



Preventing trafficking and protecting vulnerable young women through economic empowerment

Cross-country report: Ethiopia, Nepal and Tamil Nadu, India

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Executive summary

Economic empowerment in the form of having a “good job” plays a central role in tackling human trafficking by offering women and girls viable alternatives to exploitative work and improving the effective reintegration of survivors of trafficking. Reflecting on the Freedom Fund’s own experience, we noticed that many of the economic empowerment projects tended to channel women towards traditionally “feminine” occupations, including sewing and tailoring, jewellery making, hairdressing and beauty, and food processing and selling. These jobs are often insecure, low paid and unregulated, and not seen as an aspirational employment pathway.

In response, we commissioned this study to explore what non-traditional employment options exist, what support services are available and what else is needed to support vulnerable young women – those from marginalised communities with high rates of human trafficking and other forms of exploitation – in securing and thriving in more lucrative and rewarding jobs. The research team spoke with 226 stakeholders (including 147 young women and survivors of trafficking) across three deliberately diverse settings: in urban Ethiopia, urban Nepal and rural Tamil Nadu, India.

The study began by exploring what a “good job” means. What we heard from the young women is that a good job is defined not only as offering a living wage and the absence of exploitation, but it also needs to have other constructive qualities, such as providing dignity, offering a supportive environment, and fitting into their longer-term aspirations with the potential to progress.

Through in-country interviews and discussion groups, we found that employers in the hospitality, tourism, retail, healthcare and construction industries had suitable entry-level vacancies for young workers and were generally keen to attract them. Specifically in the three study locations, these industries offer a growing number of job opportunities and female workers have generally been underrepresented. While these jobs exist, however, they were not necessarily accessible to young women and survivors from vulnerable backgrounds due to a range of obstacles, including:

Social norms that lead to girls having lower qualifications, in turn making them less competitive in the labour market	Cultural practices that limit young women’s ability to pursue better training and work opportunities	Lack of formal identification that hinders access to basic public services (such as schooling) and to qualify for jobs	Being overlooked by training and employability providers, seen as more “risky” candidates	Stigma of being a survivor can erode their self-confidence	Underlying vulnerabilities that disrupt training and draw survivors back into exploitation
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While the research team has observed some promising examples of program participants becoming successful women entrepreneurs, these were often exceptions rather than the norm. The emphasis on self-employment among many of the women’s economic empowerment programs warrants further examination to ensure that they are thorough in their selection of genuinely suitable candidates, and to fully help these ventures advance from “hobbies” to generating sustainable levels of income.

A healthy range of government- and donor-funded training and employability schemes for young people were found in the three study locations. However, they operated largely in silos and the differing eligibility criteria and application processes can be confusing for the young female applicants as well as the community organisations who support them. Further, a large majority of these programs were not inclusive of young women from marginalised backgrounds, with little provision for candidates who needed to commute from remote areas or find safe, affordable and often female-only accommodation in urban centres where the courses were held.

Employers interviewed were keen to receive referrals and to support young women from marginalised communities, but most perceived the training delivered by local institutions as inadequate. In line with other international studies, this research also found small- and medium-sized workplaces to be more accommodating and suited to the needs of vulnerable young women and survivors. Allowing them flexibility to balance work alongside other caregiving duties, educational opportunities and healthcare needs.

Finally, this study recommends a series of actions to improve the effectiveness of anti-trafficking as well as economic empowerment programs, including:

- Anti-trafficking organisations**
 - Work to transform gendered expectations in the wider community that can limit girls' aspirations as well as what they choose to pursue later on as young women.
 - Continue to address underlying vulnerabilities, especially by helping families secure identification documents and access critical government services such as education and healthcare.
 - Continue to draw attention to and help reform existing industries where a large number of young women end up in exploitative employment.
 - Work with, rather than duplicate, the services of local training and employability providers.
- Training and employability providers**
 - Undertake more deliberate outreach to marginalised populations, especially by leveraging existing networks of community organisations that can facilitate access to a more diverse pool of applicants.
 - Involve local employers in formulating and delivering programs, which should include greater emphasis on soft skills and in-work training.
 - Be more selective with supporting young women into self-employment, focus on those who are most prepared for the risks and rewards of entrepreneurship rather than treating this as the default option.
- Local governments and private funders**
 - Continue tackling underlying vulnerabilities that lead to human trafficking, especially by addressing policy implementation gaps where preventative social welfare schemes are not reaching the intended beneficiaries.
 - Take a more active role in guiding businesses towards better practices through incentives for model employers as well as penalties for those violating the law.
 - Public-sector commissioners and private donors should consider more complementary coordination of training and employability programs, including shared admission processes and providing progression route from one course to the other.
 - Move towards outcome-based contracting to boost the impact of public and private funding. This model – if priced carefully and then managed well – has the potential to incentivise a more personalised, flexible scheme that maximises outcomes for young women and survivors.

Acknowledgement

First and foremost, our thanks must go to the young women in Ethiopia, Nepal and Tamil Nadu who bravely and honestly shared with us their experiences, both positive and negative, as well as their dreams and aspirations. This research has been undertaken to improve support to these young women, and many more like them, to secure employment that is of their choosing and that meets their expectation of a “good job,” offering them a meaningful livelihood with dignity, a safe work environment and hope for a better life.

We also thank the many professionals and employers who took time out of their busy schedules to meet with our team, sharing their valuable insights on local services as well as labour market conditions. A particular thanks to the many Freedom Fund partner organisations for speaking with us and hosting the focus group discussions with the young women.

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UBS Optimus
Foundation



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Table of contents

Background	1
Study locations	1
Study aim and research questions	2
Methodology	4
Development of research plan and tools	4
Ethical considerations	5
Findings from across three countries	7
Profile of stakeholders consulted	7
What constitutes a “good job”?	8
What non-traditional forms of employment exist?	12
What are the challenges faced by <i>young women</i> from marginalised backgrounds?	16
What are the specific challenges faced by <i>survivors</i> ?	18
What about self-employment?	18
What training and employability services are already available?	21
What additional services or alternative models are needed?	22
What cross-sector partnerships should be formed or scaled?	23
Conclusion and recommendations	28
Recommendations for anti-trafficking organisations	29
Recommendations for training and employability providers	30
Recommendations for local governments and private funders	30
References	32

Acronyms

BPO	Business process outsourcing
ETB	Ethiopian Birr
ILO	International Labour Organization
INR	Indian Rupee
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NPR	Nepalese Rupee
SASANE	Samrakshak Samuha Nepal
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USD	United States Dollar

Background

Globally, an estimated 25 million people are victims of forced labour, 63 percent of whom are women and girls trapped in situations of severe labour exploitation, debt bondage and forced sexual exploitation (International Labour Organization (ILO) and Walk Free, 2017).

Economic empowerment in the form of having a “good job” plays a central role in preventing human trafficking by offering women and girls viable alternatives to exploitative work, as well as by improving the effective reintegration of survivors of trafficking (from hereon referred to as “survivors”). Having a good job is important for the financial stability that it provides, and research with survivors has also highlighted the sense of empowerment and agency that it brings (ILO, 2020; Nicholson & Davy, 2020; Begum, 2020; Smith-Brake, et al., 2015; Surtees, 2012). While supporting people in securing and remaining in good jobs is not a standalone strategy to reduce trafficking and help its victims, economic empowerment should be an integral component of any anti-trafficking program.

The Freedom Fund (freedomfund.org) is an international non-profit organisation that identifies and invests in the most effective frontline efforts to end human trafficking. Since our inception in 2014, we have established nine “hotspot” projects - supporting anti-trafficking services and policy dialogues in areas around the world known to have high rates of human trafficking. Through the Freedom Fund’s support to more than 100 frontline non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Brazil, Ethiopia, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Thailand, our partners have collectively impacted the lives of more than 765,000 individuals who are victims of or at high risk of trafficking. The majority of these individuals (over 60 percent) are women and girls, including an estimated 30,000 out-of-school girls who have been supported to re-enrol and continue their schooling and 20,000 women who have gained a new form of income as a result of our partner NGOs’ support (Freedom Fund, 2020).

