



NEPAL

Hotspot report

November 2023



Front cover: Protest march from Dhanusha District to Janakpur, calling for improved rights for the Harawa-Charawa community. *Photo credit: Filmatory Nepal/The Freedom Fund*

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OPERATING CONTEXT

The Freedom Fund's Nepal hotspot supports survivors and frontline NGOs to build a movement against agricultural bonded labour. Since 2021, with funding from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), the program has expanded from a focus solely on the Harawa-Charawa in the southeast, to include the Haliya and Kamaiya groups in the far west through a partnership with ActionAid International Nepal. We also shifted our strategy to a more intentional focus on advocacy and movement building. Our hotspot now supports the three largest survivor groups exploited by agricultural bonded labour in Nepal, representing an estimated population of over 400,000.

Ongoing impact of covid-19

The pandemic continued to pose a significant challenge in Nepal at the beginning of the year. In January, government data recorded the highest number of new infections in a single day. To curb the spread of infections, the government banned public gatherings and closed schools for three weeks until 29 January. As more people received the vaccination against the virus, the impact of covid-19 decreased throughout the year. Vaccination rates across the country went from 37% in January 2022 to 83% by the end of the year.

High inflation

Despite coming through the worst of the pandemic, high inflation rates created further challenges for Nepalis, hitting the poorest the hardest. The cost of food, fuel and transportation has been rising since February 2022. Inflation increased to 8.5% in October 2022 compared to 4.24% in October 2021.

General election

A general election was held on 20 November 2022 for the federal parliament and Nepal's seven provincial parliaments, causing significant disruption to the hotspot's advocacy efforts. No single political party received a majority of seats at the federal level, which led to a period of instability as coalition negotiations ensued. On 26 December 2022, the third largest party, the Maoist Centre party, formed a coalition government with Pushpa Kamal Dahal as the Prime Minister. The Swotanttra Party, recently formed as a revolt against the old leaders of established parties, secured more than 20 seats in parliament and became the fourth biggest party in Nepal. Hotspot partners will prioritise forming relationships with newly appointed ministers in 2023 to demand action against agricultural bonded labour in Nepal.

Emerging forms of exploitation

Throughout the year, Freedom Fund partners in the southeast of Nepal reported an increase in cases of child trafficking, with 'middlemen' taking advantage of high levels of poverty and indebtedness. Partners reported that traffickers lured Harawa-Charawa children with the promise of high salaries and took them to work in factories in different parts of India. In Siraha alone, Freedom Fund partner DJKYC's interventions prevented 15 children from being trafficked and supported seven children to return to their families.

Image overleaf: The Prime Minister of Nepal, Sher Bahadur Deuba, announces the liberation of the Harawa-Charawa.
Photo credit: Niranjana Shrestha/The Freedom Fund

PROGRESS TOWARDS SYSTEMS CHANGE

A central component of the Freedom Fund's program is to support survivors and local activists to put pressure on the government of Nepal to adopt laws and policies which will bring an end to the practice of bonded labour and provide support for communities affected. In 2022, we achieved remarkable successes in our advocacy with the federal, provincial, and local levels of government.

Nepal government declares the emancipation of Harawa-Charawa on 18 July 2022

On 18 July 2022, the 22nd anniversary of the Kamaiya liberation day, the Nepal government declared the liberation of the Harawa-Charawa - a significant milestone in the ongoing struggle for freedom for agriculture bonded labourers in the country. We believe that activism of the Harawa-Charawa Network, the united movement of bonded labour networks and the frontline NGOs that supported them had a significant bearing on this announcement. At the beginning of the year, the Freedom Fund and our partners increased our focus on supporting survivor leaders to advocate directly to the relevant ministries in Nepal. This in turn led the Ministry of Land Management to establish a task force to gather first-hand evidence of agricultural bonded labour from communities through visits facilitated by the Freedom Fund and our partners. The final report was submitted to the Nepal government in April 2022 and was a key factor leading to the declaration.

