prospects in order to escape their circumstances. For example, the high prevalence of abuse against women in Nepal – a 2011 health survey found that up to one third of women had experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence<sup>12</sup> – has been identified by Terre des Hommes as a key contributor to commercial sexual exploitation.<sup>13</sup>

Women and girls are more likely than men to suffer from sexual violence as part of their exploitation, including as a physical and psychological means to compel obedience. Women trafficked into the commercial sex industry face a particularly high risk of sexual violence and rape as a form of intimidation, while abuse and harassment by predominantly male managers are commonly used to control female employees in textile factories in South Asia.

### Migration

Migration offers an escape from poverty and unemployment, but also exposes women to increased risk. Research from the Overseas Development Institute highlights the role that gender plays in decisions around migration.<sup>14</sup> The decision for a woman to migrate is often taken by her family, based on the expectation that women are more likely to send remittances home or that the eldest daughter should

earn money so her siblings can go to school. For other women, migration can be a way to escape family control, domestic violence, forced marriage, poverty or oppressive social norms.

In general, women and girls tend to have less information, less education and fewer options for migration.<sup>15</sup> Many women from sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia migrate to the Middle East to work for wealthy families. During the journey, they are at risk of physical abuse, sexual violence, kidnapping, injury, disappearance and even death. On arrival, they may be subjected to restrictions on their freedom of movement, poor living conditions or having their wages withheld.

In response to increasing reports of such abuses, some governments have placed a ban on female migration. In many cases this has had the unintended consequence of pushing women to use riskier migration routes.

Image: Atul Loke, Legatum Limited, 2017



### Gendered employment sectors

According to the ILO, women across the globe tend to work in sectors characterised by low productivity, poor remuneration, high levels of insecurity, lack of regulation and poor working conditions.<sup>16</sup> Domestic work is one of these sectors. Less socially valued than other types of work, it is typically low-paid and unregulated. A study of domestic workers found that more than a quarter were completely excluded from national labour legislation.<sup>17</sup> Numerous reports have documented serious physical and psychological abuse of female domestic workers at the hands of their employers, including food deprivation, sexual harassment and rape.<sup>18</sup>

### Conflict

Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence in situations of violent conflict. Terrorist and extremist groups are known to use religious norms to justify sexual slavery and forced marriage. Between 2014-2016, more than 5,000 women and children from the Yazidi minority in Iraq were estimated to have been kidnapped by Islamic State and sold into forced marriages or sexual enslavement.<sup>19</sup> This tactic has also been used by Boko Haram in northern Nigeria.<sup>20</sup>

Large-scale displacement caused by armed conflict creates transient communities vulnerable to human trafficking.<sup>21</sup> A Freedom Fund study of the prevalence of slavery among Syrian refugees in Lebanon indicated that 'survival sex' and sexual exploitation is a growing issue, with women forced or coerced into prostitution in order to provide food and shelter for their families.<sup>22</sup> Faced with physical and economic insecurity, families may also see early or forced marriage as a way to alleviate poverty and protect girls from difficult or uncertain living conditions.

### An 'ecological' model of risk factors

With so many factors contributing to the vulnerability of women and girls, we have found it helpful to classify them according to four categories: individual, household, community and institutional. Figure 1 below depicts the key risk factors that we have identified in our hotspot programs.

**Figure 1: Key risk factors for women and girls in Freedom Fund hotspots**



# The Freedom Fund's hotspot programs: An overview

The Freedom Fund's hotspot model supports local organisations to deliver targeted anti-slavery interventions. We believe that community-based, grassroots organisations are the most effective agents of change, especially when they are brought together to work in coalition. They have a deep understanding of the issues facing communities, which makes their interventions more relevant and better able to deliver sustained impact.

We currently fund 101 organisations across six hotspots. In five of these, women and girls are a significant target group, and in three – southern India, Ethiopia and central Nepal – interventions are almost exclusively focused on them.



## Ethiopia



Ethiopia has experienced unprecedented levels of migration of women and girls to the Middle East in recent years, particularly for domestic work. For adolescent girls, few if any local employment options can compete with the potential financial rewards offered by these jobs. In transit and on arrival, however, female migrant workers face the risk of falling into situations of slavery. As informal workers with few labour protections, they may face confiscation of their passports, restricted access to communication and physical or sexual abuse.

The Ethiopia hotspot program seeks to empower women and girls to make informed migration decisions. Our partner organisations operate in two locations: Addis Ababa, a central transit point on the journey abroad, and the Amhara region, one of the main source areas of migration. The program aims to reduce the vulnerability of potential migrants and returnee women and girls through a two-pronged approach. Firstly, we create alternative livelihood options for women and girls most likely to migrate, and secondly, we promote safer migration practices to decrease the risk of exploitation.

<sup>i</sup> Investment figures represent total invested as of 30 June 2017  
Image: Audrey Guichon/Freedom Fund



## Central Nepal



There are an estimated 13,000 women and girls working in the adult entertainment sector in Kathmandu, with as many as half this number under the age of 18.<sup>23</sup> These establishments – dance bars, massage parlours and cabin restaurants – are known to pose a high risk of commercial sexual exploitation for the women and girls that work in them. Many leave their communities to follow legitimate offers of work before unwittingly entering the sector through fraud or deception. Bonded through loans from employers that are almost impossible to pay off, they are subjected to abuse and restrictions on their freedom of movement.

Our hotspot in central Nepal is focused on preventing the exploitation of girls in the adult entertainment sector. Our partner organisations have three focus areas: preventing vulnerable girls from entering the industry, providing them with support to remove themselves from situations of exploitation, and working with employers and customers to reduce demand.