Reflecting on the Freedom Fund’s own experience and review of anti-trafficking projects and literature, we noticed that many of the economic empowerment projects tended to channel women towards traditionally “feminine” occupations, including sewing, tailoring, jewellery making, hairdressing and beauty, and food processing and selling (Begum, 2020; Freedom Fund, 2018). These types of jobs are often insecure, low paid and unregulated (Bonner & Spooner, 2011), and not seen as an aspirational employment pathway. Accordingly, we commissioned this study to explore what non-traditional employment options exist, what support services are available and what else is needed to support young women from vulnerable communities in gaining access to and thriving in more lucrative and rewarding jobs.

Study locations

This study focused on three of the eight Freedom Fund hotspots:

- **Ethiopia** – Centred in the Addis Ababa and Amhara regions, the Ethiopia hotspot was established in July 2015. The project has two goals: supporting the positive reintegration of the returning survivors of abusive work experiences overseas, and; developing attractive alternatives to migration through vocational training and employment support. Through the efforts of 12 NGO partners, the hotspot has helped improve the lives of more than 133,000 vulnerable people.

- **Central Nepal** – Concentrated in the Kathmandu Valley region, the Central Nepal hotspot project ran from August 2015 to September 2020 with the aim of reducing the prevalence of minors working in the adult entertainment sector (predominantly drinking establishments with the girls working as waitresses/hostesses), where harmful child labour and sexual exploitation is rife. Through the efforts of 14 NGO partners, more than 48,000 vulnerable individuals accessed services that helped them exit or improved their resilience against human trafficking.
- **Tamil Nadu, Southern India** – Spread across the state of Tamil Nadu, the Southern India hotspot was established in September 2015 and focuses on reducing bonded labour in the textile industry, a problem that disproportionately affects girls and young women. Through the collaboration of 15 local NGO partners, this hotspot project has impacted the lives of nearly 171,000 vulnerable people.

Although the three hotspots focus on different forms of human trafficking in distinct operating contexts, all three projects (1) share a strong focus on young women and girls and (2) use economic livelihood as a mechanism for preventing women and girls from entering into exploitation and supporting the sustained reintegration of survivors.

Study aim and research questions

A market assessment was undertaken to reflect on the needs and experiences of young women who have received services or other forms of assistance from the Freedom Fund’s hotspot projects in the three countries, as well as to examine the local labour market conditions that may help or hinder these young women in entering and thriving in alternative, non-traditional forms of employment. Its primary aim was to understand what alternative, sustainable “good jobs” were available for the young women and to propose how training and employment interventions could be strengthened to better enable vulnerable young women to access them.

The five main research questions of this cross-country study were:

1. What constitutes a “good job” as defined by the young women themselves?
2. What are the current and emerging job opportunities for female trafficking survivors and at-risk women and girls in these locations?
 - a. What are the specific challenges that young women face in finding, securing, and remaining in these good jobs?
 - b. What are the specific challenges that survivors face in finding, securing, and remaining in these good jobs?
 - c. What opportunities are available for productive and rewarding self-employment?
3. What training and employability services are already available in these hotspot locations, and to what extent do they engage with and meet the needs of these young women and survivors, and local employers?
4. Where are the service gaps and what additional interventions could help bridge them?
5. What cross-sector partnerships between businesses, governments and civil society organisations should be formed and/or scaled up?

Given the unique labour market context across the three study locations and the difference in the scope of work between the NGO partners included in this study, the focus of the three market assessments were tailored to each location. Thus, the market assessments were not designed to be exactly like-for-like but did gather sufficient insight to address the five research questions and help us compare the situation between the three locations. Finally, it is important to note this study is designed to help illustrate the labour market conditions, programs and services specific to the study locations and findings should not be extrapolated to represent the situation at a broader level such as across 'urban Ethiopia' or 'rural Tamil Nadu'.

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Methodology

The research methodology for this market assessment was entirely qualitative and conducted in four stages:

Ethiopia (Apr - Jun 2019)	➔	Tamil Nadu (Jun - Sep 2019)	➔	Nepal (Oct 2019 - Jan 2020)	➔	Comparison and synthesis of cross-country findings (Apr - Dec 2020)
Lead researcher: Seth Opuni Fieldwork locations: Addis Ababa, Dessie and Kombolcha cities		Lead researcher: Shomsia Ali Fieldwork locations: Dindigul, Erode, Namakkal, Ramanathapuram and Virudhunagar districts		Lead researcher: Shomsia Ali Fieldwork locations: Kathmandu, Bakhtapur and Lalitpur cities		



Development of research plan and tools

The research team developed the research plan and associated discussion guides in close consultation with Freedom Fund staff at headquarters and in the three countries where fieldwork took place. We also refined the guides following consultations with local research teams to ensure that they reflected local norms and could realistically be implemented. Separate discussion guides were developed for the following stakeholders:

- **Young women** between the ages of 16 and 25, at risk and from communities affected by human trafficking. Some of the young women were in formal education or vocational training, and some were in paid employment. In Ethiopia, the study specifically recruited survivors with experience of labour exploitation. In Nepal and Tamil Nadu, the study recruited at-risk young women from communities with high rates of trafficking. Although some of the participants may be survivors of trafficking and past experiences of exploitation were indeed disclosed during the discussions, being a survivor was not an eligibility criterion for participation.
- **Parents of young women** in Tamil Nadu were also invited to one discussion group to explore the family dynamics of having their daughters continue their education or enter into vocational training and work. This was possible in Tamil Nadu as the study was located in 'source' areas and many of the young women still lived with their parents. In Ethiopia and Nepal, the study was conducted in 'destination' sites and family members could not be easily located or included into the study.

- **NGOs** that are/were Freedom Fund partners with experience in delivering a range of anti-trafficking interventions, including (but not limited to) vocational training and employability support to vulnerable individuals, including young women.
- **Other training and employability providers** identified from the desk-based research and/or through the local researcher, including government-funded providers and with an attempt to engage with those known for their quality of provision.
- **Local employers** identified from the desk-based research and/or through the local researcher, focusing on employers that were known for, or deemed to have the potential to, employ young women with limited formal qualifications. Generally speaking, employers were from the hospitality, retail, health and manufacturing industries, but with some local variations in each study site.
- **Government officials** with remits related to youth employment and labour rights, typically at the sub-national level, whose practical knowledge leans more toward policy implementation than formulation.

All interviews and group discussions with the young women were conducted in the local language, interpreted by local research assistants who had been trained on the study topic and the discussion guides. The languages used were Amharic in Ethiopia, Nepali in Nepal, and Tamil in Tamil Nadu, India. Some service providers, local employers and government officials were comfortable enough discussing matters in English, and in those cases a local research assistant was present to interpret whenever needed.

Ethical considerations

The study was voluntary and required consent from individuals to participate. The interviews and focus groups with the young women were designed to foster open and constructive discussions, and they deliberately steered clear of topics that might have been traumatic or stigmatising, such as past experiences with forced labour, debt bondage or other distressing experiences. Interviews with young women took place in local community venues, including village halls and NGO premises. At all times trained NGO staff were on hand to provide support if participants became upset or disclosed information that needed to be followed-up by a caseworker.

Researchers provided potential participants with information about their rights within the study, including the option to pause the discussion, or to withdraw their participation at any point and without repercussions. No compensation was offered for participation in the interviews or focus groups. Where needed, transportation to and from the meeting location were arranged or paid for by partner NGOs and the research team.

No identifying information of the young women nor their (good or bad) employers were recorded by the research team. The identities of the individuals representing local service providers, employers and government departments were not shared beyond the field team and were carefully anonymised during the process of analysis and report writing.



Findings from across three countries

Profile of stakeholders consulted

Across the three-countries, a total of 226 people contributed their experiences and insights to this study (see Table 1).

The majority of participants across all stakeholder groups (72 percent) were young women age 16 to 25 living in communities with high rates of human trafficking, who shared their views either in one-on-one interviews or in focus group discussions. Typically, each group discussion was limited to between 12 and 15 participants; however, an exception was made in Tamil Nadu, where most group sessions had more than double this number. While the majority of the 147 participants were women between the ages of 16 and 25, there were two instances where older women with experiences of exploitative work also joined the group discussions. Considering that many of the Tamil Nadu attendees travelled a considerable distance to the meeting location, the research team decided not to turn anyone away even if they did not fit exactly into the initial eligibility of the study.