After the declaration, the ministry organised a series of closed-door consultations including survivor leaders, the ILO and the Freedom Fund, to advise on rehabilitation guidelines for the Harawa-Charawa. The guidelines, which contain plans for identification of bonded labourers, debt cancellation, and land and housing entitlements, are currently awaiting cabinet approval.



Budget allocations for Haliya, Harawa-Charawa and Kamaiya communities

Our partners have successfully influenced budget allocation at various levels of government, for the issues of Haliya, Kamaiya and Harawa Charawa communities. In western Nepal, the Bhajani Municipality supported 118 freed Kamaiya families with grants of USD \$800 per family for livelihood activities and also announced a program to provide grants to freed Kamaiya families for agriculture and animal husbandry activities. Sayal Rural Municipality allocated USD \$11,444 for Haliya communities in the fiscal year 2022/23, after discussion between local Haliya representatives and the local government. The Province 7 government allocated USD \$231,000 in its 2022/23 budget to address the demands of the freed Haliya.

Similarly in southeastern Nepal, almost all the municipalities in our hotspot working area have made budget allocations towards Harawa-Charawa empowerment, building their capacity and investing in skills development. For example, in CIC's working area, (Shahidnagar Municipality, Ganeshman Charnath Municipality, Mukhiyapatti Musharniya Rural Municipality, Kamala Municipality, Bideha Municipality, Mithila Bihari Municipality and Dhanauji Rural Municipality), USD \$20,400 was allocated to support capacity building and vocational skills training for the Harawa-Charawa.

Local government shows solidarity with Kamaiyas in western Nepal

Freedom Fund partner ActionAid International Nepal reported that following regular advocacy and campaigning with the local government, three municipalities in Kailali district have declared a local holiday to commemorate Freed Kamaiya Day. This is a symbolic step forward in recognising Kamaiya labourers who were exploited in debt bondage for generations.

In Doti district, three municipalities have committed to developing Haliya rehabilitation guidelines to support Haliya families who were left out of the Haliya rehabilitation process.

Agricultural bonded labourers elected to local government positions

Former bonded labour communities see political representation as a critical step towards true freedom. In the run-up to the election, the Freedom Fund provided hotspot partners in the southeast of Nepal with additional funding to work with the Harawa-Charawa Network to organise awareness-raising campaigns to encourage the Harawa-Charawa community to increase their engagement in the local elections. When the local elections were held on 13 May 2022, a total of 222 Harawa-Charawa were elected into official posts across the eight districts of Province 2. In the far west of Nepal, 38 Kamaiya community members (16 female and 22 male) and 16 Haliya community members (11 female and five male) were elected as representatives.

HOTSPOT OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

Headline results

285 community groups supporting agricultural bonded labour communities

During the program period, 285 community groups supported 8,497 Haliya, Kamaiya and Harawa-Charawa group members across three provinces in Nepal. One type of group is a saving credit group where members meet monthly to deposit their savings. In turn, group members with urgent financial needs have the opportunity to take a loan with low levels of interest. The process has helped members to implement the habit of saving money while motivating them to earn more. The groups have also helped members to start small-scale businesses through loans received.

4,729 community members gain access to essential government services

Through our partners, we have been supporting the Harawa-Charawa, Haliya and Kamaiya communities to access government services and entitlements. Our partners have been raising awareness about the importance of attaining citizenship and birth registration documentation - key requirements to access other services such as education, health, employment and social security services. Partners have also been supporting community members to complete application forms for services, which can be a challenge as many are illiterate.

2,728 children enrolled in school

Many children of agricultural bonded labourers drop out of school to become labourers themselves. This year, the Freedom Fund's partners supported 2,728 Harawa-Charawa, Haliya and Kamaiya children to enrol in school and provided scholarship support to help them continue their studies for this academic year. Harawa-Charawa children often lack support with their homework, as many of their parents are illiterate, so our partners responded by setting up after-school tuition classes. In Saptari District, Freedom Fund partner DJKYC set up tuition classes to children through four tuition centres, supporting 150 Harawa-Charawa children (77 girls and 73 boys) with their education. Our partner CIC in Dhanusha is also running four tuition classes where 320 pupils (178 girls and 142 boys) are getting support for their education.

