

MEASURING SYSTEMS CHANGE

Examples from the movement against modern slavery

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Front cover image: The final residential for the Freedom Rising cohort in Brazil in 2024. © *Flora Negri/The Freedom Fund*

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INTRODUCTION

Modern slavery is a complex and deeply entrenched issue, involving multiple stakeholders with competing interests and rooted in social norms that tolerate extreme forms of inequality.¹ Eliminating modern slavery requires far more than targeting individual perpetrators or providing immediate support to survivors. Instead, a shift is required across the wider economic, social and political structures that continue to allow vulnerable people to fall prey to exploitation, perpetrators to extract gains and bystanders to tolerate such gross violations of human rights. To end modern slavery, there is a need to focus on significantly altering the system that perpetuates abuse.

The Freedom Fund, founded in 2014, is a global fund with the sole aim of helping end modern slavery. We are committed to taking a systems change approach to our work and, through our investments and support, we aim to shift power so that frontline organisations and communities can shape and drive the transformative change required to bring modern slavery to an end. For an overview of our approach to systems change, which also draws on learning from impactful systems change interventions undertaken by other social movements, see [*Systems change in practice: Pathways towards eradicating modern slavery*](#).

As an organisation committed to evidence-based programming, the Freedom Fund recognises that a critical element of successful systems change is effective, continuous measurement of the outcomes and impact of our interventions throughout the project cycle. This enables us to evaluate whether the interventions are having the intended effect on specific parts of the system and allows us to adjust our approaches where required. However, there are also substantive challenges associated with the measurement of systems change. Often, interventions are complex and multifaceted and exist in real-world settings, making it difficult to identify exactly which effects are triggered by our interventions and not by external factors.

This report explores the challenges of measuring systems change interventions and programming and suggests possible approaches for addressing and resolving them. Rather than a definitive guide to measuring systems change in the anti-slavery movement, we intend for it to provide a starting point for anti-slavery actors to think through the challenges of assessing the longer-term effects of anti-slavery work. The report concludes with a summary of suggested approaches for measuring programmatic interventions that are commonly used by the anti-slavery movement but are particularly difficult to measure, such as advocacy and strategic litigation.

UNDERSTANDING SYSTEMS CHANGE

Within this report, the term “systems change” is used to describe “an intentional process designed to alter the status quo by shifting the function or structure of an identified system.”² How this can be achieved in practice, though, is widely debated. A seminal report by Kania and colleagues calls on social change actors to look beyond explicit outcomes, such as policies, practices and resources, and also to consider transforming relationships between the actors in the system and challenging power structures that have defined, influenced and shaped the present system.³

For instance, specific to the anti-slavery sector, Vexler has noted that systems change can be understood as addressing root causes, adapting to the complexity of systems or supporting systems entrepreneurship and systems entrepreneurs.⁴ The latter are actors who take the initiative to promote systems change by facilitating the necessary collaborations, creating momentum, cultivating shared understandings within coalitions of anti-slavery actors and serving as bridges to marginalised communities.⁵

While approaches to systems change may vary, they share fundamental characteristics. Each recognises that actors within a system are interdependent, with interactions that can either reinforce or counteract one another. At any given moment, different parts of the system may move closer to or further from the overarching goal, requiring a flexible, adaptive approach that avoids assuming a linear cause-and-effect path.

Building on these conceptualisations, as well drawing on our own experiences of driving systems change, the Freedom Fund has created a typology of systems change interventions which captures our vision for a systems change approach to eliminate modern slavery. The typology covers interventions that address root causes of modern slavery, strengthen policy frameworks and build the capacity of key stakeholders to sustain progress in the longer term. While the range of interventions within the typology is relevant for a cross spectrum of anti-slavery actors, the typology particularly centres the role of civil society actors, especially organisations and leaders in communities affected by modern slavery. For details of our typology of interventions, see [*Systems change in practice: Pathways towards eradicating modern slavery*](#).

Applying a systems change perspective to anti-slavery programming enhances understanding of what drives meaningful and sustainable progress. Consequently, the way evaluators measure change must also capture this complexity. This report introduces a variety of methods to evaluate the outcomes and impact of systems change efforts, reflecting the interventions outlined in our typology. Our aim is to offer practical insights that help anti-slavery actors improve their measurement practices and build a more robust evidence base.