The next largest group of stakeholders was employers, identified as local business owners or managers who were known for offering, or deemed to have the potential to offer, jobs to young women with limited formal qualifications and/or were from potential growth sectors. In Ethiopia, this included employers in the hospitality, retail, health, textile and agribusiness sectors. In India, businesses in the hospitality, dairy and oil production sectors were selected. In Nepal, firms in the retail, garment, hospitality and beauty industries were interviewed.

In addition, the research team also spoke with representatives from NGOs that were Freedom Fund partners at the time and were providing support to communities with high rates of trafficking. Some of the support these partners provided included training and employability services to women and girls. External providers to the Freedom Fund's hotspot programs, who were specifically providers of skills training and employability services were also interviewed, with a focus on providers that received government or aid funding and/or those with a reputation for quality services. Finally, the research team also interviewed government officials, including staff at the Ethiopian Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs, District Employment Offices in Tamil Nadu and from Nepal's Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security.

Table 1: Stakeholders who participated in this study

	Ethiopia	Nepal	Tamil Nadu, India	Subtotal
Young women (age 16 to 25), or older women with who were survivors of trafficking	30	22	95	147
Parents of young women	-	-	15	15
Employers	15	4	3	22
NGOs	5	9	6	20
Training and employability service providers	4	8	3	15
Government officials	3	1	3	7
Total	57	44	125	226

What constitutes a “good job”?

The study began by exploring the concept of a “good job;” that is, what are the criteria used by young women preferring some employment opportunities over others?

In the context of the communities that are the focus of this assessment, where there are high rates of human trafficking and other forms of labour exploitation there was a general consensus on what constituted a “good job”. The notion of having a good job was central to the young women feeling economically and emotionally secure and not having to resort to exploitative and often illegal work out of desperation. A good job was defined not only by its financial rewards but also by its working conditions, including whether it delivered a sense of respect for the workers and prospects for personal and professional growth.

Participants highlighted four key dimensions of what they consider to be a good job:

Providing a reliable level of income that is sufficient to cover basic necessities for the young women and their families. Although social norms across the study locations typically place a greater emphasis on men as “breadwinners,” many of the female participants felt a strong desire (sometimes an obligation) to contribute towards their family income. Typical contributions included paying for necessities such as rent, food and medicine, as well as education for their siblings and/or own children. In rural Tamil Nadu, nearly three-in-five of the young women had children of their own, whereas in the other study locations this proportion was significantly lower.



“I left my village to find work here [Kathmandu] so I can pay my brother’s medical bills. He is very sick.”
- Young woman in Kathmandu, Nepal

In the market assessment it was difficult to pinpoint a desired income range as the needs and expectations of the study participants varied considerably; some needs were practical while others may have been more aspirational. In conversations with young women in Ethiopia, we found that participants in the Amhara region had higher salary expectations than those based in Addis Ababa, which possibly indicates that those in more rural areas may have expectations that are too optimistic and not reflective of market conditions. Their views may be influenced by tales from “successful” returnees from the capital city Addis Ababa or from working abroad, which carried an upward bias and skewed towards returnees sharing positive rather than negative experiences. As illustrated in the quote below, one of the young women in Dessie expected a minimum monthly income of ETB 5,000 (about USD 155) which is significantly higher than the average per adult expenditure of ETB 2,000 per month (about USD 60) in Addis Ababa, the region with the highest cost of living in Ethiopia (Kiros, et al., 2020). As part of any economic empowerment program, an important first step is to work with the candidates to develop a budget based on accurate cost-of-living information and set realistic earning goals.



“I would need a minimum monthly salary of ETB 5,000 [about USD 155] to enable me to keep up with rent payments as well as transportation to work.”
- Young women in Dessie, Ethiopia

In the Kathmandu Valley there was a specific challenge with young women who wanted to exit the adult entertainment sector but was unable to find alternative employment that pays better than their current job - with average earnings at around NPR 9,000 (about USD 80) per month when generous tips from clients were taken into account (Dank, et al., 2019). An important first step in employment support programs here is to be able to demonstrate progression in earning potential in alternative jobs to ensure young women who successfully left exploitative work did not re-enter on account of not immediately earning as much in alternate and less abusive employment.

Security and safety. This dimension was commonly shaped by the negative past experiences of the participants. Young women in Tamil Nadu described the forced overtime and physical exhaustion and ailments (such as respiratory troubles) from working in local textile factories, as well as the verbal abuse and physical harassment by (often male) supervisors. Former domestic workers who have returned to Ethiopia from the Middle East talked about the isolation of working in a foreign household and not knowing where and how to seek help if needed. Young women in Kathmandu spoke about feeling unsafe - being forced by the venue manager to engage with clients beyond what they were comfortable with. Having a sense of control over working conditions and not feeling a sense of isolation or loneliness were important criteria for many of the young women interviewed.



“I was regularly assaulted and my employer stopped paying my salary, but I had no one to help me.”
- Young female survivor in Kombolcha, Ethiopia

Appreciation for the work that they do and respect for workers as individuals. This was particularly salient among young women interviewed in Kathmandu, where many of them have worked (or still work) in the adult entertainment sector. Although not all workers in this sector are exploited and not all employers are abusive, high rates of sexual exploitation and coercion inside adult entertainment venues have been highlighted by a number of other studies (Dank, et al., 2019; Freedom Fund, 2018). Even though many of the workers interviewed were generally happy with their income - roughly NPR 20,000 (about USD 170) a month including tips, compared with a national minimum wage of NPR 13,450 (about USD 120) - they disliked having to request their pay at the end of each month, with the amount often determined at the whim of their managers. The young women also disliked being touched by customers without their consent, as well as the harassment they faced from customers and managers for not “obliging.”



“I make good money at work but I don’t like the touching [from male clients].”
- Young woman working as a waitress in Kathmandu, Nepal

Prospect for upward mobility. Many of the young women had aspirations to advance into better-paying and higher-skilled roles, and therefore they wanted jobs that could give them skills that lead to more lucrative work and/or to more rewarding/respectable future employment.

For example, although the young women in Kathmandu's adult entertainment sector did not necessarily enjoy their work, some of them did value having work hours that were predominantly at night as it gave them the opportunity to undertake training for other employment during the day. The young women were open to undertaking training or returning to education in order to improve their future employment prospective but found that their immediate need to earn an income took priority and was therefore a barrier to this. For example, in Tamil Nadu young women took jobs in the textile mills rather than complete their education as their family was dependent on their income.

Those who were unmarried, and under less financial pressure, accepted the potential need to accept a low-paying job with inconvenient working hours in the interim, but it was important to them that this would bring them closer to better-paid and/or more respectable jobs over the longer term. In contrast, the married young women were less likely to accept this trade-off, preferring instead to have more flexibility in the near term so they could balance their work with caregiving (often childcaring) responsibilities. Accordingly, they were much more interested in self-employment and working on their own terms, even if this may bring greater financial uncertainties than working for others. In such cases, the formation of collectives among a group of women producers may help them offset the risks faced by individual self-entrepreneurs.

In summary, what we heard from the young women across the locations is that a good job is defined not only as offering a living wage and the absence of exploitation, but it also needs to have other constructive qualities, such as providing dignity to the young women, offering a supportive environment, and fitting into their longer-term aspirations with the potential to progress (or in the case of married women, ability to meet immediate family care needs).

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What constitutes a “good job”?



A “good job” is not only about earning a wage and being financially independent, but it also offers dignity to the individual and prospects for advancement. Here is what we heard from the young women across the three study locations:

Prospect for upward mobility, a pathway towards better-paying and higher-skilled roles.



Appreciation for the work that they do and respect for workers as individuals.



Providing a reliable level of income that is sufficient to cover basic necessities for the young women and their families.



Safety and security, not being forced to do things that they have not consent to and to be protected from harm, including workplace injuries as well as physical and verbal abuses.



My first job might not give me my ideal salary and role. However I would be willing to take the position if there are prospects of developing skills and securing a good career progression.