Progress towards hotspot objectives

In 2021, the Freedom Fund spent a lot of time laying the groundwork for a new approach to the hotspot, bringing together the Harawa-Charawa, Haliya and Kamaiya to work together and form a united movement against agricultural bonded labour. This year we were able to step up our activities which culminated in a number of achievements.

Hotspot Objective 1: A united movement of agricultural bonded labour groups is formed and active at the national level

Formation of a joint strategy and the Joint Struggle Committee

In 2022, the hotspot held a four-day workshop, facilitated by Purple Foundation, with leaders from the Harawa-Charawa, Haliya and Kamaiya networks to develop a joint strategy for their collective actions. The Kamaiya and Haliya networks have long experience within the movement and together they agreed that the liberation of the Harawa-Charawa, who had been excluded from earlier bonded labour rehabilitation schemes, was a key priority in their joint strategy. The strategy also focused on enabling Haliya and Kamaiya who had been left out of earlier rehabilitation programs to be included.

Through the process of drafting a joint strategy, the three networks decided there was a need for them to formalise their coordinated work so, with the support of Purple Foundation, they formally

established the Joint Struggle Committee on 2 July 2022. Harawa-Charawa, Haliya and Kamaiya representatives announced the creation of the committee at a press conference on 4 July, highlighting their key demand for the liberation of the Harawa-Charawa. They then submitted their full demands through a memorandum to government ministries.

The structures and relationships established by the Joint Struggle Committee will continue beyond the Norad-funded project. The committee has also included representatives from the Kamlari, a system of domestic servitude in the far west under which – even though it was officially abolished in 2013 – hundreds of girls and young women continue to be exploited. As of 2019, there were 13,026 identified Kamlaris, of whom 12,932 are reportedly in the process of being rehabilitated.¹

Joint Struggle Committee representatives invited to attend the declaration of Harawa-Charawa liberation

The Joint Struggle Committee was invited to the office of the Prime Minister on 18 July 2022 to commemorate the 22nd anniversary of the liberation of the Kamaiya. The Freedom Fund and our advocacy partner Rastriya Dalit Network (RDN) were also invited. Broadcast on national television, the Prime Minister made a declaration of freedom for the Harawa-Charawa. The Prime Minister also committed to cancelling Kamaiya debts and to monitoring continuing practices of bonded labour and the implementation of rehabilitation schemes. The government's commitment to act for the Harawa-Charawa, Kamaiya and Haliya was a validation of the Joint Struggle Committee's coordinating actions.

The day after the liberation declaration, the Joint Struggle Committee, together with the Forced Labour Elimination Advocacy Group (FLEAG), organised a press conference in Kathmandu. They welcomed the government's declaration and urged the government to start as soon as possible the process of creating a rehabilitation package including shelter, livelihood options, health facilities and education for their children.

Joint Struggle Committee influences manifesto policies of major political parties

The Freedom Fund, its partners and the agricultural bonded labour networks took the general election as an opportunity to educate major political parties about the issues facing the Harawa-Charawa, Haliya and Kamaiya in the hopes of influencing manifesto policies. In the lead-up to the election, the Joint Struggle Committee developed a plan to meet and submit a memorandum to the key political parties. As a result, four major political parties of Nepal – Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre), Nepali Congress, Unified Socialists and People's Socialist Party – included commitments to bonded labour communities in their manifestos. The newly formed government, which includes the Maoist Centre party which made bonded labour manifesto commitments, committed (in its Policy Priorities announcement on 9 January 2023) to resolve the issues of landless, freed Haliya and freed Kamaiya within two years, and form a National Land Commission to resolve land management issues.²

Harawa-Charawa Network expands to two more districts in Province 2

In 2022, the Harawa-Charawa Network expanded to two new districts, Sindhuli and Mahottari, meeting its objective to have representation across all eight districts of Province 2. With the technical support of Freedom Fund partner RDN, the Harawa-Charawa Network has engaged with local government and communities in all eight districts to understand where there might be high concentrations of Harawa-Charawa families.

Hotspot Objective 2: The government changes policies to address agricultural bonded labour and provide support services for survivors

Dalit empowerment regulations endorsed by Province 2 government

Most Harawa-Charawa families are from the Dalit caste. In 2021, the Province 2 government passed the Dalit Empowerment Act, which includes provisions to uplift the Dalit community and reduce caste-based discrimination. In January 2022, the provincial government endorsed Dalit empowerment regulations, which are needed in order to implement provisions included within the Act. Provisions

1 <https://nepalyouthfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/An-Evaluation-Study-of-NYF-Support-to-Kamlari-Eradication-Program.pdf> (page vi)

2 <https://english.nepalpress.com/2023/01/09/government-makes-public-21-point-common-minimum-programme-with-list/>

include full scholarships to all Dalit students in higher and technical education as well as ration cards and health benefits to disadvantaged Dalits. The Act also sets out new measures to address caste discrimination in Nepali society, including the formation of monitoring committees and a Caste Discrimination Control Unit.

Collaborative approach to influence policies on agricultural bonded labour

The Forced Labour Elimination Advocacy Group (FLEAG) is an alliance of 25 organisations with expertise in working against forced labour including NGOs, survivor leaders, trade unions and the ILO. The Freedom Fund hotspot supports FLEAG with funding for its secretariat (which also receives funding from the ILO) and collaborates closely to ensure our advocacy work is aligned.

FLEAG coordinated a series of advocacy events at the national level to keep pressure on the government to deliver on its commitments against bonded labour. In August 2022 RDN and FLEAG organised a policy debate with the Human Rights Commission, Women's Commission, Dalit Commission and government ministries. Government officials were held to account during the event regarding their commitment to develop rehabilitation guidelines for agricultural bonded labour groups.

Advocacy activities in far-west provincial government on the social and economic issues of freed Haliya and Kamaiya

In order to keep Haliya and Kamaiya issues as a priority for the Province 7 government, a discussion program was organised by RDN in Dhangadhi (Province 7). Representatives of RDN, Haliya and Kamaiya leaders and government officials were in attendance. In the meeting, the minister highlighted that the provincial government is committed to the equitable rehabilitation of the freed Haliya and Kamaiya through the provision of housing, land and livelihoods.

Consultation with Harawa-Charawa children for the UNCRC alternate report

The Freedom Fund, jointly with Consortium Nepal (the consortium of organisations working for child participation), organised a two-day consultation with the children of recently liberated Harawa-Charawa community members. The children, through child participatory tools, expressed the challenges they currently face. The consortium will put their voices in the child-led alternate report on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Hotspot Objective 3: Agricultural bonded labourers have greater resilience as a result of accessing government and NGO support services

Land Commission begins distributing land ownership certificates

This year, the Land Commission began drafting agreements with municipalities in order to start distributing land ownership certificates to landless Dalits living in unauthorised settlements in Province 2. This policy will have a direct impact on Harawa-Charawa communities as the majority are Dalit and landless or occupying government land.

Within our program district of Siraha, six municipalities have signed an agreement with the Land Commission and two municipalities have begun collecting data and making land certificate applications. In Lahan municipality, 269 Harawa-Charawa families received land ownership certificates through the Land Commission, changing their status from landless to landowner. Having a land ownership certificate adds protection to their homes and should reduce the likelihood of them being evicted.

However, the Land Commission's activities have had unintended consequences in some areas. There have been reports that landlords in areas where the Land Commission is yet to sign agreements with municipalities have started to pre-emptively evict Harawa-Charawa communities from their settlements, using legal actions and road expansion activities, before they have the opportunity to apply for a land certificate. Freedom Fund partners and the Harawa-Charawa Network have raised the issue with the Human Rights Commission and local municipalities. The Human Rights Commission published an appeal letter to stop the evictions. The Freedom Fund will work with a consultant and the Harawa-Charawa Network to systematically gather evidence of ongoing evictions across Province 2. Partners agreed to prioritise the issue in their meetings with local and provincial government as well as with the Nepal Human Rights Commission.

Harawa-Charawa access vital registration documents

Citizenship certificates in Nepal are fundamental to accessing a range of entitlements. Many Kamaiya, Haliya and Harawa-Charawa lack vital certificates (including birth registration and marriage certificates) which then prevents them from accessing government services such as the old age pension, disability allowance, girl child schemes, disaster relief schemes and shelter schemes. In the southeast of Nepal, our NGO partners organised awareness-raising campaigns for community members, informing them about the importance of these documents and how to apply for services and schemes. Historically, the government has made it difficult for these marginalised communities to obtain citizenship certificates but recently there has been a positive shift in our working areas. Some municipalities have started providing a recommendation letter for citizenship certificates and have provided transportation to the Chief District Office to acquire the certificates. During 2022, with the support of our partners, 222 Harawa-Charawa have successfully obtained citizenship certificates.

Birth registration is a basic right of children. It is required for school enrolment and also supports the process of applying for citizenship certificates. However, it has been a continuous challenge for children from the Harawa-Charawa community because their parents themselves don't have citizenship, in what becomes a vicious cycle of exclusion. To help break the cycle, this year our partners have supported 844 children from Harawa-Charawa homes to receive birth registration certificates.

Access to government employment scheme

The federal government launched the Prime Minister's employment scheme in 2019 with provisions to provide up to 100 days of work, targeting the unemployed. In recent years, the scheme made specific reference to targeting the freed/bonded labour communities. This year, our partners have supported almost 600 Harawa-Charawa to obtain paid work through the scheme.

Vocational skills training for bonded labour communities

Marketable vocational skills are important to increase livelihood options available to communities and improve access to decent work. Freedom Fund partner ActionAid International Nepal organised six business skills and business development training courses and as a result, 205 people from bonded labour communities received vocational training certificates. During the training, participants developed a business plan through which they would be provided with start-up support. During the reporting period, 137 people have been provided with start-up grants to support their business. Since starting their businesses, these bonded labour families have an increased daily income which ranges between USD \$4 -\$10 and a monthly income which ranges between USD \$115-\$138. Many families reported that they used the extra income towards supporting their children's education.

Similarly, in the southeast of Nepal, Freedom Fund partner CIC provided entrepreneurship skills training to 32 Harawa-Charawa community members. Participants learnt entrepreneurial skills, small business skills, information about developing a business plan, employee to employer relations, negotiation skills and account keeping. Since the entrepreneurship skills training began, eight participants have started small businesses.

ActionAid have also supported 18 young people to participate in vocational education approved by CTEVT. Among them, nine are studying veterinary medicine, six are studying agriculture, one is studying construction and one is in the process of attaining a diploma in civil engineering. The selection of participants followed an open competition and tripartite agreement between technical schools, project implementation organisations and families of young people. This educational attainment gives these young people professional skills for their future careers, they will also serve as role models for their communities, allowing others to reimagine what their future could hold.

Protesters take part in the Freed Harawa-Charawa Rights Caravan.
Photo credit: Filmatory Nepal/The Freedom Fund



मुक्त हरवाचरवाको
विकल्प स्थापनाहाम्रो
सरोकार, भूमि, शिक्षा,
स्वास्थ्य, रोजगारी र
सामाजिक सुरक्षाहाम्रो
अधिकार

विकासकानाममा
हरवाचरवाको
उठीवास बन्द
गरियोस ।

मुक्त हरवाचरवाको विकल्प स्थापना हाम्रो सरोकार ।
भूमि, शिक्षा, स्वास्थ्य, रोजगारी सामाजिक सुरक्षा हाम्रो अधिकार ॥
पूनःस्थापनाका लागि
हरवा अधिकार
२०७८ वैत्र २५ देखि २५

CASE STUDY

Haliya woman becomes a “voice for the oppressed”

Sita is a 28-year-old, single mother of three belonging to a Dalit landless family. A former bonded labourer, Sita became actively involved in women’s groups and in the Haliya Network. She is currently serving as a local ward member, using her political platform to help shed light on key issues faced by single women, Dalits and Haliya.

Sita was born in a remote village called Bhungada in then Mudbhara VDC. Believing that ‘Marrying away the daughter before her first menstruation would ensure a place in heaven’, Sita’s parents wed her off at the age of 13. By the age of 14, Sita gave birth to her first child. After that, two more children came at two-year intervals. As Sita belonged to a Haliya family which was landless, her husband used to work in the landlord’s fields and household while Sita was confined to her own household tasks. A decade ago, Sita’s husband lost his life while working in the field. Aged 19, with three children and in-laws to feed, Sita was now forced to work in the landlord’s house in her husband’s stead. She recalls: “After working for the whole day, I would return with leftover food and sometimes with a few lentils or millet. My underfed children would weep due to hunger, and I had no other options but to cry with them.” The Bhungada community had 50 landless Haliya families like Sita’s, and they shared the same fate.

In 2020, Sita joined a local women’s group consisting of 35 Dalit landless Haliya households. The group was supported by ActionAid International Nepal and Equality Development Centre through a project called the Mahila Network. During their monthly meetings, group members discussed various topics including violence against women, child marriage, equal pay, women’s empowerment and financial empowerment. Sita also participated in leadership development training, which increased her confidence. She started amplifying voices from her community, especially on equal pay, economic empowerment and education. She also received a grant from the group mobilisation fund, which supported her to set up a small grocery shop from which she started earning around USD \$35 per month.

In 2021, Sita became a member of the Haliya Network and, at ward level, the Sunaulo Mukta Haliya group. During an orientation program, she learnt about the Single Women Allowance, and she now receives around USD \$61 every four months, which has also supported her in raising her young family.

During the May 2022 local elections, Haliya groups were encouraged to put forward candidates. After discussing it with her family members, Haliya group and communities, Sita decided to run as a candidate and was elected as a ward member. She has already started to use her influence to promote opportunities for women in her community. She says: “To support the economic empowerment of Dalit Haliya single women, I have allocated 3 lakh rupees (around USD \$3,667) to start small-scale businesses and 1 lakh rupees for training on skills and women’s capacity building. We also organised a health camp for women focusing on reproductive health in Sikhar Municipality-4, which benefited 24 women.”


As a ward member, Sita continuously raises her voice in ward and palika level meetings for the rights of single women, Dalits, landless and Haliya communities. She is also an inspiration to other women from her community – including Lalita BK, who says: “Since participating in different groups, we now no longer work for the landlords. Sita has been raising her voice for the oppressed, so we supported her. Now as a ward member she continues to be the voice of Haliya and families living in poverty. Now I also want to develop my leadership and support our community.”

As a ward member, she earns around USD \$53 monthly and receives allowances while participating in different training and meetings. She has also continued her small grocery business.

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION AND RESEARCH

The Overseas Development Institute and National Institute of Science Education and Research undertook a mixed-method study to assess what decent employment and livelihood opportunities exist for the Harawa-Charawa, Kamaiya and Haliya communities, and what support is necessary to enable members of these communities to secure and remain in decent work. A validation workshop of the preliminary findings was held with key stakeholders from the communities in Kathmandu in February 2023, and the final report will be available later in 2023.

ActionAid International Nepal, in partnership with the Community Self Reliance Centre (CSRC), conducted a study on land tenure to document the current local land tenure system in different municipalities. The research was conducted in Haliya, Kamaiya and Harawa-Charawa communities from Doti, Bardiya and Mahottari districts. A total of 138 people participated in the research. The forthcoming report will help inform the development of new strategies to advocate with local, provincial and federal government for bonded labour communities.



Rajbati Devi Mandal, Treasurer of the National Harawa-Charawa Rights Forum.
Photo credit: Filmatory Nepal/The Freedom Fund



Members of the Harawa-Charawa Rights Forum.
Photo credit: Filmatory Nepal/The Freedom Fund

VISION

Our vision is a world
free of slavery.

MISSION

Our mission is to mobilise the
knowledge, capital and will
needed to end slavery.

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