Image: Jenna Mulhall-Brereton/Geneva Global



## Southern India

 17  
PARTNERS

 \$3.1m  
INVESTED

Up to 80% of workers in cotton spinning mills in southern India are female, and most are adolescent girls from low castes. Despite the importance of the industry in providing local jobs, workers face many risks. Girls are often recruited to work under fraudulent pretences and lack basic employment rights and protections. Many work more than 60 hours a week, yet are commonly paid at half the legal minimum wage for apprentices. Cases of physical, verbal and sexual intimidation and abuse tend to go unreported and uninvestigated.

Our local partners in the southern India hotspot, located in Tamil Nadu state, aim to tackle forms of bonded labour in spinning mills through targeted community-based interventions. These programs seek to address the root causes of vulnerability for women and girls, build their collective voice and provide access to skills training, alternative employment and government entitlements. Our hotspot partners also collectively engage with mill owners and government departments in support of better conditions and workers' rights within the mills.

Image: Sanjit Das, Legatum Limited, 2017



## Northern India

 22  
PARTNERS

 \$7.1m  
INVESTED

In the northern Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, high levels of bonded labour have been documented in a range of industries, including brick kilns, agriculture and domestic work. The root cause is often debt bondage, where families that have taken out loans at extortionate rates from local landowners are forced to work to pay off the loan. Women and girls, particularly in brick kilns, are usually 'invisible workers'; hired as part of the family unit yet receiving no wages, they are unable to access employment benefits and are at risk of sexual violence.<sup>24</sup> Women and girls, especially those from Dalit castes, are also vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking.

Our northern India hotspot program supports 22 partner organisations to reduce the incidence of bonded labour, trafficking and harmful child labour. The emphasis is on community-led efforts to counter trafficking and to reintegrate individuals coming out of bonded labour. Our partners also support communities to develop economic alternatives and to understand their basic rights. A major focus of this hotspot is to strengthen state government actions to tackle bonded labour and trafficking.

Image: Sanjit Das, Legatum Limited, 2017



## South-Eastern Nepal



13  
PARTNERS



\$2.9m  
INVESTED

Our hotspot program in south-eastern Nepal aims to eradicate harwa-charuwa, a system of agricultural bonded labour that mainly affects people from Dalit castes. Families in financial difficulties are forced to take loans from landlords and, in return, are expected to provide labour to pay off the debt – often indefinitely. While men grow crops, women and children herd cattle or work as domestic servants. Dalit women face multiple levels of discrimination linked to their caste, ethnicity and gender. They suffer restrictions on their movement, domestic violence and violence related to dowry.

All 13 partner organisations in this hotspot work with harwa-charuwa communities, engaging with local women and girls through dedicated ‘freedom groups’. These interventions help bonded labourers understand their rights, organise savings and income-generating groups, remove children from forced labour and improve access to education.

Image: Jenna Mulhall-Brereton/Geneva Global



## Myanmar (future hotspot)

Forced marriage of girls and women from Myanmar to men in China is an issue that has largely gone unreported. China’s one-child policy, as well as a cultural preference for sons, has resulted in a substantial gender gap. Within the next 10 to 15 years it is estimated that more than a quarter of Chinese men will be unable to find wives.<sup>25</sup> Research from local groups in one border state of Myanmar highlights the scale of the problem: 25% of female trafficking victims were under 18, with girls as young as 14 subjected to forced marriage.<sup>26</sup> However, the lack of comprehensive data suggests that the real number could be considerably higher.

Many of the women and girls forced into marriage choose to migrate to China in search of employment to support their families. The majority make the journey illegally and their informal status makes them especially vulnerable to exploitation by traffickers. Gender-based violence and entrenched discrimination in Myanmar, as well as internal displacement resulting from conflict in the country’s border areas, also places girls and women at high risk of exploitation.

Image: Freedom Fund

### **By women for women: WORD in Tamil Nadu**

Women's Organisation in Rural Development (WORD) is one of the Freedom Fund's local partners in Tamil Nadu. WORD works to improve conditions in textile mills through education, training and awareness-raising. WORD is an organisation led by women for the benefit of women.

With support from the Freedom Fund, WORD is working in 50 villages in the Namakkal District, an area with a high incidence of bonded labour. They have reached over 1,500 adolescent girls since the program began, providing life skills education, vocational training and career guidance to those at risk of exploitation. WORD has also been able to secure access to local spinning mills, enabling staff to deliver life skills training and health camps to current workers. By emphasising the link between improved working conditions and workers' productivity, WORD has been able to build support and cooperation with many mill owners. In fact, some mill owners now approach WORD and ask to be involved in the program.

Renida Sarala, executive director of WORD, says that she has seen a reduction in child labour in the villages where they work; she estimates approximately 10% of children are in child labour today, having previously been as high as 60%. Just as importantly, girls who have participated in WORD's life skills training program have gained confidence and are now helping to share what they have learned to prevent the exploitation of others.

Despite this encouraging progress, Ms Sarala notes that considerable challenges remain, including a lack of adequate sanitation and other facilities for women within mills and the broader community, continuing reluctance among some mill owners to grant workers' rights and sexual exploitation of female workers by male employers that generally goes unreported.



I can see the improvement and empowerment among women and girls in the village compared to when I started working on this issue almost 20 years ago. Yet there is still a long way to go. Many adolescent girls and women remain unaware of their rights and their potential to contribute to society. We must create an environment to encourage them to pursue better lives through education and awareness.



- RENIDA SARALA

# Our impact in numbers

In 2016...



Our partner organisations enabled over 4,250 women and girls to exit slavery and ensured they received support to assist their recovery.<sup>i</sup>



More than 27,500 women and girls accessed social and legal services, including shelter, healthcare and legal aid.