METHODOLOGY

This report was developed concurrently with our accompanying report, *[Systems change in practice: Pathways towards eradicating modern slavery](#)*, which outlines a typology for initiating systems change in the anti-slavery movement. A qualitative approach was used, combining in-depth secondary data review with complementary key informant interviews to explore lessons learned from the anti-slavery movement and other impactful social movements.

A combination of peer-reviewed and grey literature was identified through keyword searches on a variety of databases (including Science Direct, JSTOR, Google Scholar and PubMed) and analysed with the following questions in mind:

- What is meant by “systems change” in the context of modern slavery?
- What are the challenges of measuring systems change? How might these be overcome?
- What programmatic interventions are used by the anti-slavery movement to successfully bring about/contribute to systems change?
- What methods or approaches have been successfully used by the anti-slavery movement or other impactful social movements to measure systems change more generally or programmatic interventions suited to supporting systems change?

The secondary data were complemented by 11 key informant interviews, involving eight Freedom Fund staff members and three experts from the public health and feminist movement sectors. These aimed to gain a more granular understanding of systems change approaches, including what works and what does not, with a focus on measuring systems change. Information from the secondary data and key informant interviews was synthesised into case studies. These reflect learning from the Freedom Fund’s efforts to measure sustainable system change that can be used by the anti-slavery movement.



Still from a TV clip aired as part of a norms and behaviour change campaign, launched by Girl Effect and the Freedom Fund in Ethiopia, which challenged harmful norms that enable child domestic worker exploitation and aimed to shift employer attitudes. The campaign outcomes were measured through a comprehensive baseline and endline evaluation.

DISTINCT CHALLENGES OF MEASURING PROGRESS TOWARDS SYSTEMS CHANGE

Systems change is uniquely hard to measure since systems are “living” and are thus constantly changing.⁶ The challenge facing evaluators is how to map and measure these complex changes, including subjective shifts in power that lie at the heart of successful systems transformation. Moreover, change is typically produced through various interrelated interventions, often over an extended period and via non-linear, uncertain pathways. It can therefore be difficult to establish causality between a specific outcome and a specific intervention or set of interventions.⁷ It can also be particularly challenging to map and measure shifts in power within a system, as power is relational and exercised by different stakeholders to often extremely differing degrees. Since systems impact multiple stakeholders, it is often challenging to decide whose perspective matters the most when evaluating impact and to access a broad enough range of stakeholders, especially those who are not direct partners and/or are reluctant to participate in the evaluation. Nevertheless, the latter’s viewpoints are required as they can help to shed light on aspects of the system that may be hidden from view, including an intervention’s unintended consequences.

Basic linear evaluation methods and tools are therefore ill-suited to understanding the complexities of systems change. Accordingly, specific tools or approaches are needed that can help evaluators make sense of and evaluate the different aspects of complex systems change. Within this report, we highlight some of the tools and approaches that have been developed for measuring either the overall impact of systems change or more complex programmatic interventions that contribute to systems change, such as advocacy and strategic litigation. We do not present an exhaustive list of methods, but instead present possible approaches to be considered when measuring systems change in the anti-slavery movement.



FEATURES OF SUCCESSFUL SYSTEMS CHANGE MEASUREMENT

During our review of literature, several key features of successful systems change measurement emerged:

