

South-Eastern Nepal Hotspot

ANNUAL REPORT / FOR PERIOD 1 JANUARY TO 31 DECEMBER, 2015

The South-Eastern Nepal hotspot was launched in December 2014, and by the end of 2015 was working with 18 NGO partner organisations. In the hotspot, thousands of individuals and families in agricultural bonded labour are coming together for their rights to land, incomes, education and dignity – working for an end to this inter-generational form of modern slavery (called “haruwa-charuwa”). Currently working in three districts, the hotspot aims to achieve the following outcomes:

1. **Sustained Liberation:** Between 3,000 and 5,000 haruwa-charuwa households in at least 400 locations will be part of a community-based freedom group and taking progressive steps to liberate themselves from slavery, alongside protecting other local residents at-risk.
2. **Wider social mobilisation and government action against haruwa-charuwa bonded labour:** Advocacy by haruwa-charuwa groups in the region will lead to inclusion of haruwa-charuwa in government-led programmes to provide access to resources for their liberation.
3. **Proof of an effective method for eradicating slavery:** Careful measurement through initial baselines and regular tracking of progress against benchmarks for sustained liberation will document progress towards eradication of forms of slavery in the targeted locations.

During 2015, this new hotspot formed and supported 117 community freedom groups with over 3,000 members. Many of these are economic self-help groups, through which members can start to assert their independence from the control of the landowners. Through the groups, they also begin to access all their rights as Nepali citizens, including ensuring children’s enrolment in local schools. Through a combination of awareness and economic empowerment, the groups help individuals move towards freedom, and already 400 have been liberated through the program. Given the range of strategies needed to support sustained liberation, the Freedom Fund is not only working with community-based NGOs, but also with organisations focused on documenting and asserting rights to land; health; legal rights; community mediation; non-formal and adult education; and mental health.

Operating context

2015 was a challenging year for our partner organisations in Nepal due to a series of earthquakes, subsequent aftershocks, and significant political changes. Due to two earthquakes, which struck Nepal on April 25th and May 12th, our partner organisations delayed their project activities. The program was further set back by lengthy and continuous strikes throughout several months after the passage of the country’s new constitution. The Madhesi party demanded amendments to the constitution, resulting in the ongoing closure of major urban areas and highways in the hotspot’s implementing area. The shortages during the post-earthquake months throughout Nepal were further exacerbated as protesters blocked vital trading checkpoints at the Indian border, cutting off vital supplies, such as petrol, medical supplies and cooking gas.

However, the passage of the new constitution offers significant advancement opportunities for the hotspot. Its provisions provide a strong framework for increased support for haruwa-charuwa, while addressing forced labour. Under the new Constitution, Dalit community members are to receive a free education, including scholarships, and will also be provided with health services and social security. In cases of forced labour, the Constitution commits to the prosecution of perpetrators and the provision of compensation to survivors.

Headline results

Since program inception at the end of 2014:



1 117 community freedom groups supported

In 2015, our partner organisations supported formation of 117 community freedom groups, comprised of 3,077 members. These groups provide a platform for disseminating rights-based knowledge, and important messages about migration, education, and legal rights. Such a forum also creates a space for collective action, wage negotiation, and the pursuit of local advocacy objectives. By the end of 2015, community freedom group members were beginning to participate in advocacy efforts, were able to write their names. In some areas, the groups had collectively refused to work without proper payment, resulting in improved wages for community members.

2 400 slavery victims were liberated with follow-up support

As a result of enrolment campaigns, provision of in-kind scholarships, and facilitation of before-and-after school tutoring classes, 209 haruwa-charuwa children were removed from forced child labour, as cattle-herders and domestic workers, and were enrolled in school. Because of effective negotiation with landlords and alternative livelihood development, facilitated by partner organisations, 191 adults were able to leave their slavery conditions. These efforts by partner organisations gave survivors the ability to choose where and for whom they work. Additionally, liberated adults were connected to community freedom groups for ongoing support and provided with the opportunity to save within the savings and credit groups, further empowering individuals to remain free.

3 4,140 previously out-of-school children attended classes

Through education, children can become literate and are less likely to be exploited in the future. As a result of partners' enrolment campaigns, in-kind scholarships, and tutoring classes, haruwa-charuwa children gained access to education and child labourers were able to exit their hazardous working

conditions. Rights-based learning through tutoring classes and child clubs also enabled children to gain knowledge of their legal rights.

4 4,211 individuals gained new access to government services

Obtaining birth registration, citizenship and marriage certificates is an important first step for individuals to access government services. For example, it helps them access to water pumps, toilet construction materials, house construction materials, school scholarships, land, and health services. At the end of 2015, we supported one of our partners to create a registration certificate database to electronically file community members' registration documents, protecting these vital documents and enabling submission of applications if there are new government programs and services being offered.