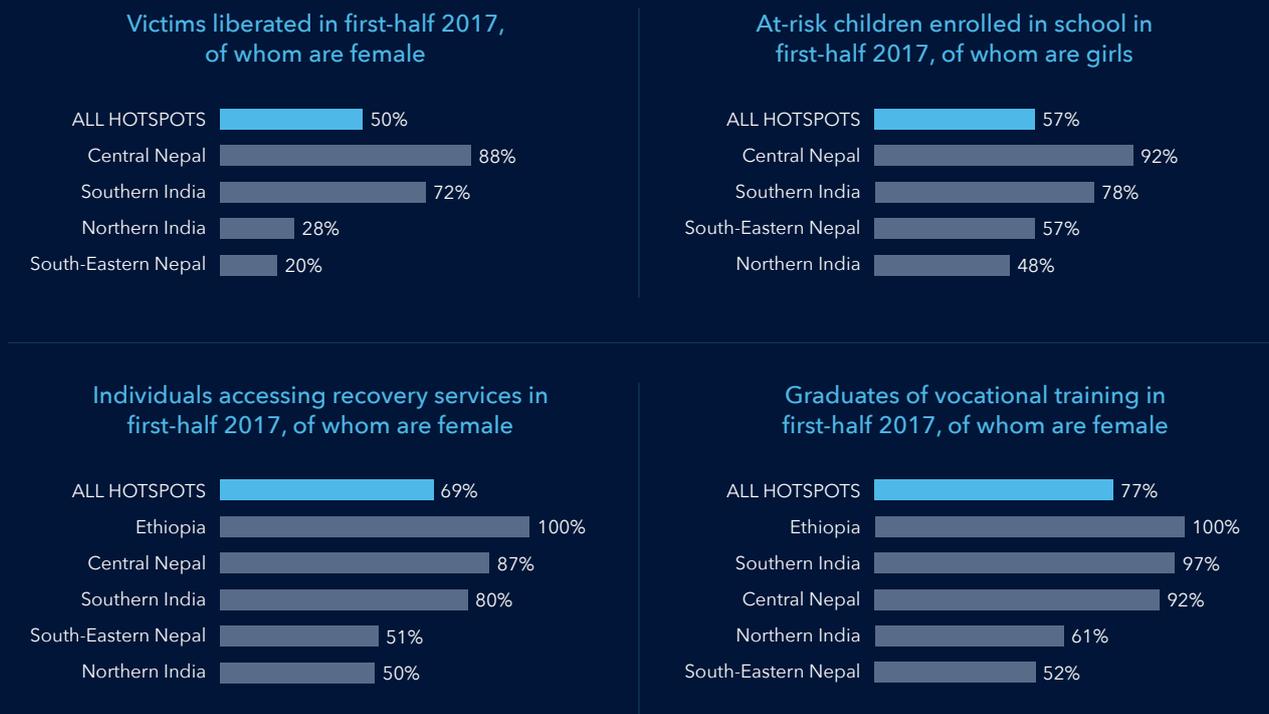


10,600 previously out-of-school girls began attending formal or non-formal education classes.



More than 3,000 adolescent girls and women – survivors, victims or at-risk individuals – graduated from a vocational training course.

**Figure 2: Freedom Fund program impact on women and girls in 2017<sup>ii iii</sup>**



<sup>i</sup> Includes gradual change of circumstance or shorter 'rescue event'. The Freedom Fund's approach is to only support liberations where services for survivor recovery are provided.

<sup>ii</sup> Impact results from Freedom Fund hotspot programs 1 January – 30 June 2017

<sup>iii</sup> All Freedom Fund local partners report into a common set of metrics to monitor program performance. Gender disaggregated data is available for four of the Freedom Fund's global metrics. For further information on Freedom Fund monitoring and evaluation, see <http://freedomfund.org/impact/monitoring-and-evaluation/>

# Working with women and girls on the frontlines: Lessons from our interventions

There is no single approach that will end the slavery of women and girls. Each of our hotspot strategies is different, tailored to an analysis of what is required in each setting and where we can have the biggest impact. We work in a wide range of contexts and we support a diverse range of local partners, each with their own priorities and expertise.

Despite this diversity, there are common strands to our programs. This section describes the different interventions that our partners are delivering for the communities in which they work, highlighting the lessons that we have learned over the past four years and the challenges we continue to face. As our programs are mostly designed to affect change at the individual, household and community levels, these insights are focused on these areas and less on interventions aimed at the structural/institutional level (see Figure 1 on page 9).

## STRENGTHENING AGENCY

### Key lessons

- Interventions to increase rights awareness of at-risk women and girls are most effective when combined with life skills training to build confidence to challenge discriminatory gender norms in the community.
- Women who have returned from domestic work overseas have the most influential voice in shaping the decisions of future migrants. Involving them as 'change agents' in peer discussions can be a powerful way to promote safer migration practices and reduce the risk of exploitation.
- Vocational training programs can unlock women and girls' potential by empowering them to pursue exploitation-free income-generating opportunities.

Agency is the ability to make effective choices and exercise control over one's life. It means being able to earn and control income, move freely outside the home, choose who to marry and have a voice in society. In

the communities in which the Freedom Fund's partners work, women have less agency than men. They have fewer opportunities to earn an income, less control over household decision-making and limited political participation.

Our programs seek to increase the ability of women and girls to make and influence decisions, challenge social and cultural norms in the community and change the underlying factors that affect their vulnerability to slavery. Our partners do this by educating women and girls on their rights, equipping them with the skills to take control of their lives and providing access to education and employment opportunities to generate a sustainable path out of exploitation.