- **Designing interventions with a systems change approach in mind.** From the onset, there should be a clear, shared understanding of what the theory of change is, particularly because it is much harder to decide halfway through a project to measure the effects of interventions on related systems. By developing a clear theory of change at the project design phase, evaluators can concurrently design an accompanying measurement framework that draws on methods that are suited to measuring systems change and, because systems are not static, can be adapted to reflect any changes in intervention(s).⁸
- **Clearly articulating what change is intended at the start of the intervention.** This should be clearly outlined in the theory of change to help in setting clear output, outcome and impact indicators linked to the immediate and longer-term desired change. It is important to differentiate between shorter-term outcomes and more complex outcomes or impacts that might more profoundly affect systems dynamics.⁹ “Helicopter questions” (those that explore how systems are changing and why) and “intervention questions” (those that explore the impact of specific interventions) can support the development of clearly articulated indicators.¹⁰ USAID’s four evaluation questions for systems change suggest adding an additional domain around scalability, questioning the extent to which interventions can be scaled up or can work elsewhere.¹¹
- **Setting a realistic time horizon and budget.** It typically takes time to see evidence of systems change.¹² Project designers should therefore ensure that timeframes for measuring change are extensive and include regular monitoring and interim evaluations to capture early signs of intended or unintended change or poor performance that need to be addressed. Longer, more complex measurement approaches should be accounted for when costing an intervention.
- **Being mindful of unintended outcomes and consequences.** The complexity of systems means that interventions do not always have the desired effect.¹³ It can be helpful to sensitise staff on the possibility of unintended outcomes due to the complexity of systems change and reframe these as learning opportunities so that they are openly discussed rather than hidden. The likelihood of capturing unintended outcomes or impact can be increased by consulting with stakeholders who are external to the project/intervention, as they may have different vantage points. Where unintended outcomes occur, it is important to clearly document learning so that it can be built into future interventions.
- **Using multiple methods for assessing and measuring change.** The complexity of systems means that systems change measurement often requires a mixed methods approach, typically with a strong focus on qualitative tools to capture the change narrative.¹⁴ This means that monitoring and evaluation teams need to have a broad array of technical expertise so that various and distinct elements of systems change can be measured.
- **Using a multi-stakeholder lens, coupled with an intersectional lens.** Since systems change relies on the work of multiple, interlinked actors who push for different aspects of change, measurement approaches should engage a range of different actors operating within the targeted system, ideally through participatory approaches.¹⁵ The use of an intersectional lens is also advisable to capture the varying impacts of system change interventions on different individuals or communities within the targeted population. For example, when consulting survivors, it is important not to treat them as a homogenous group but instead consult a cross section to understand the extent to which different sub-groups have witnessed or experienced the intended systems change.

APPROACHES FOR MEASURING SYSTEMS CHANGE

Approaches to systems change measurement vary, from those designed specifically to capture systems change to established evaluation methods that can also be used to measure aspects of systems change. A variety of frameworks or tools have been suggested for measuring systems change that consider all or many of the success factors for systems change measurement, as listed above. These include guidance documents on how to evaluate systems change, as well as specific tools for planning and implementing systems change evaluation.¹⁶ The latter range from simple tools for supporting the design of systems change evaluation, such as the [“Tamarack Institute’s Systems Change Evaluation Canvas,”](#)¹⁷ to more complex toolkits that guide the evaluator through the process of measuring varying impacts and suggest appropriate data collection methods. Examples include, but are not limited to, Learning for Action’s systems change evaluation toolkit, [“A Practical Guide to Evaluating Systems Change in a Human Services System Context,”](#)¹⁸ Feed the Future’s [“Practitioners’ Guidance to Assessing Systems Change,”](#)¹⁹ and Posthumus and colleagues’ guide, [“A Pragmatic Approach to Assessing System Change.”](#)²⁰ Finally, suggestions have been made for overarching questions that should guide the evaluation process. An example of this is the [“OECD/DAC Network Revised Evaluation Criteria: Definitions and Principles for Use,”](#)²¹ which incorporates systems thinking and has been adapted and successfully used to measure systems change in a variety of contexts.²²





Fishing industry, Thailand. The Freedom Fund commissioned an evaluation of an ethical recruitment policy introduced by a global seafood company based in Thailand (see case study 5). ©Jittrapon Kaicome/
The Freedom Fund

Methods well-suited to measuring systems change

Alongside approaches designed specifically to measure systems change, evaluators can also measure systems change using methods that are well-suited to evaluating outcomes and impact. Table 1 presents a selection of such methods, including when to use each. Although multiple factors influence the choice of method, a key consideration is whether one is trying to test a predetermined hypothesis or to examine, more generally, what change has occurred as a result of specific interventions.