SURVIVOR IN
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA



What non-traditional forms of employment exist?

A major impetus for this research was the need to better understand alternative, non-traditional employment options for young women from vulnerable communities, especially by looking beyond traditionally “feminine” occupations that are dominant in many women’s economic empowerment programs.

Our market assessment deliberately looked for existing and growing sectors that could offer entry-level positions suitable for a sizeable population of young women who have limited relevant experience or formal qualifications, with the potential for subsequent progression. While certain sectors are highlighted in this report, it is not a blanket endorsement and worth stating upfront that there are good jobs and exploitative roles across all segments of the labour market. No sector is immune from labour exploitation and therefore care should always be taken by training and employability providers to screen out problematic workplaces and monitor the working conditions of all participants. It is important not to make broad assumptions about ‘good’ or ‘exploitative’ sectors but instead consider the circumstances of each specific employer and employee.

Further, while this cross-country report attempts to synthesise insights across the study locations, there are important differences to bear in mind. In urban Ethiopia and Nepal, a higher number and increasingly diverse work opportunities were available to young women, spurred by the transformation of the urban economy and emergence of new industries. In rural Tamil Nadu, however, the dominance of the textile mills combined with the large supply of (wo)men power means that patterns of employment will likely remain unchanged in the medium-term.

In urban Ethiopia, job opportunities in the hospitality, retail and health sectors were highlighted by the employers, training providers and government officials interviewed. Entry-level roles suitable for young women with limited experience and qualifications would include housekeepers, cleaners and kitchen assistants. Although these entry-level roles may not be norms-defying, they do present opportunities for progression into more specialist work such as facilities and catering management. Many of the employers interviewed were particularly keen on female returnees who may have greater exposure to life and culture outside of Ethiopia, and one hotel manager actually singled out returnees for their exemplary standards of cleanliness and work ethic due to their experience working abroad.

In urban Nepal, tourism and hospitality, light manufacturing and constructions were identified as growth industries locally. In 2019, prior to covid-19, tourism directly supported more than 1 million jobs in Nepal and income generated by this sector has grown at an average of 12 percent year-on-year during the past decade (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2020; Ministry of Culture, Tourism & Civil Aviation, 2020). Although a traditionally male occupation, women-only trekking companies have started to transform the sector, including women-owned businesses such as SASANE (see Case study 1), 3 Sisters Adventure, and Everest Women Treks Expedition. These businesses generally offer entry-level opportunities as cleaners, cooks and tour assistants, with the opportunity to progress into more lucrative roles as tour guides.

Construction represents another high-growth sector offering entry-level opportunities in urban Nepal. Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, the sector provided employment to more than 1.3 million workers and was growing at an impressive rate of 9 percent per year (The Asia Foundation, 2020). In particular, the training providers interviewed for this assessment often spoke about vacancies in construction-related trades such as plumbing and electrical work. The skills shortage in these sectors means that the pay rates can be lucrative, yet young women are not actively scouted for these jobs, with the exception of the *Skills for Employment Programme* (more on p.23).

Case study 1: A social enterprise founded by survivors, for survivors

Samrakshak Samuha Nepal (or SASANE) was founded in 2008 by a group of female survivors of trafficking. It is an NGO specialising in anti-trafficking advocacy and access to education and livelihood opportunities by survivors and their communities in rural mountain regions of Nepal. SASANE comprises four interlinked programs: (1) a program to provide paralegal training to survivors in order to facilitate their legal careers, with placement into roles in police stations to work directly on reports of trafficking and abuse; (2) a Sisterhood of Survivors program that equips survivors with language, customer service and business skills to secure employment in the local tourism industry in order to help female workers avoid exploitation and build sustainable, long-term careers; (3) an anti-trafficking awareness program for local schools; and (4) a community outreach program to support women and girls currently in conditions of exploitation in rural mountain villages and who are prevented from leaving by geography, low educational attainment and language barriers.

As the keystone of SASANE's work, since 2008 the paralegal program has trained 328 trafficking survivors as paralegals, with 270 trained paralegals certified at the district court and subsequently filing more than 4,000 complaints on behalf of women and children being exploited. The training focuses on reintegration, job skills and helping survivors understand legal rights. Activities include psychosocial and legal counselling, data collection and legal aid. Survivor graduates of the program, through their placement within police stations, are able to provide free legal support to victims of human trafficking and gender-based violence. In 2018, paralegals aided 415 legal cases and supported 238 women and girls to exit situations of exploitation.

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In Tamil Nadu, the opportunities for vulnerable young women were far more limited compared with those in urban sites in Ethiopia and Nepal. Employment in our study area is dominated by thousands of local textile factories. While they provide a critical financial lifeline to many families, the exploitative conditions inside many of these factories cannot be disregarded: typically, the hours are long, the work is hard and the working conditions are not healthy. Although some female workers have managed to escape the factory floor and into less perilous administrative and supervisory roles, they are the exception rather than the rule. Jobs in other local industries do exist, such as in dairy and charcoal factories, but often these involve even harsher working conditions than textile factories. Furthermore, the few alternative jobs are not easily accessible, with poor or unsafe transport links from the villages where the young women live. As a result, many of the unmarried young women interviewed aspire to eventually migrate to urban centres such as Chennai, Coimbatore and Madurai, where there are wider job opportunities in the retail, healthcare and industrial sectors. The dominance of textile factories as employers in this location makes it even more imperative that key agencies (such as local and state governments) work closely with them to improve working conditions.



“The young women can work making charcoal, like many of the people here but they choose to leave the villages for the mills because they provide them a place to live. The charcoal work is even more difficult.”

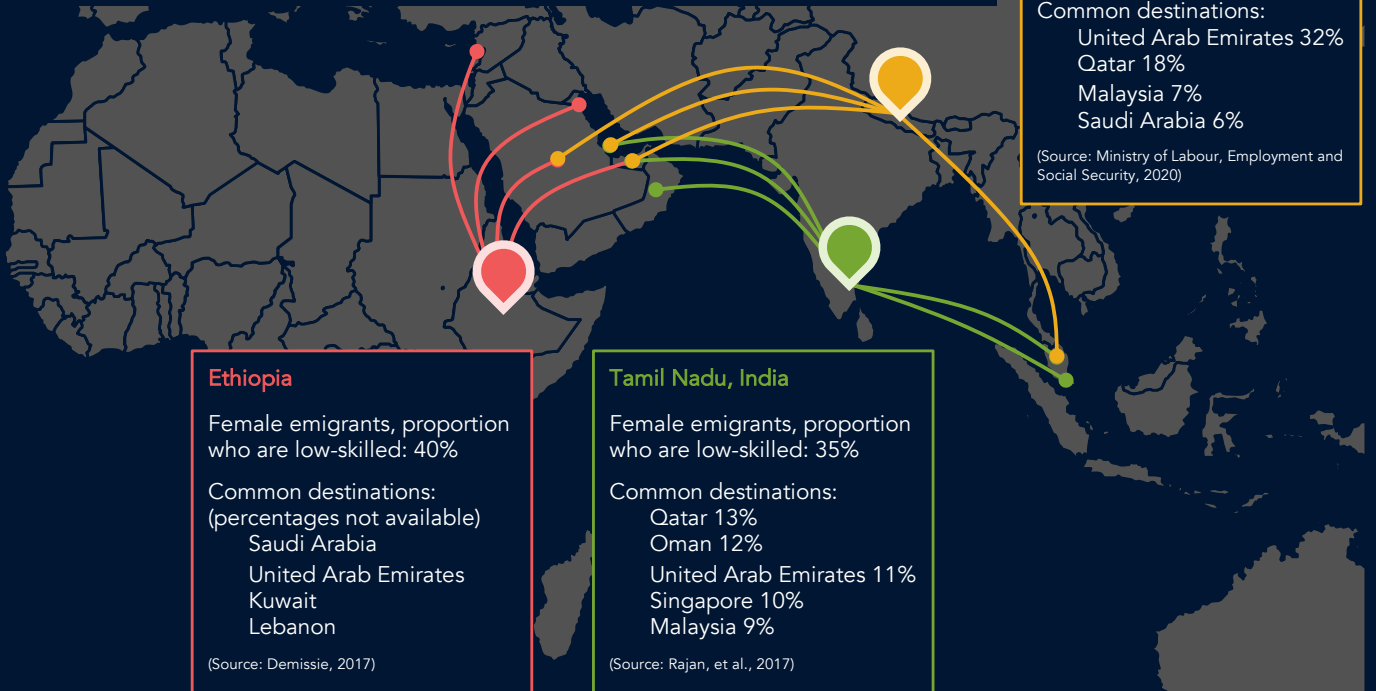
- NGO Worker in Tamil Nadu, India

In addition to employment in the local job market, many of the young women and experts interviewed also had interest in foreign employment. Common corridors for low-skill female migrants include from Ethiopia to Saudi Arabia, from Nepal to the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, and from Tamil Nadu to Qatar, Oman and Singapore. Assisting young women and their families to achieve positive migration outcomes is out of the scope of this assessment; however it should be noted that overseas migration is a growing trend among low-skilled women in the three study locations (see Figure 1) and should be carefully considered alongside other local employment options. If properly managed to ensure the safety of the women, temporary labour migration can offer significant economic and social benefits.