### Building awareness of risks and rights

Our hotspot partners work at the community level to equip women and girls with the information they need to help them navigate away from potential harm and into safe employment, or to remove themselves from situations of slavery. In some instances, this information is about risks - the common schemes that traffickers use, the workplace conditions that may await children sent to work abroad - and in others the focus is on legal and human rights. Evidence from our programs has demonstrated that in source communities for trafficking and labour migration, individuals are often aware of the risks. Awareness-raising interventions therefore need to be narrowly targeted to a specific audience and informed by what factors are likely to change local behaviours.

In central Nepal, over 3,000 girls have attended discussion groups about child and women's rights, empowering them to challenge cultural norms in their communities around early marriage and girls' education. In southern India, through a partnership with the Ethical Trading Initiative, we are training groups of adolescent girls in spinning mills on workplace rights,

aiming to strengthen resistance to labour violations. Our local partners also advocate for women's rights to be recognised at both local and national level, challenging the assumptions and expectations that families, employers and women and girls themselves hold about their role and potential.

### **Improving life skills**

Risk and rights awareness programs have limited impact if women and girls lack the 'life skills' - the confidence, assertiveness, decision-making ability, and other practical skills such as basic numeracy - to resist exploitation. In Ethiopia, our partners promote safer migration through self-help groups that provide prospective female migrant workers with life skills training to improve their chances of a successful journey and safe employment. This includes improving their communication and negotiation skills to challenge discriminatory practices. These community-based conversations help to remove the taboo associated with travelling abroad for domestic work, and provide women and girls with the opportunity to candidly discuss the risks and opportunities of migration with their peers.

Life skills training also seeks to address the root causes of exploitation in the community. For example, women participants in our south-eastern Nepal hotspot identified family health emergencies as the primary source of costly loans that contribute to their debt bondage. Our partners are tackling this by improving the health literacy of women. In northern India, female community health mobilisers have been trained to provide information on topics such as personal hygiene, nutrition and sanitation practices within their own communities, helping other women avoid medical debt.

### **Using film to counter discrimination against girls**

An innovative approach using film to empower adolescent girls and women is being trialled by partner NGOs across 405 villages in Tamil Nadu, India. This intervention will reach over 10,000 participants, delivered through community adolescent girls groups.

The film, *Call me Priya*, and accompanying curriculum were specifically developed for this program by Novo Media. The story in the film, based on interviews with over 60 mill workers and the life stories of 308 individuals in bonded labour, centres on a girl who experiences family troubles and goes to work in a spinning mill. The combined media and discussion program involves a range of activities to facilitate peer dialogue around ways to tackle gender-based violence suffered by young women in the workplace and at home. The aim is that through this process, girls will be better able to challenge the pervasive discrimination they suffer by creating resistance, building negotiation skills and pursuing legal action where necessary.

We are currently evaluating the effectiveness of this new approach through a study assessing whether the participating girls have developed new knowledge and skills, increased their confidence to discuss difficult issues within the household and taken actions to protect themselves or other girls. The results of this assessment are expected in 2018.



For every extra year a girl goes to school, her income increases by an estimated 12%.<sup>29</sup>

### **Unlocking potential through vocational training**

Vocational training programs aim to unlock women and girls' potential by equipping them with marketable skills and empowering them to pursue income-generating opportunities. From beautician, tailoring and radio training for girls working in highway-side hotels in central Nepal, to running a housekeeping program that enables women in Ethiopia to find employment in local hotels, our goal is to provide women and girls with safe employment alternatives. A recent study into the pathways out of commercial sexual exploitation in central Nepal found that access to an

alternative income through participation in vocational training was one of the key factors that allowed girls to leave the sector.<sup>30</sup> In Addis Ababa, our local partners assist potential migrants to acquire the domestic work skills that they need, thereby professionalising the sector and increasing the likelihood that they will be valued by their employer, paid more and respected.

### **Promoting economic empowerment through savings and lending schemes**

Women in low-income communities with a high prevalence of slavery are commonly deprived of access to finance. Economic-focused self-help groups established by our partners promote collective savings and loans systems, enabling women to save and access funding to start micro-enterprises. This reduces the likelihood that women will enter into debt bondage by taking out loans from local moneylenders or employers. An evaluation of the work of our northern India partner MSEMVS found that the creation of self-help groups focused on women in, or at risk of, bonded labour contributed to the reduction of household debt by enabling members to gradually develop an independent income.<sup>31</sup>

### **Keeping girls in school**

Many of the women and girls in our hotspots have had limited access to education. In the Amhara region of our Ethiopia hotspot, the female literacy rate is 36%.<sup>27</sup> Among the Dalit communities in south-eastern Nepal, almost no women from harwa-charuwa families have completed primary education.<sup>28</sup> The longer girls remain in school, the better their prospects of gaining higher-skilled employment.

In the first half of 2017, our partners helped more than 6,000 at-risk girls attend school by providing scholarships, running school-enrolment initiatives and raising awareness among families about the importance of sending their daughters to school. In southern India, community resource centres have been established in villages to encourage children to continue their education and provide after-school tutoring. Our partners in central Nepal have provided girls with scholarships, enabling them to leave their work in the adult entertainment sector.

Image: Alice Smeets, Legatum Limited, 2017

### Providing women in rural communities with access to training

In the village of Thumalapatti, Tamil Nadu, failing crops have forced many families to send their daughters to earn an income in the local spinning mills. Our hotspot partner Child Voice established a community support group in the village, bringing members together to discuss alternative income solutions for those facing the highest risks. As cultural norms prevent most girls from travelling alone to seek work or receive vocational training in nearby towns, the group decided to establish a tailoring centre in the village. Child Voice sponsored the machines, the community sponsored the venue and together they raised funds to hire an instructor. Since opening in 2016, girls from the village and surrounding communities have been trained in garment making, giving them the opportunity to either work for themselves or apply for higher paying jobs in factories. The community is now paying more attention to the general welfare of girls, who are building their self-confidence and considering employment possibilities outside the spinning mills.