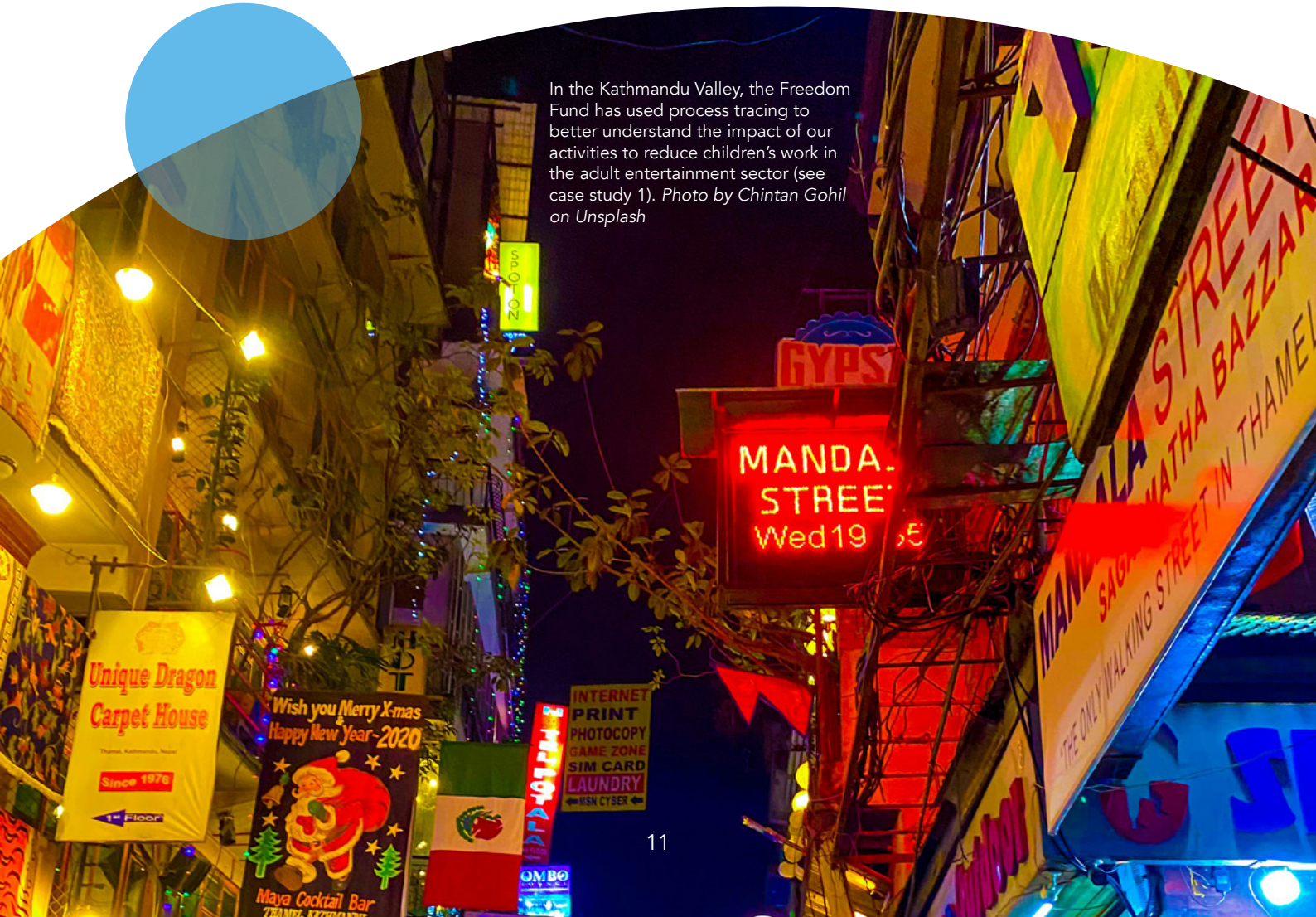
It is worth noting that the literature reviewed for this report predominantly emphasised the use of qualitative tools to measure systems change. This is not to imply that quantitative tools cannot play an important role in systems change measurement. However, qualitative tools are particularly effective at allowing narratives of change to be captured and analysed and associations between different interventions and outcomes to be identified.