In Ethiopia and Nepal, there is a number of safer migration initiatives to help young women understand the opportunities as well as risks of going abroad for work. These include the Freedom Fund’s hotspot program in Ethiopia, delivered in partnership with the Government of Ethiopia, which works to promote safer migration of young women going to the Middle East for domestic work. In Nepal, Helvetas also runs a Safer Migration Project (SaMi) in cooperation with the Government of Nepal. It provides information, training and legal advice to men and women who are seeking to work overseas, especially in Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Malaysia.

Figure 1: Patterns of female outward migration

Many of the female emigrants from the three study locations end up working overseas in low-skilled jobs, as domestic workers as well as employed in factories and on industrial farms. In many cases cross-border migration can offer a large boost in income, however migrant workers are also at high risk of abuse if the recruitment process and working conditions are not monitored properly.



What are the challenges faced by young women from marginalised backgrounds?

While the assessment in the three locations identified a number of non-traditional occupations that could provide entry-level employment to vulnerable young women, it must be highlighted that it is a competitive environment for any young jobseeker. The youth bulges in the study locations mean that every year, millions of new jobs are needed in the three economies in order to keep young people employed (see Figure 2).

In this highly competitive environment, young women from marginalised backgrounds face further forms of structural discrimination. In our discussions with young women across the study sites, a number of additional barriers were brought to the forefront.

Figure 2: The youth bulge and urgency of job creation

Ethiopia

Youth aged between 15 - 24 make up **36.5 percent** of the working-age population. Each year, over **2.3 million new jobs are needed** to absorb the youth entering into the workforce.

Nepal

Youth aged between 15 - 24 make up **31.3 percent** of the working-age population. Each year, over **500 thousand new jobs are needed** to absorb the youth entering into the workforce.

Tamil Nadu, India

Youth aged between 15 - 24 make up **20.2 percent** of the working-age population. Each year, over **700 thousand new jobs are needed** to absorb the youth entering into the workforce.

Sources: UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019; Census of India, 2011.

A lack of legal documentation is a notable barrier faced by many young women interviewed, particularly in Nepal where, historically, local laws and government processes have been biased against women. In Nepal, 26 percent of the female population does not possess a birth certificate, compared with 18 percent of the male population (Forum for Women, Law and Development, 2018). Among our study participants, young women who grew up without a father in the household or who were born out of wedlock, as well as those from minority caste or ethnicity backgrounds, found it particularly difficult to meet the documentation requirements to qualify for a birth certificate. This, in turn, excluded the young women from accessing government services such as public schools, vocational training and healthcare, as well as being able to open bank accounts and secure formal employment. A similar exclusion exists in India with respect to the Aadhar government identification system, with women from rural communities, marginalised castes and religious backgrounds – or whose parents were migrants lacking formal residency status – disproportionately excluded from obtaining an Aadhar number. The lack of formal identification that the card provides hinders these young women’s ability to complete schooling and compete for employment.

Low educational attainment is another barrier faced by young women from vulnerable groups. Although the educational gap between girls and boys is a well-documented issue in the three hotspots, it must be emphasised that the gap is even wider among low-income households. Among the poorest households in Ethiopia, for every adolescent boy who is out-of-school, there are 1.23 adolescent girls who are out-of-school (UNESCO, 2020). Many of the young women we spoke to were unable to complete lower-secondary

school (grade 8 in Ethiopia and grade 10 in India or Nepal), which is often a common requirement of employers, even for entry-level jobs such as cleaners and retail assistants. Once the young women have dropped out, they find it nearly impossible to re-enrol as a mature age student or to find alternative pathways towards obtaining their school certificate.



“We’re uneducated so what else can we do?”
- Young woman working in a textile mill in Tamil Nadu, India



“Employers in Addis will not consider us for many vacancies because we are poorly educated with low qualifications.”
- Female survivor in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Narrow aspirations for young women and alignment to gender stereotypes present endemic challenges across the study sites. Young women in urban Nepal expressed strong interests in receiving vocational training and becoming economically independent; however, the courses that were most frequently mentioned were tailoring, garment and beauty therapy – traditionally “female” occupations. These sentiments were also echoed by some of the training and employment providers who were struggling to fill vacancies for electricians and plumbers but did not think female candidates would be suitable for what they considered to be “male jobs”.



“My HR [human resource] person, a lady herself, does not like to recruit women as they get married and leave.”
- Local employer in Tamil Nadu

Being married, or planning for marriage, heavily influences the aspirations and types of employment sought by the young women interviewees. In Tamil Nadu, India, married women preferred employment that can fit around their caregiving responsibilities and is located close to their home. To address the practical needs of this group, options such as self-employment and piece-rate work could be explored. Similarly, upskilling opportunities that require less rigid time commitments should be considered, such as on-the-job coaching and skills recognition schemes. Ancillary support with arranging childcare and negotiating flexible working arrangements would also be valuable to help young women access alternative job opportunities while balancing caregiving duties.

In contrast, the unmarried adolescents expressed much greater ambition, with a desire to migrate to the urban areas in search of more rewarding work. Interestingly, many of the parents interviewed also shared these aspirations of their daughters gaining more rewarding work – yet at the same time – they have also made the decision to put their daughters to work in local textile factories. This highlights the mismatch in longer-term parental aspirations with the short-term economic incentive of sending their daughters to work, which in turn disrupts her education and lowers her chance of achieving these longer-term, shared aspirations.

Limited awareness of and access to employability support services was also observed in our discussions with the young women. Many of them are almost solely reliant on family and social networks to inform their employment decisions. Although many government- and donor-funded employability support programs exist in nearby towns, very few young women were aware of these initiatives. At the same time, these initiatives also did not target our study populations for reasons of timing, cost and risk – along with a concern that supporting individuals with multiple disadvantages could not be reconciled with their short duration and narrow measure of performance.

What are the specific challenges faced by survivors?

Employment could form an integral part of a survivor's reintegration journey, but the pace at which they re-enter work would vary. Economic empowerment may help some survivors regain their sense of autonomy and independence, but others may find that the pressure of work exacerbates their anxiety. Their individual needs must be carefully assessed to help them consider and plan a transition to work, with each survivor proceeding at their own pace and with consideration given to the provision of ongoing support once in work.

Underlying vulnerabilities often draw survivors back into exploitation. The root causes for people falling victim to trafficking often remain in place even after they have managed to “exit” one situation of exploitation. Many of the young women described chaotic family situations including abuse at home, family debt and medical costs that compelled them to take up exploitative work, and without resolving these underlying factors many survivors will often be forced back into abusive arrangements. These young women were striving to balance their personal aspirations with the needs of, and tensions with, their families.

The stigma of being a victim and having suffered severe exploitation is another obstacle faced by survivors. Young women who have experienced “bad employers” described the lingering shame of being tricked into exploitation and not able to defend themselves, such as Ethiopian returnees who worked as domestic workers in the Middle East and did not return home successful like other migrants. The returnees also felt that employers in the formal sector were less inclined to recruit survivors due to the perception that - as described by one of the study participants in Ethiopia - “all survivors are mentally unstable.” Due to this, there was a strong notion against training and employment schemes that branded participants as “survivors,” as this would be likely to attract further stigma and discrimination.

What about self-employment?

Across the three study locations, there was strong interest expressed by the young women in self-employment, including running their own micro-enterprises. In part, this may be due to the young women's prior negative experience and desire to escape exploitative work. In addition, there is also a long history of government and NGO programs that have prominently promoted self-employment and microenterprises as one of the main livelihood options for young women from disadvantaged backgrounds. For example, the Nepalese government has made entrepreneurship one of five pillars of the Youth Vision 2025 strategy, and also offers funds to disadvantaged groups through the Youth and Small Entrepreneur Self-Employment Fund, Rural Self Reliance Fund, Economic Rehabilitation Fund and the Women Entrepreneurship Development Fund, to name a few.

While the research team has observed some promising examples of program members becoming successful women entrepreneurs, these have often been the exceptions rather than the norm. On the one hand, the research team encountered inspirational examples of women business owners in all the study locations. In Tamil Nadu, for example, we met with a young woman who, following her exit from working in a textile factory and with the support of a local NGO partner, set up her own tailoring business and then expanded to include hair and beauty to meet the demand of bridal make-up needs during the wedding season. The young woman was keen to grow her business and to become a “good employer” for others. On the other hand, these ventures clearly require external support to advance from “hobbies” to genuine, sustainable forms of employment. Running a business is a difficult undertaking and exposes the entrepreneur to a number of external and unpredictable risks - as illustrated by the dire and sudden impact of covid-19. Failure among new businesses is common, and such setbacks can cause further social and financial shocks to the women entrepreneur, including the risk of being in further debt. Thus, the emphasis on self-employment and entrepreneurship among many of the women’s economic empowerment programs warrants further examination to ensure that they are thorough in their selection of suitable candidates (and business plans) and are able to provide long-term support to help the business reach a sufficient, sustained level of profitability.

Survivors of trafficking may face additional barriers in self-employment. Often, the limited financial means of their families makes entrepreneurship a far riskier endeavour, as survivors will likely be further disadvantaged in accessing capital and having the personal and professional contacts that typically facilitate business deals. Furthermore, while in theory self-employment can offer flexible hours, in reality many early-stage businesses are understaffed and owners are often overworked (ILO, 2015). This added stress can cause further anxiety to survivors and lead to further tensions with friends and family. Finally, survivors may also face discrimination from customers and suppliers, who may see the women as “failed” workers who are less competent and less trustworthy.

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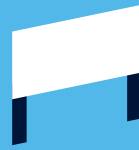
What obstacles do vulnerable young women and survivors face in securing a good job?



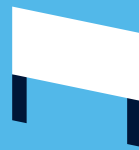
Social norms that lead to girls having lower qualifications, in turn making them less competitive in the labour market.



Cultural practices that limit young women's ability to pursue better training and work opportunities.



Lack of formal identification that hinders access to basic public services (such as schooling) and to qualify for jobs.



Being overlooked by training and employability providers, seen as more "risky" candidates.



Stigma of being a survivor can erode their self-confidence.



Underlying vulnerabilities that disrupt training and draw survivors back into exploitation.



“

I got a job, in Qatar, but I couldn't go because I don't have my citizen certificate... So I came back to work as a dancer.

YOUNG WOMEN IN KATHMANDU, NEPAL

”

“

Employers just need to see how hard we work. When they see that, they will want us.

YOUNG WOMEN IN TAMIL NADU, INDIA

”

What training and employability services are already available?

The assessment identified a wide range of government- and donor-funded training schemes for young people in the three study locations. Some of these schemes were designed as welfare schemes to offer a minimum level of employment and income, while others are providing skills and placement into strategically important industries such as the light manufacturing sector in Ethiopia and the construction sector in Nepal. We made several observations:

While there is a large number of training schemes, they are operated largely in silos and the differing eligibility requirements and application processes can be confusing. In Tamil Nadu, for example, there were at least six government-funded training and employment schemes providing free or subsidised training and employability support – ranging from the national flagship *Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana* program to the services offered by the District Employment Office to match jobseekers with employers. In urban Nepal, there was also an ample number of schemes, from the Prime Minister’s Employment Programme to the donor-funded Skills for Employability Programme. Theoretically, the broad variety of schemes and the customer choice associated with that could drive up the performance of service providers. However, in the case of Nepal, while the assessment identified at least four departments in separate government ministries each designing, commissioning, and/or delivering their own training and employability support schemes, the lack of coordination between them leads to confusion and thereby places a heavy burden on target beneficiaries and non-specialist NGOs that work to support them. In addition, the duplication of services also means a less efficient use of resources which could otherwise be put towards reaching more and harder-to-reach candidates.

Demand for places in training and employment schemes far outstrips supply, and there are limited incentives for providers to engage with “risky” applicants. Many of the schemes reviewed did not have provisions for, and service providers are not incentivised to consider, riskier applicants from vulnerable groups – even though these are the individuals who could benefit most from these schemes. For example, in Namakkal district in Tamil Nadu, 70,000 individuals were registered with the District Employment Office, with many of them having completed tertiary education. As such, it is highly unlikely that a young female candidate who has not completed secondary education will be matched with any job vacancies.

The training curriculums were heavily weighted toward “hard” skills and not fully responsive to employers’ and trainees’ needs. Across all three locations, employers spoke about the challenges of identifying candidates who possess soft skills, such as having a strong work ethic and working well in teams. Some employers in the retail and hospitality sectors even spoke about preferring candidates with soft skills over those with formal qualifications. Yet, soft skills were rarely the focus of training curriculums or even mentioned by the local providers. On the whole, the training providers reviewed tended to offer a formulaic, narrow approach to “training” that did not cater well to the needs of employers or candidates.

With a few exceptions, many of the programs seem narrowly focused on “training” rather than “employment.” For the majority of the training schemes, success was measured by the number of people obtaining a completion certificate and not by the number of graduates securing relevant employment. In Ethiopia, for example, the regional bureaus that are responsible for implementing government employment

programs play a minimal role in connecting training graduates with job opportunities, and interviewees mentioned that this happens mostly through “word of mouth.” Extending from this, there is also little tracking of graduate outcomes and there is no data available on how many of them have secured wage employment or started their own enterprises. Without these, it is difficult to assess if these schemes are effective and how they can be more responsive to industry demands.

What additional services or alternative models are needed?

An intermediary “navigator” service to help guide young women towards the most suitable training and employability programs would be useful in the medium term, especially given the broad range of options that were identified across the three study locations. This would help program participants take advantage of external programs with more options to suit their individual circumstances and aspirations, and also reduce the need for local anti-trafficking NGOs to deliver their own training, a function that often lies outside of their core expertise. A navigator service could also provide candidates with accurate information to consider a wider range of training and employability programs in distant towns as well as across district and state boundaries, which can help reduce the risk of misinformed and unsafe migration. Over the longer term, the ideal situation would be for government departments and donor agencies to increase coordination between their training investments so that application processes are more streamlined and accessible to young women at risk of trafficking, and that they ultimately increase the efficiency of the training and employability marketplace.

More flexible schemes such as on-the-job training, coaching and mentorship. This refers to learning that is demand-led (i.e. defined by the employer) and delivered at the workplace. On-the-job training offers distinct advantages over traditional training programs. It can be delivered more flexibly to suit the pace of the learner and enable them to earn income while acquiring new skills and qualifications. Both of these advantages make on-the-job training much more aligned with the needs of at-risk young women and survivors. Furthermore, on-the-job training can be a more effective mode of delivery compared with what is offered in training centres, as it naturally focuses on skills that are most relevant to the role and practised through real-life rather than hypothetical scenarios, which is especially important for acquiring soft skills such as time management, working under pressure and behaviours for interacting with customers and clients. While on-the-job training, despite its many advantages, does not seem to be common in the three markets assessed in this study, it is an important feature of livelihood programs that should be further explored and strengthened.