Why should we fear?  
We're girls, we won't fear  
anyone. We can do it on  
our own now.

- MEMBER OF ADOLESCENT  
GIRLS GROUP, TAMIL NADU



## INSIGHTS FROM OUR PROGRAMS

### *The use of returnee migrants as 'change agents'*

Public awareness campaigns that attempt to dissuade female migration by emphasising the risk of abuse tend to be dismissed by potential migrants.<sup>32</sup> Research by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), commissioned for our Ethiopia hotspot, found that safer migration programming should be informed by an understanding of migrants' perceptions of risk and their motivations about whether and how to migrate.<sup>33</sup> A subsequent research study by LSHTM into the motivations of Ethiopian women migrants found that they selectively listened to positive stories from women returning from the Middle East and tended to ignore reports of abuse and exploitation.<sup>34</sup>

In response to these findings, some of our hotspot partners have begun to use returnee migrants as change agents, inviting them to speak to community groups about their experiences. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this is having a positive impact, as potential migrants are far more likely to be influenced by the advice of returnees than that of NGO workers or media messaging. This approach has also been beneficial for the returnees, helping them to reconnect with their communities and making them feel valued for sharing useful knowledge about life as a domestic worker.

### *Adolescent girls groups promote female leadership*

Providing members of adolescent girls groups with life skills training has encouraged them to take steps to fight slavery in their communities. It has empowered them to advocate for their continuing education and press for better rights in the workplace, as well as strengthened their sense of ownership over the decision to migrate. Across our hotspots, girls taking part in these groups have demonstrated increased self-confidence, to the extent that some are now starting to challenge the discriminatory gender norms that have perpetuated their vulnerability. In northern and southern India, for example, adolescent girls groups have taken a leadership role in their communities to address low school attendance, identifying students who have dropped out and engaging with parents to persuade them about the importance of educating their daughters.

### *Peer learning builds confidence and creates a ripple effect*

Training girls as peer educators in our Ethiopia hotspot – sharing information on migration, sexual and reproductive health and the importance of education – has provided them with the leadership skills to act as change agents in their community. This peer-based education model has also generated a ‘ripple effect’ in the community, where girls who have not directly participated in training still receive information about safer migration through student leaders organising their own sessions, thereby increasing the scale and impact of the program.

### *Identifying realistic employment opportunities*

In many communities, the scope and impact of our alternative livelihoods programs is limited by a lack of jobs for women and girls. Vocational training will only be effective if there is a corresponding demand for female labour and the potential for growth. In Kathmandu, a lack of alternative work outside of the adult entertainment sector means that many women survivors struggle to make ends meet during their transition into new forms of employment. Furthermore, vocational training support tends to focus on gendered skills, such as tailoring and hairdressing, which in some hotspots may not provide a sustainable path out of poverty and exploitation. To address these challenges, some of our local partners in Tamil Nadu are offering programs that help women explore different career options, such as mobile phone repair and desktop publishing.

### *Saving and lending schemes for returnees*

In Ethiopia, many female workers who return from the Middle East appear to have little interest in taking part in savings and lending self-help groups that our partners have established. The goal of these groups is to provide potential migrant workers and returnees with the means to set up small businesses in their communities. For returnees in particular, the potential financial returns from participating in these groups do not match those they may have received as domestic workers. While providing seed money to self-help groups may make them more appealing, it may not be practical to offer this at scale.

### *Girls who are most at-risk remain hard to reach*

Our hotspot partners have made considerable efforts to engage and support girls in vulnerable communities, however many of the most vulnerable remain hard to reach. In Tamil Nadu, for example, many young women live in closed hostels owned by the spinning mills, where they have extremely limited freedom of movement and communication. In Kathmandu, employers place restrictions on girls working in the adult entertainment sector that limit their ability to access support services at drop-in centres run by our local partners. In addition, the cultural and social attitudes that exist in many communities mean that girls are not permitted to leave the family home or interact with other members of the community, including frontline NGO staff.



### Zebo's story

Zebo, 23, grew up in a rural village in Ethiopia's Amhara region. When she was 14, she was forced to drop out of school and get married. Feeling pressure from her peers and her husband, she planned to migrate to the Middle East to find work. As she prepared to migrate, she was approached by an illegal broker. 'I had my passport at hand and I had no information whether it is legal or not,' she recalls.

While Zebo was making preparations to leave, she heard that one of the Freedom Fund's partners, Netsebrak Reproductive Health and Social Development Organisation, provided migration training in her local community. Over a five-day course, she learned about legal migration and safe travel. The training convinced her to wait until Ethiopia's migration ban was lifted before travelling to the Middle East. Zebo proudly notes, 'I am now a peer educator in my community. I teach my peers to follow legal channels and wait until the ban is lifted to migrate.'

Disclaimer: The person in this photo is not the subject of this story.  
Image: Audrey Guichon/Freedom Fund

## DEVELOPING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

### Key lessons

- Interventions to increase female agency should take place alongside programs that equip the wider community - including parents, community leaders, and men and boys - with the knowledge and resources to counter slavery.
- The Freedom Fund has invested heavily in the creation of a wide range of 'community freedom groups' - over 5,000 to date. These can be a powerful and sustainable means of encouraging broader collective action to tackle the root causes of exploitation.

Local social structures are well placed to develop and execute sustainable anti-slavery solutions. In addition to supporting individuals, efforts to tackle exploitation of women and girls must also equip the wider community - parents, community leaders, men and boys, and others - with the knowledge and resources to counter slavery. In southern India, our partners are encouraging groups of adolescent girls to use elected village leadership to take up issues of workplace abuse directly with mill owners. Supported by partner NGO Vizhuthugal, these 'community support groups' in 20 villages approached management at 13 local garment factories where many girls were employed, demanding a wage increase in line with government-established minimum wages for similar industries. After four months of continued and coordinated pressure, the management agreed to raise the wage for 47 employees, demonstrating the power of collective action.



Previously it was very difficult to live. Our children were not going to school, and instead were working with us. Now we can choose the hours we work and we can send them to school. Earlier we used to just get four kilos of grain and now we get money.



- FORMER FEMALE BONDED LABOURER, BIHAR STATE

In Ethiopia, our hotspot partners are engaging with 'iddirs', a traditional local social structure, to develop an awareness-raising network that promotes knowledge of safer migration in the community. As a result, 80% of iddirs in one implementation site adopted safer migration practices into their bylaws, officially making it their mission to lead change on the issue.

In an effort to build more resilient communities, the Freedom Fund has invested heavily in the creation of a wide range of community groups - from discussion groups challenging harmful norms, to savings and loans groups, to vigilance groups that prevent traffickers from operating freely. In total, our partners have established and supported 5,453 'community freedom groups' across our six hotspot programs. Together, these groups are driving change from the bottom up.

## INSIGHTS FROM OUR PROGRAMS

### *Community awareness-raising builds momentum for change*

Vibrant and inclusive community groups have the ability to empower participants and provide them with valuable life skills. They can also inspire collective action to tackle the root causes of slavery. For example, after being involved in awareness-raising activities in southern India, some community groups have taken ownership of local issues, approaching local government to press for better access to education, clean water and regular transportation services. As a result, local government bodies are increasingly recognising 'community support groups' as forums representing vulnerable people in their villages.

### *Engaging men and boys*

It is important that local partners do not exclusively engage with female members of the community. Men are crucial actors. They not only make up the vast majority of business owners (and workplace supervisors) but are also the drivers of discriminatory attitudes and practices. Our partners in India have begun to work with men to change these behaviours, for example by raising awareness within adolescent boys groups about the issues facing women and girls. But more research is required in our hotspots on the most effective ways to enlist male members of the community in challenging discriminatory behaviours.



### **Rajbati's story**

Rajbati lives in an agricultural village in south-eastern Nepal and has experienced caste and gender discrimination her entire life. She is a member of an 'untouchable' Dalit caste, the majority of whom are illiterate and have no assets or land. Like many others in her village, Rajbati was unaware of her rights as a Nepali citizen and therefore vulnerable to exploitation by landlords and village merchants.

Rajbati's situation began to change after she joined a community group established by one of our partners. The group provided non-formal education classes where Rajbati learned how to read and write. Through the group, she also learned about human rights, trafficking, child marriage and wellbeing topics, such as hygiene, sanitation and safe drinking water. The classes emboldened her and she studied enthusiastically, quickly becoming one of the group's most active members. The group also learned about the importance of saving money and Rajbati eventually became the president of the savings and credit group they established. As a result of her activism, she is now able to articulate the community's challenges and advocate for change with local government and other stakeholders. Formerly an illiterate member of a disadvantaged community, Rajbati says she takes great pride in leading her group and tackling the challenges they face.

Image: Ginny Baumann/Freedom Fund

## SUPPORTING THE RECOVERY AND REINTEGRATION OF SURVIVORS

### Key lessons

- Interventions that enable women and girls to exit slavery should be combined with support services to aid their recovery and prevent re-exploitation.
- Outreach and drop-in services that encourage women and girls to exit slavery on their own terms are more effective than 'raid and rescue' approaches.
- Many female survivors suffer from serious mental trauma as a result of their experiences. However, there is currently a significant gap in the provision of effective mental health support to assist their recovery.
- Despite some partners successfully supporting cases, female survivors continue to have limited access to justice against the perpetrators of slavery as a result of legislative and judicial gender bias.

Although our anti-slavery programs place significant emphasis on prevention, our partners also support women and girls in forced or bonded labour to exit those situations.

Identifying and supporting women and girls who are in slavery is not a simple task. Some may internalise gender biased attitudes and stereotypes and therefore not see themselves as victims, especially in cases of sex trafficking, forced marriage and domestic servitude. Social norms that restrict the freedom of women and girls to communicate and travel can also be major barriers for service providers and law enforcement officials trying to locate or identify victims.

Women and girls who have experienced exploitation can suffer from serious physical or mental trauma. It is vital that they have support and access to services to help them reintegrate into the community. Without this support, there is the risk that they may re-enter exploitative situations. In central Nepal, for example, limited access to shelter or affordable housing is one of the reasons why women remain in slavery, especially when the stigma around commercial sex work prevents them from returning to their home communities.

Many of our hotspot partners run shelters for survivors who have recently exited servitude, where they can access healthcare, counselling, vocational training and other services. In addition, legal support is vital so that survivors can assert their rights and seek justice. In northern India, some hotspot partners have supported legal cases against traffickers, leading to convictions under the national Penal Code. These efforts not only help deliver justice for victims but also act as a disincentive for traffickers.

### **Self-liberation to exit exploitation: providing services through outreach and drop-in centres**

Our hotspot partners adopt a rights-based approach to liberation that aims to build the agency of victims while reducing the risks of causing harm. As a recent Terre des Hommes study found, carrying out raids and rescues without the knowledge, consent or agreement of victims frequently causes unintended harm.<sup>35</sup> Instead, outreach workers employed by our partners in Kathmandu build relationships with underage girls in commercial sexual work, encouraging them to attend drop-in centres where they can receive counselling and health services. Over time, they are made aware of services available to them, including shelter and alternative livelihoods programs, if they wish to leave the sector. Recent research from this hotspot found that this gradual approach is one of the most effective strategies to assist girls to exit commercial sexual exploitation, but it has the drawback of being slow and labour intensive.<sup>36</sup>

## INSIGHTS FROM OUR PROGRAMS

### *Treatment of mental trauma: the need for an integrated approach*

Many victims of slavery suffer from trauma as a result of their experiences. Research conducted in south-eastern Nepal found that women in harwa-charuwa communities are significantly more likely to suffer from anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder than men.<sup>37</sup> Among Nepali women of reproductive age, suicide is now one of the leading causes of death.<sup>38</sup> When the mental health needs of survivors are not adequately met, it can greatly hinder their future prospects.

A 2015 study by the Helen Bamber Foundation recommended an integrated approach to mental health care to help women survivors reintegrate into their communities.<sup>39</sup> One of the serious challenges our partners face, however, is the significant gap between demand and supply of mental health services. For example, the few mental health professionals operating in Ethiopia are concentrated in Addis Ababa, making treatment virtually inaccessible to those living outside the capital.

#### *Access to justice for survivors remains limited*

Despite some NGOs successfully supporting female survivors to pursue legal cases against their traffickers, the number of cases that end in convictions remains low. This is the result of a number of factors, including a lack of knowledge among law enforcement officials about how to prosecute these cases, weak and incoherent penalties in criminal legislation, and the length of proceedings that may deter survivors from pursuing legal action. In countries where slavery is most prevalent, law enforcement officials are overwhelmingly male and gender bias can be pervasive. Even when a case is pursued, laws and judicial processes are often stacked against female claimants. The link between corruption and slavery is also very real; our partners report cases of arrested victims being released back to slaveholders by the police in return for a bribe, the cost of which is added to the victim's debt.

There is a need to invest in building the capacity of our hotspot partners to pursue these cases and support their advocacy efforts to improve, implement and enforce legislation criminalising slavery. One way in which this is being achieved is through training programs for police, lawyers and judicial officers to better understand the gender dimensions of their work.

## **BUILDING A COLLECTIVE MOVEMENT FOR CHANGE**

### Key lessons

- Building a collective movement among women workers in at-risk sectors can help them push for improvements in working conditions.
- Collaboration with selected business owners as 'champions of change', and appealing to their self-interest, can produce results. However, many remain reluctant to engage with our local partners.
- 'Communities of practice' formed by our local partners have enabled them to jointly advocate for victim-centred policy and legislative reform. By coordinating and collaborating with broader civil society coalitions, the scope and impact of their advocacy work can be strengthened.

From government to business, society's institutions are critical in enabling (or combating) the marginalisation of women and girls. Our local partners are working to change the systems that enable slavery to persist, engaging with business and government to improve working conditions in high-risk sectors and lobbying for the adoption of victim-centred policies and processes.

### **Mobilising female workers**

In the absence of other employment opportunities, families will continue to send their daughters to work in high-risk sectors. Anti-slavery programs can reduce the risk of exploitation by improving the conditions in these workplaces. One way the Freedom Fund is contributing to this is by building a collective movement among current female workers and supporting them to push for their rights. In central Nepal, our partner organisations have begun to mobilise workers in Kathmandu's adult entertainment sector, with the aim of making restaurants and hotels safe and exploitation-free for working women. They are also using this network to identify underage girls in the sector who require support and to lobby business owners to not employ children. In southern India, our partners have supported members of youth groups, many of whom are employed in spinning mills, to approach mill owners and request wage increases and better working conditions.

## Engaging with business

Convincing owners of businesses that exploit their employees to promote fairer working conditions can be challenging. While some may be compelled to change their practices as a result of negative media attention and public campaigning, most owners are reticent to engage with civil society unless they see a benefit for themselves. In two of our hotspot programs, our partners have made headway by doing exactly that: appealing to owners' self-interest. In Kathmandu, our partners received permission from owners of adult entertainment establishments to provide health services to their workers. This perceived 'beneficial' relationship helped them overcome initial hostility, and they have since been able to secure permission to visit over 30 establishments, working directly with owners and adult workers to discourage the trafficking of children into the industry.

In Tamil Nadu, our partners are working with local mill management to improve their health and safety systems and to assist them to implement workplace regulations, such as the establishment of internal complaints committees. By highlighting the long-term economic benefits that can flow from improving working conditions and employee satisfaction, our partners have successfully engaged business to take action. Looking beyond individual mills, this hotspot is also engaging with brands and retailers by playing an active role in international initiatives to create common tools for protecting workers in the apparel industry, such as the Social and Labour Convergence project.



Sometimes they beat us up if we ask for more wages. We don't want it to stay the same. We'll have to motivate other women not to work for less.



- MEMBER OF SELF-HELP GROUP, NORTHERN INDIA

## Biswas Nepal: Ending child exploitation in the adult entertainment sector

Biswas Nepal is a member organisation comprised of adult entertainment sector workers that advocates against injustice, exploitation and violence experienced by women and girls working in the sector. The members' lived experience makes them uniquely placed to provide a credible and authoritative voice on behalf of exploited women and girls. The Freedom Fund was one of the first donors to directly fund Biswas Nepal and invest in its organisational development and leadership, with the goal of ending the commercial sexual exploitation of minors in Nepal's dance bars and cabin restaurants. Since then, Biswas has developed from an informal entity into an established and effective anti-trafficking organisation.

## Peace Trust: Engaging with mill owners in Tamil Nadu to improve workers' protections

Adolescent girls working in spinning mills are at a high risk of sexual harassment. Much of this harassment goes unreported, however, because of cultural norms and fear among workers of losing their job. Workplaces in India are required by law to establish an internal complaints committee to address and resolve worker grievances, including complaints of abuse and harassment. Despite this, in 2017 the Tamil Nadu state government said it had no record of these committees being formed or functioning in the more than 3,000 mills located in the region.<sup>40</sup>

In 2016, Peace Trust - a hotspot partner that has been working with local mills to improve working conditions - engaged with the managers of some mills, as well as the workers, to help establish internal complaints committees. Their efforts led to committees being established in 25 mills. Peace Trust has also worked with mill owners and district government agencies to register mill hostels in line with legislation. So far, 21 mills in the district have applied for hostel registration, allowing local officials to conduct inspections to ensure compliance with regulations. Following their engagement with Peace Trust, some mills have begun to adopt other legal requirements, such as asking for and filing workers' proof of age and not forcing workers to take on overtime.

## **Collective advocacy through communities of practice**

Supporting local NGOs to jointly advocate for systems change is a key element of every Freedom Fund hotspot. We bring our NGO partners together in 'communities of practice' to share learning and best practices with each other and to engage in joint advocacy. In those hotspots that have a strong focus on women and girls, our communities of practice engage with government to push for the recognition of female victims' rights. While our partners are still building their advocacy capacity, this collective approach has allowed them to establish credibility and begin a dialogue with officials at the local, regional and national levels.

The central Nepal community of practice has developed a common advocacy position on the elimination of girls from the adult entertainment sector, allowing them to collectively push for the adoption of legislation with a rights-based, trauma-informed and victim-centred approach. As a result, the Nepali government recently adopted guidelines for registering adult entertainment sector workplaces and regulating working conditions, marking a major milestone towards eliminating the commercial sexual exploitation of girls in Kathmandu. In northern India, the Human Liberty Network established by our partners is playing a vital role to support the government's proposed new legislation related to trafficking and bonded labour that incorporates provisions to increase support for women survivors.

## **INSIGHTS FROM OUR PROGRAMS**

### *Amplifying survivors' voices*

At a national level, survivors' voices can be a powerful tool to raise the issue of slavery and advocate for policy and legislative change. Survivors of slavery understand the issues in a profound way and are best placed to identify and advocate for solutions. In our southern India hotspot, many of our local partners' frontline staff were formerly employed in garment and spinning mills. This lived experience provides them with a deep understanding of the challenges that women and girls face in trying to remove themselves from situations of exploitation. A positive step in the central Nepal hotspot is the recent appointment of Tara Bhandari, a founding member of Biswas Nepal, to Nepal's National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking. A survivor-activist, she is the first former adult entertainment sector worker to be appointed to the committee.

### *Achieving impact through civil society coalitions*

Some of our partners have begun to connect with broader civil society coalitions as a way to push for greater progress on gender-related issues. For example, the southern India community of practice has joined with other civil society organisations seeking improvements in working conditions in textile factories to form the Tamil Nadu Alliance, a stakeholder network that advocates for better policy implementation. A similar approach is being taken in Ethiopia, where the community of practice is participating in a 'CSO safe migration taskforce' to influence community and government systems to promote safer migration.



Image: Alice Carfrae, Legatum Limited, 2017

# The way forward

Four years since the launch of the Freedom Fund, we have learned a great deal. We have begun to identify effective ways to help women and girls protect themselves from slavery and the pitfalls that hinder progress. We hope the lessons presented in this report contribute to the ever-growing body of learning in the anti-slavery sector.

There of course remains a significant need for further research and investment. Among the many areas that would benefit from investment, we have identified the following priorities. The Freedom Fund would welcome partnerships with others in the anti-slavery movement and the broader development sector to carry this work forward and help end this egregious crime.

- 1 Connecting frontline efforts with national and regional women and girls' movements:** Our partners' efforts to strengthen female agency in the household and within the community are having a positive impact. However, their work, and that of other anti-slavery NGOs, is often disconnected from the women's rights movements that are tackling gender discrimination at national and regional level. Building bridges between frontline partners and these broader campaigns can amplify our partners' voices while contributing evidence and credibility to campaigns for gender equality.
- 2 Working with men and boys to change discriminatory behaviour:** More research is required to determine the most effective ways to enlist male members of the community in challenging discriminatory behaviours and supporting their female counterparts in tackling the root causes of slavery.
- 3 Investing in civil society capacity and female leadership:** Our partners are committed to advancing gender equality but many lack the internal capacity, expertise and tools to make sustained progress. They function within deeply patriarchal societies and need to make very conscious efforts to enable female leaders and managers to emerge. In a number of our hotspots, only a small percentage of our NGO partners are led by women. The Freedom Fund, too, has had to adopt deliberate policies to improve our recruitment of female staff in our hotspot programs. Investment is needed to build capacity and promote women's leadership in the anti-slavery sector.



They see the changes in us. We can move freely out of the village. The group has given us a space to experience freedom.



- MEMBER OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS GROUP, TAMIL NADU

**4 Identifying the most effective forms of economic support:** When vocational training programs succeed, they make a considerable difference in participants' lives. However, in communities where there are limited employment opportunities for women, this approach may not provide a viable path out of exploitation. There is a need for further research into what elements of economic support - for example, savings and loans groups, vocational training and cash transfers - are the most cost-effective and sustainable in building women's resilience.

**5 Research into the most effective treatments for mental trauma:** Delivering timely mental health support for survivors of exploitation is one of the largest gaps in the global response to slavery. Despite clear evidence that many female victims suffer from mental trauma, little is known about which therapies and treatment programs are most appropriate in different contexts. Research is needed into the psychological consequences of slavery and the effectiveness of the mental health interventions that our local partners are delivering to support the recovery and reintegration of victims.

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