Table 1: Selection of methods suited to measuring systems change or systems change programmatic interventions

Method	Link(s) to further information
<p>Outcome harvesting is a process through which evidence of change is collected (harvested). Evaluators then work backwards to determine how and if an intervention has contributed to these changes. Outcome harvesting is particularly helpful for monitoring and evaluating longer-term complex projects where interventions do not have simple, clear objectives. It is also well-suited to collecting information on unintended outcomes that often occur as part of complex systems change interventions since it measures change more broadly rather than measuring the extent to which pre-agreed outcomes have been achieved.</p>	<p>For a detailed explanation of the method, see Ricardo, "Outcome Harvesting: Principles, Steps, and Evaluation Applications."²³ For information on the application of outcome harvesting and a summary of further resources, see Better Evaluation's webpage on "Outcome Harvesting".²⁴</p>
<p>Most significant change (MSC) "is a form of participatory monitoring and evaluation. It involves the collection and selection of stories of change, produced by program or project stakeholders."²⁵ The method collects stories of change according to a number of agreed domains and uses a participatory and collaborative approach to decide which stories are most significant within each domain. MSC is a helpful approach when it is not clear what change interventions are likely to trigger, meaning change cannot be measured against pre-agreed outcome or impact indicators.</p>	<p>For a detailed overview of the MSC method, see Davies and Dart, "The Most Significant Change (MSC) Technique: A Guide to Its Use."²⁶ Intrac provides a helpful summary of MSC: "Most Significant Change"²⁷.</p>
<p>General elimination methodology aims to improve understanding of cause and/or effect of specific outcomes. It is a systematic approach that helps to identify possible causes for change and the conditions needed for these causes so that specific explanations of cause or effect for an outcome can be ruled out. Evidence is gathered to eliminate alternate ideas about the cause(s) of an outcome until the most convincing, evidence-based explanation(s) are left.²⁸</p>	<p>For more information and further resources see Taso's source document on "General Elimination Methodology".²⁹</p>

Method	Link(s) to further information
<p>The Bellwether method was designed by the Harvard Family Research Project specifically to measure the effectiveness of message communication in policy advocacy. It uses structured interviews with “bellwethers” – these are influential people in the public and private sectors whose positions require them to be politically informed and track a range of political subjects. The interviews aim to assess how decision makers and other influential actors are thinking about or discussing a talking point or policy and their likelihood of acting on it.³⁰</p>	<p>See Coffman and Reed, “Unique Methods in Advocacy Evaluation.”³¹</p>
<p>Process tracing is a “qualitative analysis methodology. The main purpose of process tracing is to establish whether, and how, a potential cause or causes influenced a specified change or set of changes. This is done by applying formal tests to examine the strength of evidence linking potential causes to the changes. Process tracing also involves testing alternative ideas about how change might have come about.”³² Process tracing uses four causal “tests” to assess the causal inference. When measuring systems change interventions, process tracing can help evaluators to establish whether results align with the intervention’s/project’s theory of change.</p>	<p>See Derek Beach and Rasmus Brun Pedersen’s book, “Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines.”³³ For a summary of process tracing, see, Collier, “Understanding Process Tracing”.³⁴</p>
<p>Narrative assessment is an approach that can be used for evaluating advocacy. It focuses on gathering advocates’ stories about their work, emphasising their experiences, decision-making processes and how they addressed opportunities and challenges. A narrative assessment facilitator co-constructs stories with advocates. Together, “the causal links between advocacy and outcomes are explored and substantiated to develop plausible accounts of contributions to change. This way of working does justice to the dynamics of advocacy within specific contexts, it tries to bring out and assess the plausibility of claims made in, for example, outcome harvesting.”³⁵ Unlike outcome harvesting, narrative assessment does not use outcomes as a starting point but explores the advocacy context more broadly, focusing on opportunities, challenges and barriers, and the extent to which these have been addressed.</p>	<p>See HIVOS and Wageningen University, “Narrative Assessment”.³⁶</p>
<p>Social network analysis (SNA) is a method used to identify, visualise and analyse social networks and interactions between different individuals, organisations and groups. It enables researchers to understand the underlying structure of a social network, identify the level of influence held by different actors within a social network and explore the formal and informal relationships that drive or hinder change. SNA can highlight the impact of systems change initiatives by documenting and visualising changes in the quality and quantity of relationships following an initiative. It can also identify barriers to systems change tied to social networks and it supports change agents to know where to push to have the desired impact. As such it can be helpful at all stages of the project cycle, from design to monitoring and evaluation.</p>	<p>See “Social Network Analysis 101: Ultimate Guide” by Visible Network Labs.³⁷ For tools to facilitate SNA, see “Net-Map Toolbox”,³⁸ a tool based on participatory methods which analyses influence within social networks, and “Network Canvas”,³⁹ an open-source package of online tools to support the analysis of complex social networks, including data collection and data/network visualisation tools.</p>