Incentives to training and employability providers to focus on employment outcomes rather than training services. While youth-focused training programs were commonly found across the three study locations, there were only a handful of service providers that were contracted based on employment outcomes. These included the Sister Yemisrach Institute in Ethiopia, the Vocational and Skills Development Training Academy in Nepal and the Al-Arafath Educational & Charitable Trust in Tami Nadu, India. Rather than being paid directly for activities such as the provision of training, or outputs such as the number of graduates, payments to these providers were contingent on graduates being successfully placed in and remaining in their new jobs. An outcomes-based payment model – if priced carefully and managed well – has the potential to incentivise a more personalised, flexible scheme that maximises outcomes through responding to the

individual needs of young women and survivors. Crucial features of an outcomes-based model include ancillary support to the young candidates and close monitoring of the workplace in order to prevent abuse of the model as well as manipulation of outcomes and financial rewards.

Incentives to expand inclusion of young women from marginalised backgrounds. The service providers who spoke with the research team would often say that they want to target underrepresented groups, but in practice their marketing activities were limited primarily to urban areas and conformed to gender stereotypes. For example, in Nepal we found that young women are targeted mostly for courses to become tailors or beauticians, while courses offering more lucrative skills such as electronic repair, machine operation and construction had few or no female trainees. To ensure meaningful inclusion of young women from marginalised backgrounds, the use of explicit quotas and performance incentives should be considered, for example by offering a higher payment to providers that are able: to successfully recruit young women and people from underrepresented groups; actively support them to complete the training, and; take steps to ensure they can remain in relevant employment afterwards.

Approaches that extend beyond seeding female-led enterprises to helping them become profitable businesses. As described earlier in this report, supporting young women into self-employment is a popular intervention in all the study locations. However, most programs are focused on seeding early stage (often micro-) enterprises and, in comparison, there is scant support available to help women scale and make their businesses profitable and sustainable. The female entrepreneurs interviewed in the study spoke about the difficulties they face in sustaining a livelihood for themselves and their families. These ventures need support in the form of enterprise development including product marketing and financial management, as well as access to further financing beyond the seed capital offered by NGOs and microfinance institutions. The World Bank has called this a “missing middle trap” for women entrepreneurs who have outgrown development-oriented financing but are unable to access commercial banking services, as they are less likely to have the necessary formal documentations and collaterals (Alibhai, et al., 2019). For women from disadvantaged backgrounds, these barriers can become insurmountable and widen historical disparities. This gap could be addressed through working with social investors to create funds from which the women entrepreneurs can access loans (and on-going business support).

What cross-sector partnerships should be formed or scaled?

Partner with local businesses to transform the rigid norms that limit the types of work that young women pursue. Across the three study locations, gender norms dictate many aspects of people’s lives, and this naturally extends to the type of work to which women and girls have exposure, aspire and negotiate access. One powerful way to transform gender norms is to showcase more diverse female role models, and this is most effective when done through partnership with real employers. In Nepal, for example, the *Skills for Employment Programme* brings together training providers, employers and government departments to generate youth employment. One part of the initiative aims to support young women in pursuing non-traditional careers, such as becoming a JCB machine operator. As part of this, trainees have access to a women-only hostel and, on completion, earnings can be as high as NPR 50,000 (about USD 430) per month. Aside from directly providing employment to women, an under-represented group in the construction industry, media coverage generated by the Programme also helps challenge gender norms and create

relatable role models for the next generation of female workers. Similar transformative programs have also been found in India and Ethiopia (see Figure 3). Creative cross-sector partnerships are essential to help broaden aspirations and increase demand by women and girls for more diverse and rewarding livelihood opportunities.

Figure 3: Examples of training and employment programs to shift norms around women’s work



Directly involve employers in shaping curriculums and implementing on-the-job training schemes. The general view of employers in our discussions was that training currently delivered by local institutions did not adequately prepare individuals for the practical world of work, and in response they have often invested their own resources into company- or job-specific training curriculums. To address this gap, there needs to be closer and more frequent dialogue between training providers and local employers to ensure that vocational curriculums are driven by market demands (both current and future) and to better harmonise classroom- and workplace-based learning and qualification. Collaboration will require more deliberate coordination efforts from both sides, but this will likely result in quicker and more effective transitions from training to sustained employment. It may require the training providers to be paid on the basis of sustained employment outcomes to incentivise their collaboration.

Consider a “day release” model to address the needs of vulnerable young women and survivors. This is an agreement between the employer and employee under which workers are given time off work to access other services and training. A case study on Regenesys (featured on p.26) illustrates how such a model could work for survivors, where employees are supported through a professionally-developed curriculum – including trauma-informed mental health, life skills and career support – that accompanies skills training with the aim of supporting survivors to stay and thrive in their work over the longer term.

Focus on small- and medium-sized employers, which are typically more suited to the needs of young women and survivors. Studies around the world have found smaller firms to be more willing to hire, and more supportive of workers from disadvantaged backgrounds compared to larger businesses (ILO, 2019; Kok, et al., 2011). Our discussions with local employers in the three study locations concur with these observations.

Small- and medium-sized employers tend to be more flexible in terms of management support and working-time arrangements in comparison with larger corporations, which tend to have more rigid structures and rules. This degree of flexibility is even more crucial for young women and survivors who may be balancing work alongside other caregiving duties, educational opportunities and healthcare needs. Although it may take more effort to broker job placements with individual small- and medium-sized employers, they are likely to offer a more conducive environment for young women and survivors to gain new skills and thrive in the longer-term. It is also the case that the vast majority of employment (probably over 90 percent) in nearly every labour market is with small and medium-sized businesses.

Continue to work with existing “exploitative” sectors to identify and reward positive behaviours. Over the longer-term, the aim of this assessment is to support young women and survivors who may be working in less-than-ideal conditions to transition into non-traditional livelihood options that offer better terms of work. In the meantime, however, existing forms of livelihood – such as textile factories in Tamil Nadu and adult entertainment venues in Kathmandu – will continue to dominate and subject young female workers to exploitative conditions. Local communities and NGOs must continue to monitor and call out exploitative practices in existing industries and work with governments (especially labour departments) to reward conscientious employers and weed out abusive ones. Efforts could include awards schemes and kitemarks that help to identify and draw attention to positive behaviours and change existing norms around gender roles and labour practices. It may require financial incentives to “good” employers and would benefit from being employer-led.

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Case study 2: A survivor-centred social business in the Philippines

Regenesys BPO (regenesysbpo.com) is a Philippines-based business process outsourcing (BPO) company that is committed to equitable employment of survivors and people who are at high risk of human trafficking and violence. Through mentorship, skills training and a holistic environment of support services, Regenesys aims to help employees break the cycle of poverty and exploitation.

One of the company's main services is the editing of digital media for a host of international clients, with a commitment to high-quality deliverables in short turnaround times. In turn, the business relies on skilled employees who have capacity to work in a competitive environment. To ensure that its staff has the technical and soft skills for doing this work, Regenesys operates as a hybrid between a traditional BPO and a non-profit organisation, with a deliberate focus on hiring and upskilling vulnerable individuals and survivors of trafficking and abuse.

The Regenesys team is inclusive of individuals from all different backgrounds, including survivors of trafficking and abuse as well as with young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds. New candidates are typically referred from local NGOs as well as by existing staff themselves. Although the team does not consist solely of survivors, almost one-third of the staff have reported symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder when they first joined the company.

On selection, candidates are offered five weeks of technical training followed by a seven-week work placement, with a gradual increase in work responsibilities until they are comfortable working to the company standard of quality for media editing. This is essential as new joiners generally have limited education and skills that are relevant to Regenesys' services, and also little exposure to a competitive work environment. Technical training is complemented by courses on general workplace skills and behaviours.

Parallel to skills training, the support team offers five curriculums of trauma-informed mental health, life skills and career support. These include sessions on wellbeing, healthy relationships, career planning and financial literacy.

Drawing on the past seven years of delivering a financially sustainable, socially impactful model of employment, Regenesys highlights the following as key lessons learned:

- Success in employment among survivors and at-risk individuals can be achieved only by holistically-designed workplaces that marry skill improvement with trauma-informed support.
- Survivors and at-risk individuals are most likely to thrive when working alongside peers who share their lived experiences and also act as relatable role models to inspire personal and professional growth.
- Delivering social impact, by itself, is not a sufficient "selling point" for attracting and retaining clients. The services provided also need to be competitive in terms of price and quality, and thus the mission of employing survivors needs to be carefully balanced with cultivating a high-performing workforce.



Conclusion and recommendations

A “good job” – as described by the young women in our study – is not only about earning a wage and being financially independent, but it also offers dignity to the individual and prospects for advancement. Even when some of the female participants experienced exploitative employers or worked in unsafe conditions, they were undeterred by their past and remained steadfast in their determination to secure better livelihoods and raise the quality of life for themselves and their families. As firmly stated by one of the study participants:



“Employers just need to see how hard we work.
When they see that, they will want us.”
- Young women in Tamil Nadu, India

This study focused on identifying non-traditional livelihood options, beyond industries such as tailoring, jewellery making and beauty that young women are often steered into. Through in-country interviews, we found that employers in the hospitality, tourism, retail, healthcare and construction industries were keen to attract young workers for entry-level roles. Specifically in the three study locations, these industries offer a growing number of job opportunities and female workers have generally been underrepresented (ILO, 2021). While these jobs exist, they were not necessarily accessible to young women and survivors due to a range of supply- and demand-side obstacles, including:

- **Social norms that lead to girls having lower qualifications, which in turn make them less competitive in the labour market.** Typical patterns include disrupted schooling, early school drop-out, early marriage and a greater burden of domestic and caregiving responsibilities than that of boys.
- **Cultural practices and values that limit young women’s access to opportunities.** For example, these can discourage women from working in mixed-gender workplaces or prevent them from commuting to urban centres to access better training and job opportunities.
- **Lack of formal documentation to access preventative services and job opportunities.** Impediments can begin early in life, including missing out on public healthcare, nutrition and education schemes. Later in life, it can form concrete barriers in terms of qualifying for training and job opportunities.
- **Being overlooked by training and employability providers.** Although most providers expressed interest in enrolling more young women from marginalised communities, there are very little incentives to do so. Few providers take practical measures to reach out to them and to develop programs tailored to their needs.
- **Disconnect between training and employment.** Once they leave training programs, graduates rarely receive support in securing and remaining in relevant employment. The training itself may be perceived by employers to be of low value. This can be especially challenging for young women from vulnerable backgrounds, who often have less access to non-traditional role models and alternative work opportunities.
- **For survivors, stigma can erode their self-confidence.** Our study found a common belief among the survivors that employers are less inclined to hire them, despite that this concern was not mentioned by

the employers interviewed. Young women had strong views against training and employability schemes that branded participants as “survivors.”

Finally, in our interviews, there was a high level of interest, expressed by both the young women and local community organisations, in supporting young women with self-employment opportunities. While we learned of promising examples of micro-enterprises that grew into successful businesses, it was also apparent that these were usually exceptions rather than the norm. The interest in supporting self-employment and entrepreneurship programs for young women should certainly continue, but we need to ensure that such programs are capable of thoroughly vetting and selecting suitable candidates who are able to navigate the risks and rewards of entrepreneurship. Furthermore, these programs should be better resourced to provide participants with longer-term support – such as product marketing and access to commercial credit – to enable the businesses to reach sustainability over time.

Recommendations for anti-trafficking organisations

1. **Work to transform the gendered views and expectations held by the wider community that can limit what girls believe they can do in their lives, as well as what they choose to pursue later on as young women.** Programs involving girls and young women, their families and surrounding communities could help introduce role models – particularly working women and employers in non-traditional occupations – as a way of demonstrating what is possible and thereby broadening expectations of what a young woman can achieve.
2. **Continue to address underlying vulnerabilities, especially in securing identification documents and access to critical government services such as basic education and healthcare.** Activities could include mobilising communities to highlight policy and implementation gaps, as well as the logistics of helping households and individuals obtain legal entitlements. Understand what the practical barriers are and look for pragmatic solutions.
3. **Continue to draw attention to and help reform existing industries where a large number of young women end up in exploitative employment.** This includes the domestic work sector in Ethiopia, adult entertainment venues in Nepal, and textile factories in Tamil Nadu. Responsible employers do exist in all these sectors and locations, and exemplary peers could be promoted and given public credit to encourage other firms to offer better terms of work. Consider partnering with responsible employers and supporting them to grow as businesses.
4. **Work with, rather than duplicate, the services of local training and employability providers.** Many of the anti-trafficking organisations have set up their own training and livelihood program for survivors. This is often not the most efficient use of resources, as these organisations are usually social work and legal experts, not employability specialists. As such, more effort by anti-trafficking organisations could be invested into connecting with local training and employability providers and referring program participants to external schemes, and then monitoring and reporting on their progress. The use of quotas and scholarships to increase access by young women from marginalised backgrounds should be explored.

Recommendations for training and employability providers

5. **Undertake more deliberate outreach to marginalised populations, especially by leveraging existing networks of community organisations that can facilitate access to a more diverse pool of applicants.** Consider more modular course structures that give flexibility for participants to learn alongside other work and caregiving responsibilities, as well as ancillary support for candidates who may need extra assistance such as applying for state benefits, finding affordable accommodation and arranging childcare. Track and report on the success of participants from marginalised backgrounds.
6. **Involve local employers in formulating and delivering the program, which should include greater emphasis on soft skills and in-work training.** Ensure that training is demand-led, directly addressing the needs of employers. Move training from the classroom and into the workplace. Create greater overlap between training and employment, including post-placement support to help graduates remain and thrive in their new role. Measure success in terms of job placements and sustained employment.
7. **Be more selective with supporting young women into self-employment, focus on those who are most prepared for the risks and rewards of entrepreneurship rather than treating this as the default option.** For those supported to become entrepreneurs, expand support to later stages and help them grow into sustainable businesses – including facilitating access to commercial credit.

Recommendations for local governments and private funders

8. **Governments should do more to address the underlying vulnerabilities that lead to human trafficking.** They should step-up monitoring, including through partnerships between local government offices and community groups, to ensure that protective policies are actually reaching the intended beneficiaries. Government services such as free education and healthcare, as well as legal mechanisms such as identity documents and land titles, are fundamental to preventing vulnerability and exploitation.
9. **Given the government's central role in shaping the behaviour of employers and reforming industries with high rates of exploitation, they should more actively guide businesses towards better practices through incentives for model employers as well as penalties for those violating the law.** Ministries responsible for labour rights and skills development could better align their budgets and activities to focus on sectors and employers that offer better working conditions and prospects for marginalised workers. At the same time, work to jointly identify and penalise exploitative employers, including fines for non-compliance as well as exclusion from state-linked training and employability schemes.
10. **Both public-sector commissioners and donors should consider more complementary delivery of training and employability programs.** This could include joint marketing efforts and application processes, as well as ancillary services such as helping with applying for government allowances, finding part-time work and securing preferred accommodation such as female-only dormitories. Consider developing and implementing a shared performance management system for all programs, with comparable tracking and reporting of activities, to increase transparency and accountability. This could also include designing and commissioning programs in partnerships so that instead of duplicating, training and employability programs complement each other and provide progression route from one to the other.

11. **As an interim solution to recommendation #10, consider funding a “navigator” service that could help applicants explore the wide range of training and employability programs and find the best option for them.** The navigator could also act as an intermediary between program providers and prospective candidates. This would be especially helpful for young women from marginalised backgrounds, who typically have less time and access to information to prepare their applications. The navigator could also be extended to promote urban opportunities (as well as provide transport and relocation support) to young women in rural areas who have fewer options available locally.
12. **Move towards outcome-based contracting to boost the impact of public and private funding.** This model – if priced carefully and then managed well – has the potential to incentivise a more personalised, flexible scheme that maximises outcomes through effectively responding to individual needs of young women and survivors. This recommendation applies to both government service commissioners and private donors, and one example of an outcome-based model that brings together private investors and local government is the *Finance for Jobs* development impact bond in Palestine (World Bank, 2019). Socially-motivated private investors can help address the cashflow needs of these schemes, but the model must emphasise real, meaningful outcomes – to create effective, concrete pathways for for each young woman to fulfil her aspirations.

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