5 121 individuals started microenterprises

Financial and economic reliance on landowners is the primary force enabling slavery to persist among haruwa-charuwa communities. The dearth of livelihood alternatives and limited means for saving requires community members to seek loans from landowners in case of emergency or a large expense. Through microenterprise development, community members are able to develop a level of independence from landowners. Although these microenterprises alone are not enough to liberate entire communities from slavery, they disrupt the power relationship between labourers and landowners, undermining the 'forced' nature of agricultural bonded labourers' work and providing supplementary income for the family to meet their immediate subsistence needs.

[Addressing systemic drivers of slavery](#)

Developing a Forced Labour Act

Before the implementation of our South-Eastern Nepal program, there was a limited understanding among national government officials about the forced labour conditions experienced by haruwa-charuwa. Although the current Bonded Labour Prohibition Act states that haruwa-charuwa forced labour is illegal, the mandated rehabilitation support has never been granted to the haruwa-charuwa community. Different regional groups in bonded labour in Nepal have received different levels of support from the government, with the haruwa-charuwa being almost entirely neglected. According to the newly drafted Forced Labour Act, the Ministry of Land Reform will facilitate budget allocations and rehabilitation efforts for all forced labour groups in Nepal, likely leading to opportunities for greater support of the haruwa-charuwa community.

Establishing a high-level haruwa-charuwa committee

After careful preparation, partner organisations and haruwa-charuwa leaders held meetings with several ministries in December 2015 to advocate for a government budget allocation for the haruwa-charuwa community. These meetings led to a commitment to develop a high-level committee responsible for allocating resources and providing support to haruwa-charuwa groups. Managed by the Ministry of Land Reform, this committee will be responsible for identifying and registering haruwa-charuwa community members to benefit from: public land distribution, livelihood assistance through vocational training and seed funding, scholarships to children, and funding for house construction. The Ministry of Land Reform will develop guidelines for the formation of the high-level haruwa-charuwa committee and outline the committee's responsibilities in the first half of 2016.

Successful access to Land Inhabitant Certificates and house construction materials

During 2015, 70 haruwa-charuwa families were granted Land Inhabitant Certificates¹ from the local government and housing construction materials under the Urban Ministry's People's Residential Program through our partners' advocacy efforts. Although some haruwa-charuwa families have acquired residential rights to land in the past, this level of government support provided to haruwa-charuwa families has not been achieved before. Advocacy efforts in 2016 will pursue greater government budget allocation for provision of housing to haruwa-charuwa, which will be realised by June 2016 when the national budget is finalised.

Strengthening media's interest and ability to report on forced labour

Throughout 2015, 141 media stories were generated about challenges faced by the haruwa-charuwa community and local organisations' responses to addressing bonded labour. As illustrated by this achievement, there has been a strong improvement in media attention on agricultural bonded labour in south-eastern Nepal due to the local efforts of partner organisations to educate media professionals through meetings and trainings as well as coordinated visits of media professionals to project areas. A film produced by Freedom Fund partner organisation, Saundaraya, was broadcast on regional and national television, and disseminated among INGOs and government stakeholders, generating significant national media attention which gained momentum through the end of the year.

Accessing government services

Critical documents such as birth registration, citizenship, and marriage certificates are necessary to access government services. Partner organisations organised registration camps and coordinated with the local government offices, so that community members could receive these required documents and apply for these vital programs. In some locations where the local government had previously restricted the approval of new registration documents, partner organisations successfully pressured local officials to provide the necessary documentation.

Enhancing civil society capacity

As the first full year of implementation, 2015 provided many opportunities for learning, both through practical experience as partners implemented their projects and through structured events such as trainings, workshops, exposure visits, and stakeholder meetings. The hotspot approach has required each organisation to implement a variety of interventions, including non-formal education, livelihoods, rights-based awareness, savings and credit, and advocacy activities.

As a result, we coordinated a variety of events to ensure that partner organisations were learning best practices within each intervention area, while strengthening their monitoring, evaluation, financial and administrative functions. To ensure that all the organisations' staff members had strong conceptual clarity on bonded labour and trafficking, a training was provided on existing laws and policies related to forced labour and trafficking.

To address gaps in strategic interventions, additional learning opportunities were facilitated. An exposure visit to partner organisation, Janachetana Dalit Sangam (JDS), was conducted to learn about group formation, management, and social mobilisation. Partner organisation, Community Improvement Centre (CIC), hosted an exposure visit focused on their unique approach to economic empowerment and group farming techniques. Specialist service provider, World Education, offered training and support to partner organisations for their 'back-to-school' campaigns, tutoring classes, and savings and credit groups. Training was also provided on gender and social inclusion.

¹ Land Inhabitant Certificates provide residential rights to the land, eliminating fear of eviction. By affording haruwa-charuwa families rights to land, the coercive measures used by landowners to force haruwa-charuwa community members to work for them are significantly reduced.

Two further exposure visits were coordinated to give partner organisations the opportunity to learn from organisations that are addressing bonded labour outside of the South-Eastern Nepal program. An exposure visit to the far-west of Nepal was coordinated so that partners could observe successful models of livelihood, group farming, and non-formal education interventions implemented to liberate another bonded labour group in Nepal, the Kamaiya. An exposure visit to northern India partner, Pragati Gramodyog Sansthan (PGS), was facilitated to illustrate strategic approaches for developing community freedom plans, organising community freedom groups into a larger network, facilitating legal aid, and garnering new ideas for integrating livelihood and health activities into programs.

Learning

1 Learning Needs Assessments

In the three hotspot districts, a learner's needs assessment was conducted for haruwa-charuwa adults to identify project participants' educational needs. Focus group discussions with local organisations, community leaders, health workers, VDC secretaries, teachers and other key informants informed the findings, concluding that rights-based, educational modules would be the best medium for learning. The findings also suggested that the modules should focus on health and sanitation practices, economic participation, education, legal rights, social issues, wage negotiation, social mobilisation, and available government services.

2 Mental health research

On behalf of the Freedom Fund, Helen Bamber Foundation, in partnership with Community Mental Health Centre (CMC), organised a mental health needs assessment, conducting 103 interviews with haruwa-charuwa community members. Initial findings of this research found there to be high levels of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, suicidal ideation, and panic anxiety within the haruwa-charuwa community. The data is being finalised by CMC and research conclusions will be disseminated in Q2 2016.

3 Livelihood Assessment and Employment Opportunity Survey

We commissioned a Livelihood Assessment and Employment Opportunity Survey which was completed by Action for Development (AfD) in September 2015. The report concluded that haruwa men would benefit from formal training—such as masonry, plumbing, welding, or auto mechanics—for job placement in local markets or informal business and cooperative training which would enable participants to leverage existing agricultural skills. For women, AfD found market demand for additional tailoring and embroidery services as well as the production of Mithila art, incense sticks, laha bangles, and soap. Most of these skills could be provided through informal training. As many youth are migrating abroad, skills training will need to be provided to increase safer migration and reduce the likelihood of exploitation. According to the report, youth would benefit from training, such as masonry, plumbing, and auto mechanics.

4 Vocational training, alternative businesses, and group farming

Although economic empowerment has been part of the strategy throughout 2015, learnings from the year suggest the need for further development of these interventions. The development of microbusinesses within the community provides supplemental income and enables haruwa-charuwa to provide for their families' subsistence needs, but is unable to cover larger expenses faced by the family, such as medical expenses. The dearth of formal employment opportunities, the lack of skills among the haruwa-charuwa community, and the slow growth of local and regional markets present challenges for developing employment opportunities which eliminate dependency on local landowners. In 2016, new

interventions need to be piloted, including skills-based vocational training, to understand if other approaches, in addition to starting small microbusinesses and group farming, can establish haruwa-charuwa members' independence from landowners.

Looking ahead

- **Advocacy with the government ministries in Kathmandu**

Ongoing advocacy efforts with national government ministries will be prioritised in 2016 to ensure the government follows through on establishing a high-level committee for providing support to haruwa-charuwa families. Additionally, advocacy efforts with key policy makers will be important to ensure the newly drafted Forced Labour Act includes appropriate recognition for the haruwa-charuwa community.

- **Network development**

Efforts to strengthen Freedom Fund partner organisations' and haruwa-charuwa leaders' networks will be a priority in early 2016. Partner organisations and haruwa-charuwa leaders will meet with leaders from other forced labour groups, such as Kamaiya and Haliya leaders, to ensure advocacy efforts with the Ministry of Land Reform and other national ministry leaders are coordinated, and that those leaders will advocate for government support to the haruwa-charuwa community. Partner organisations will provide support to the haruwa-charuwa district networks in Saptari and Siraha and will coordinate the formation of a haruwa-charuwa network in Dhanusa.

- **Prevalence research:** The academic research component of the program will begin with a scoping visit in February 2016. Following the scoping visit, a workshop will outline the process for prevalence research, facilitated by academic research partners Praxis and the Institute for Development Studies.

- **Mental health interventions trainings and implementation**

Following the design of a tailored mental health intervention for haruwa-charuwa communities based on the needs assessment conducted in 2015, trainings will be provided to Freedom Fund partner organisations. This series of trainings will equip partner organisations' staff to help individuals and their families to cope better in cases of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression.

- **Mapping land on which haruwa-charuwa reside and continuing vital registration campaigns**

Partner organisations will be supported by Community Rural Development Society (CRDS) to map the land on which haruwa-charuwa are living. This mapping process will determine whether the land is privately or publicly held. If publicly held, partner organisations and CRDS will work to enable haruwa-charuwa community members to access Land Inhabitant Certificates, eliminating likelihood of eviction. Partner organisations will continue conducting registration camps to ensure that important identification documents are secured and stored electronically so when new government services arise, community members can access those services.

- **Capacity building of local partners**

Reinforcing the strength of program implementation, training and capacity development of partner organisations will be ongoing. Organisations focused on community mediation, advocacy, safer migration, legal approaches, and non-formal education will continue to support partner organisations to develop their strategies. We will also be facilitating organisational development, focusing on child protection and advocacy efforts throughout the first part of 2016.