Method	Link(s) to further information
<p>SenseMaker® is a software designed to make sense of complex or messy situations, such as systems change. It uses a narrative-based method that combines qualitative and quantitative methods. The software collects personal stories from big cohorts to understand a specific issue and, critically, gives storytellers the chance to interpret and analyse their own narratives according to pre-set questions. It has been successfully used in the development sector to understand issues relating to modern slavery, such as the parameters of decent work,⁴⁰ and can give voice to those who may not normally be heard.⁴¹</p>	<p>See the SenseMaker® website.</p>
<p>Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) is a participatory technique that is best suited to interventions or programs that have a broad intended goal that goes beyond a few specific outcomes. REM uses one-on-one interviews, focus groups interviews, mind mapping and qualitative data analysis to explore the impact of a project on a specific group or community. The core activity is a group mind-mapping exercise where participants are asked to reflect on the differing effects (“ripples”) of the intervention or project. Data are then classified, coded and analysed. This approach has been successfully used to measure systems change in the public health sector.⁴²</p>	<p>See “A Field Guide to Ripple Effects Mapping” by Chazdon et al.⁴³</p>



In the Kathmandu Valley, the Freedom Fund has used process tracing to better understand the impact of our activities to reduce children's work in the adult entertainment sector (see case study 1). Photo by Chintan Gohil on Unsplash

MEASURING THE IMPACT OF SPECIFIC INTERVENTIONS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO SYSTEMS CHANGE

Programming that aims to trigger systems change typically involves the use of multiple different interventions. Drawing on the methods listed above, this section provides suggestions for measuring six interventions highlighted within the Freedom Fund's typology of systems change interventions for eradicating modern slavery.

Measuring the impact of strategic litigation

The impact of strategic litigation may initially appear easy to measure: did the plaintiff win their case or not? However, Duffy has argued that it is imperative that evaluators move away from a victory/defeat binary when assessing the impact of strategic litigation.⁴⁴ Instead, she argues that strategic litigation is a process, typically combined with communication and advocacy efforts. As such, the end judicial result is not necessarily indicative of the impact of the entire process, with equally significant changes occurring due to interactions between members of social movements, litigators and the litigants, all of which can lead to "agenda change." The latter include changes in discourse and expanding democratic space.⁴⁵ Duffy argues that measurement of strategic litigation should therefore be based on three lenses: a high-definition lens to look at the multi-dimensional impact of human rights litigation, a second long lens to view impact over time and post-litigation, and a third wide-angle lens to look for synergy between litigation and other agents for change such as civil society advocacy or legislative reform.⁴⁶

Recognising the need for a more comprehensive approach to measure the effects of strategic litigation, several additional tools and frameworks have been developed. These include the REDRESS Impact Framework for measuring the impact of strategic litigation focusing on torture.⁴⁷ This framework identifies 10 possible impacts for consideration, covering impacts on the survivor and their family (such as justice, truth and community) and broader impacts on social governance and rule of law (including attitudes, law and governance). Although specific to strategic litigation focusing on torture, the idea behind the framework and suggestions for outcomes and indicators could be adapted by the anti-slavery sector. The Digital Freedom Fund has developed a tool for measuring the impact of digital strategic litigation.⁴⁸ Its impact assessment framework uses nine outcome themes that are designed to capture the different possible impacts of strategic litigation, ranging from changes in public opinion to representation of minority voices in court. These outcome themes are then developed into outcome statements, which form the basis of a monitoring and evaluation plan for the litigation process. Although the impact framework is designed with digital litigation in mind, the organisation notes that it can be adapted to fit the type of litigation being conducted.

Measuring the impact of advocacy

When evaluating advocacy interventions, evaluators need to understand the effects of the advocacy strategy on the targeted population.⁴⁹ A summary of specific tools that are particularly well-suited to this task can be found in "The User's Guide to Advocacy Evaluation Planning," produced by the Harvard Family Research Project,⁵⁰ and The Overseas Development Institute's (ODI) working paper "[Monitoring and evaluation of policy influence and advocacy](#)".⁵¹ Possible tools/methods for measuring the impact of advocacy include narrative assessment, intense period debriefs, media tracking, process tracing and the Bellwether method. The latter, summarised in Table 1, was developed by the Harvard Family Research Project specifically for evaluating policy and advocacy efforts and has been extensively used successfully in real-world settings.⁵² Likewise, process tracing has been effectively used to measure the impact of advocacy and policy initiatives.⁵³ For an example of how process tracing was used effectively to measure project-level impact amid broader change in the Adult Entertainment Sector in Nepal, see Case Study 1.

Specific tools or frameworks have also been used to explore particular aspects of advocacy. For example, when looking at health and racial equity, The Center for Evaluation Innovation developed a Power Building Framework as the guiding structure for evaluating “in depth and in context how advocacy builds power in addition to achieving wins.”⁵⁴ Another method, Episodic Communication Channels in Organisations (ECCO) analysis, can track how advocacy messages are spread rather than focusing on the content, making it suited to evaluating communication channels and understanding whether messaging is reaching the intended audience.⁵⁵ Additionally, specific guidance has been developed to support the evaluation of distinct types of advocacy, such as the Legal Advocacy Evaluation Framework developed by the TCC Group.⁵⁶

Case Study 1: Learning from the anti-slavery movement in Nepal

Process tracing to establish project-level impact amid broader change

In our central Nepal hotspot, the Freedom Fund supports a network of locally-based NGOs to reduce the prevalence of children working in the Adult Entertainment Sector (AES) in the Kathmandu Valley. In 2019, a study found that the prevalence of children working in the AES was markedly less than a decade earlier.⁵⁷ We therefore commissioned an independent evaluation that used process tracing to better understand why and how this change had occurred and assess the extent to which our hotspot activities had contributed to this change.⁵⁸ The evaluators reviewed the impact of our activities on five different causal pathways that contributed to change, covering demand for and supply of child workers in the AES. It found that our partners’ work advocating for legislative changes and supporting lower levels of government to implement these changes was particularly impactful, as were their efforts bringing 299 legal cases against AES business owners and customers. The method also identified activities that were less impactful on systems change, such as awareness raising when it was not coupled with broader structural changes that ensure children have viable alternatives to work in the AES.

Process tracing also helped us to assess the type of impact of our activities. For example, the evaluators noted that the direct survivor-centred interventions used by our partners to assist individual child workers to safely and permanently exit the AES were not most impactful in terms of triggering macro-level change. However, they did prove to be highly impactful at an individual level, with AES child workers reporting that they felt more empowered, confident and aware of their rights, enabling them to refuse abusive practices. This contrasted sharply with the government’s use of police raids which, although effective in reducing business owners’ demand for child workers, did not support children to exit the AES in a safe way as the raids led to children’s arrests and loss of work. This, in turn, forced them to return to the AES due to their lack of viable alternative livelihoods. Process tracing therefore identified the strengths and limitations of our activities in relation to other actors’ interventions and provided information about where to target our resources and efforts to see the most impact. It also encouraged us to analyse our role in broader change processes, challenging us to question the extent to which our actions actually contributed to meaningful change.

Measuring the impact of policy change interventions

Similar to advocacy, it can be very hard to ascertain the impact of policy change interventions on either facilitating or preventing actual policy change. Case Study 2, which explores implementation of a new policy for e-payments in the Thai fishing industry, highlights that policy changes do not always have the intended outcomes. Evaluators therefore need to use measurement approaches that not only measure pre-determined indicators but also look for outlier or unplanned effects.

There is a range of literature focusing on how to measure policy change interventions. The ODI has produced various guidance, including a guidance note looking at how to measure policy influence which observes that although it can be helpful to measure outputs, these are not necessarily a reliable marker of policy influence.⁵⁹ For example, while citation analysis can review the extent to which

advocacy messaging is being replicated, the intervention being evaluated may be only a small factor determining influence. The authors subsequently suggest more in-depth methods for measuring policy change and influence, such as RAPID Outcome assessments, Most Significant Change, Episode Studies (constructing the narrative and multiple factors that led to policy change) and Framing Analysis (reviewing how issues are framed in the media compared to campaign messaging).

Other helpful resources include, but are not limited to, a policy and advocacy toolkit by WWF-UK which includes detailed suggestions for monitoring methods and indicators of change,⁶⁰ and CIPPEC's handbook on monitoring policy influence that has a strong focus on practitioners.⁶¹ The latter provides clear advice on how to monitor policy influence, along with suggested methods and practical tools such as guiding questions for knowledge harvesting.

Case Study 2: Learning from the anti-slavery movement in Thailand

Capturing the intended and unintended consequences of policy change

In 2017, a study by the ILO found highly exploitative working conditions within the Thai fishing industry, including the withholding of salaries and illegal salary deductions for many workers.⁶² Workers were typically paid in cash, often without accompanying payslips, making it extremely difficult to track and determine if workers were actually being paid what they were owed. The ILO subsequently called for adoption of an electronic payment system in which all fishers have a bank account and salary payments can be monitored. In November 2017, the Thai Ministry of Labour announced that electronic monthly payments to migrant fishers should be made directly into the workers' bank accounts so payments can be verified by the banks. These measures were approved by the Thai cabinet in March 2018.

In 2019, the Freedom Fund and Humanity United commissioned a mixed methods study to evaluate the effectiveness of the new electronic payment system, including qualitative interviews with boat owners and key government and non-government stakeholders, and a survey with 598 migrants working as fishers.⁶³ The survey highlighted that fishers generally felt that the payment system had significantly improved minimum wage compliance and regularity of payments, and that it reduced salary deductions. However, when asked whether they had control over their wages, over half reported having no control over their ATM card. This was especially likely for fishers who had borrowed money from their employers, with employers holding their ATM cards and even withdrawing cash. A more recent 2024 study by the Fishers' Rights Network drew an even bleaker picture, with 99.4% of the 1,087 surveyed fishers reporting that they were not paid monthly by bank transfer, as per the law, with most paid in cash. Meanwhile, 98.3% reported that their employers held their ATM cards and created fictitious paper trails to satisfy the authorities. Both studies therefore highlight the crucial importance of regular consultations with those whom a policy is supposed to impact to determine if its effects are as intended.

Measuring the impact of social movements (movement building)

The fluid and complex nature of social movements makes movement building potentially very hard to measure. Certain methods, such as social network analysis (SNA), are well-suited to this task. Case Study 3 provides an example of how we have used SNA in Brazil to map social networks as part of our flagship Freedom Rising program.

In addition, specific tools have been developed to address the challenges of measuring the impact of movements and movement building. The Global Fund for Women has developed a Movement Capacity Assessment Tool that provides a framework to help social movements assess their strengths and challenges. This information can then be used to develop action plans and decide how best to allocate available resources to fulfil the social movement's priorities and strengthen its capacity.⁶⁴ The assessment tool has been successfully used by different organisations to evaluate social movements, including the Ukraine Women's Fund and CARE International.⁶⁵ The Innovation Network has also

developed a framework for measuring the power of social movements against five domains: people power, movement capacity, institutional power, network power and narrative power.⁶⁶ By providing sample indicators, the framework helps evaluators to capture a social movement's influence and ability to promote systems change.

However, it is important to note that social movements are not homogenous. Instead, they are typically very heterogeneous, with different actors having slightly different motivations, goals and preferred ways of reaching these goals.⁶⁷ A further possible approach for evaluating movement building is therefore consensus analysis, which measures the degree of consensus within a social movement. Caulkins and Hyatt, for instance, have suggested a typology for measuring and better understanding diversity and change in domains with low consensus.⁶⁸ This helps evaluators to gain a more granular understanding of the social dynamics of social movements and how to better mobilise activists to push for change.



Fishing Vessel, