

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS: Research opportunity

April 2024

Participatory Intervention Development Research for a program to address child exploitation in Karamoja, Uganda

Project summary

The Freedom Fund (freedomfund.org) is a global non-profit organisation that identifies and invests in the most effective frontline efforts to eradicate human trafficking and exploitation. One of our main strategies is to support long-term “hotspot” programs in areas with a high incidence of modern slavery, through which clusters of community-based organisations come together to identify and address the root causes of exploitation. Hotspot programs seek to bring about a sustained and measurable reduction in prevalence of modern slavery, through systemic change, led by the affected communities, workers and survivors.

Following a scoping study and consultation with local organisations and government bodies, the Freedom Fund is now starting an inception year, with a view to a possible longer-term hotspot, and will initially be working in two districts of the Karamoja region of Uganda. Key issues of slavery in the region, identified through the scoping study and further visits, are: child marriage, child trafficking for street work and commercial sexual exploitation, child labour in mining and as Karamojong child warriors. The hotspot aims to address these issues, especially through seeking greater voice, hope and power of girls and women in the region.

The *intervention development research* will use participatory methods to enable affected communities, local organisations and the Freedom Fund to i) prioritise which **forms of exploitation** and modern slavery should be the main focus of the program in these districts (one or all of the ones mentioned above); ii) which **interventions** and program components should be prioritised, bearing in mind the major intersecting issues driving vulnerability such as gender discrimination, food security and climate change; iii) what are the **traditions, narratives and cultural beliefs** that could be mobilised as assets to the program; and iv) which of the **key actors** and influencers we should invest most attention in.

The research will enable us to build the program based on data collected and analysed by those closest to the issues, setting the pattern for the hotspot of critical reflective practice and effective listening relationships between those with lived experience, affected communities, NGOs and the Freedom Fund. The research itself should model and enable transformative approaches to gender roles, while identifying ways that the program can shift harmful gender norms that generate violence and exploitation. Meaningful engagement of people with lived experience should be at the centre of the research.

The Freedom Fund anticipates that the research will be completed within July 2024 – May 2025.

Eligibility

Organisations or consortia are invited to submit proposals for this research. Applicants must have the capacity to conduct field work in the Karamoja region, and **applicants fully or partially based in and led from Uganda will be prioritised**. The Freedom Fund is particularly interested in working with teams that can demonstrate: (a) having members who are from the local communities where the research will take place (b) a gender-balanced team, and (c) commitment to and experience of participatory and survivor-inclusive research.

Budget

A fee of up to USD 80,000 has been made available, with the expectation that, in addition, local organisations will be directly grant-funded by the Freedom Fund to conduct data collection (based on the research agency's development of collective tools, guidance and in-field mentoring) alongside community members. Budgets will be reviewed with respect to the strength of the proposal in meeting the project objectives in a cost-effective manner - we do not simply prioritise the lowest budget. This is a fixed price contract.

Proposal deadline

Proposals should be submitted via email to Ginny Baumann, gbaumann@freedomfund.org **no later than Monday 29 April, 5pm East Africa Time**. Proposals should be no more than 6 pages, plus CVs and annexes.

Background to the Uganda hotspot

The Freedom Fund is a global non-profit organisation that identifies and invests in the most effective frontline efforts to end human trafficking. We select key geographic areas – our hotspot projects – known to have high rates of modern slavery, and where our interventions are most likely to be impactful.

Among Karamoja's population of approx. 1.4 million, government statistics indicate a child marriage rate of 50% and child labour rate of 55%. The region has the highest rate of children trafficked into urban areas of Uganda as well as Kenya and Somalia. While adolescent girls often enter forced marriages following rape, adolescent boys have tended to be recruited as child warriors, seeing cattle rustling as their only option for survival and for mustering the required bride price. These boys are then trapped in very risky and harmful activities as warriors. In this arid, and now unpredictable environment, sustainable forms of pastoralism have broken down due to conflict, commercialisation and prevented land access, and agricultural alternatives have shown limited viability due to haphazard rainfall. In this context of seasonal drought and hunger, girls are married at a young age, with parents fearing pregnancy and the resulting loss of the bride price cattle for the clan. With the loss of pastoral livelihoods, many men have become dependent on women generating the household incomes and food. Increased alcohol consumption fuels gender-based violence. Once married, girls and young women are expected to have very high rates of childbirth.

Despite this, local organisations, women's groups, and some elders and religious leaders persist in trying to create improvements, food security, peace, gender justice and child protection.

Following a scoping study and consultation with local organisations and government, the Freedom Fund has committed to support an inception year in 2024, with a view to testing out in practice the scope for a longer-term hotspot program, and seeking the collective insights from local participants, NGOs and local government about priorities and strategies. The work (and therefore the research) will initially be concentrated in Moroto and Napak districts.

Research objectives and main research questions

The Freedom Fund is seeking organisations or consortia to undertake participatory research on child marriage, child trafficking, children recruited as warriors and other forms of child exploitation in two districts (Moroto and Napak) of the Karamoja region. The overall objectives of the research are to identify:

- i) Which **forms of exploitation** and modern slavery should be the main focus of the program in these districts (one or all of the ones mentioned above);
- ii) Which **interventions** and program components should be prioritised;
- iii) What are the **traditions, narratives and cultural beliefs** that could be mobilised as assets to the program; and
- iv) Which of the **key actors** and influencers we should invest most attention in (who, why, how).

To help achieve these objectives, the research will use appropriate participatory methods to explore the following questions (while allowing researchers to suggest additional key questions):

- Which of the **different types of child exploitation** are most prevalent in the targeted districts and selected sub-counties, and what are the harms associated with these situations? (Note: It is not expected that the research would carry out an in-depth quantitative prevalence study).
- What is the **significance and meaning of these situations of exploitation** to the people affected and other individuals in the families and communities, within the culture?
- What are the **relationships and systems of power** that uphold or challenge child exploitation?
- What are the **main underlying causes and triggering circumstances** leading children into exploitation?
- What, if anything, helps people **regain any freedom, agency or life-choices** (especially if they experienced child marriage, were a child warrior or were trafficked)? And who are some **key people** that facilitate this? As a result, what are the program components/interventions that should be prioritised?
- What are the **beliefs or aspects of cultural traditions and practices** that could uphold child protection and greater freedom from harmful gender norms?

Based on this, the research should enable communities, NGOs and the Freedom Fund to recommend which activities by local organisations would make the most difference and which key actors they should concentrate on. Through participatory methods, the process may also enable the collective definition of several high-level desired outcomes for the first full phase of the hotspot (after the inception year).

Research methodology

Advisory Committee: The research agency should establish an advisory committee to guide the research, helping to refine the objectives, review and give ethical approval of the research methods and tools, give feedback on plans for the analysis, as well as the findings. The committee should include individuals with lived experience of the different forms of exploitation, as well as youth from the affected communities. Local NGOs can help to offer this opportunity and facilitate their participation. The research agency should recommend a suitable composition and way of working (including compensation for time allocations) for this committee.

Participatory mixed methods approach: The Freedom Fund invites applicants to propose a suitable methodology for achieving the objectives above. It is expected that the methods should enable

community members (especially youth and individuals with lived experience) and field staff of NGOs to be supported in collecting a range of **quantitative** and **qualitative** information, which they would analyse together in real time, either at community level or through representatives attending a research analysis workshop. As part of this process, the participants would draw conclusions and recommendations about the emphasis of the program with regard to the questions listed under the objectives above. The research agency would then further refine and write up the findings and recommendations. Kindly include the data collection methods and sources of information to be used.

Sampling approach: Please outline which stakeholders you will engage with and justify your proposed sample and its size. Describe how a sample of respondents will be obtained. Consideration should be given to how these individuals can be accessed and engaged with in a manner which encourages honest responses.

Data quality and analysis: Describe the procedures that will be in place to ensure a high level of data quality (given the role of local NGO fieldworkers in facilitating community-level data collection). Describe the methods and tools used for data analysis at different levels i.e. directly by participating communities; at the research analysis workshop; and by the research agency. Describe the data analysis plan, including any data analysis software and rationale for its use, proposed analysis methods and a rough timeline. The work plan should allow for sufficient time for inputs from the Freedom Fund before finalisation.

Operational, safeguarding and ethical considerations: Highlight any logistical, ethical and/or safeguarding issues with the proposed methodology, such as encouraging candid responses, handling of potentially sensitive information, confidentiality of respondents, sensitivity and respect to stakeholders, Do No Harm etc. Please indicate how you will monitor responses provided and mitigate response bias that may influence the research. Note that we expect the team to include fluent local language speakers to facilitate data collection, alongside local NGOs. The research approach should adhere closely to ethical principles and safety concerns of the research participants and researchers themselves.

In addition, the agency should seek ethical approval for the research from a suitable research institution.

Responsibilities: The chosen applicant will be responsible for:

- 1) Developing a suitable methodology to fulfil the research objectives above. This will include a detailed research protocol, including a sampling strategy, all relevant data collection tools, and a detailed overview of ethical and safeguarding considerations;
- 2) Setting up and coordinating meetings of the advisory committee, with the responsibilities as described above, with support from local organisations and the Freedom Fund;
- 3) Obtaining suitable ethical approval from a research institution;
- 4) Hiring (if required) and training staff to support local organisations and communities in the research process and data collection;
- 5) Training local organisations for the data collection;
- 6) Piloting all data collection tools, and amending them as required;
- 7) Guiding organisational field staff undertaking all data collection, including regular in-field monitoring and ensuring the quality of data and data collection;
- 8) Arranging participatory data analysis of collected data using appropriate methods of review and analysis for inclusion of people who may have low literacy – including reaching conclusions on recommendations for the program;

- 9) Producing a written report as per a structure pre-agreed with the Freedom Fund. This should include clear findings and recommendations for the first full phase of the hotspot;
- 10) Facilitate validation workshops with the advisory committee and local organisations.

Main deliverables and high-level timeline

The proposed schedule outlines the main deliverables, with timeline based on the Freedom Fund contracting with the research agency by early June:

Main research deliverables	Proposed timeline
Establish advisory committee	End July 2024
Finalised research protocol that outlines the methodological strategies (including ethical considerations and finalised tools).	End Aug 2024
Ethical approval by research institution	End Sept 2024
Training and field testing with local organisations completed	End Oct 2024
Memo confirming completion of data collection	End Jan 2025
Completion of process/event for community representatives and local organisations to conduct analysis	Mid March 2025
First draft of report outlining the key findings and recommendations based on a structure pre-agreed with the Freedom Fund and validated by advisory committee	Mid April 2025
Final Report outlining the key findings and recommendations	End May 2025

In addition to the main deliverables listed above, the research team is also expected to discuss with the Freedom Fund any proposed research design changes and share regular updates on the progress of field activities.

The research team will be contracted by the Freedom Fund US and the Freedom Fund's Research staff will manage the service agreement. The Freedom Fund anticipates working closely with the research team through all stages of the project.

Budget

The Freedom Fund has budgeted up to USD 80,000 for the research, with the expectation that, in addition, local organisations will be directly grant-funded by the Freedom Fund to conduct data collection (based on the research agency's development of collective tools, guidance and in-field mentoring) alongside community members. Budgets will be reviewed with respect to the strength of the proposal in meeting the project objectives in a cost-effective manner; we do not simply prioritise the lowest budget.

As part of the proposal, please prepare a brief budget with the following breakdown:

- Personnel cost
- Other direct costs (e.g. training workshops, transport for field supervision, refreshments, reimbursements of participant costs and advisory committee compensation, telecommunications, software licences, devices or tools for data collection). Note that presence of NGO fieldworkers for the research will be covered through FF directly funding the NGOs.

- Overheads
- All applicable taxes related to provision of services (e.g. VAT or GST)

Note that costs related to research report design and printing will be borne by the Freedom Fund.

Proposal format

Interested parties should prepare a proposal of no more than 6 pages plus CVs and annexes. Proposals should contain the following sections:

1. **Short biography of project lead(s) and key team members**, outlining relevant subject matter expertise and prior experience leading similar participatory research projects. CV(s) of the project lead(s) should be included in the annex. Past report(s) from similar projects could be included as a link or in a separate annex.
2. **Methodology**, addressing the topics listed in the 'Research methodology' section of this document. This may include possible participatory approaches or types of tools that might be used.
3. **Team structure**, defining the role and time commitment of key project team members.
4. **High-level work plan** with timing of key project deliverables and proposed format of final report.
5. **Proposed budget** in USD.

The proposal must be written in English and sent electronically in Microsoft Office or PDF format.

Criteria and scoring for assessing proposals

Applicants fully or partially based in and led from Uganda will be prioritised. See also eligibility criteria above.

In reviewing proposals, the Freedom Fund will use the following criteria:

Technical criteria	Weighting
a. Technical capacity of the research team, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experience with program-related research, with demonstrable experience conducting participatory and innovative research. - Proven experience undertaking research on child protection, gender-based violence and/or human trafficking projects. Demonstrated experience of conducting research on sensitive topics and with marginalised communities (such as experience of working with individuals with lived experience of modern slavery) - Proven experience producing detailed research reports, with actionable programmatic recommendations. - Knowledge of the political, cultural, environmental and economic background of Karamoja with capacity for safe working practices in a high risk context. - Experience in efficiently obtaining ethical approval for research studies. 	60%
b. Team structure, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adequate staffing levels/profile to deliver quality outputs within the desired timeframe. - Diversity among its team members, including but not limited to gender and ethnicity. - English language skills. 	30%

- Ability to work in Karamoja, with translation to Karamajong and other local languages.	
Financial criteria	
c. Consideration of all potential expenses. Costs proportionate to the scale of work	10%
Total	100%

Commissioning timeline and submission instructions

Up to 20 th April	Applicants may contact the Freedom Fund – Varsha Gyawali, vgyawali@freedomfund.org - for any technical clarifications regarding the proposal requirements.
By Monday 29th April 2024, 5pm East Africa Time	Final proposals due. Please submit all documents to Ginny Baumann, gbaumann@freedomfund.org with “Proposal for Intervention Development Research, Karamoja” as the email subject line.
8 May 2024	All shortlisted research teams likely to be notified and interviews scheduled.
29 May 2024	Tentative date for contract to be signed with successful research team

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Payment and Jurisdiction

Applicants should observe that the Freedom Fund is a United States 501(c)(3) public charity. The awarded contract will be governed by and constructed in accordance with the laws of the State of New York, United States of America, without regard to principles relating to conflicts of law. All payments to the consultant under the awarded contract shall be agreed upon therein, in compensation for the services provided, and directly related to the approved costs of the required services when/if applicable. Contracts will always be drafted in United States Dollars.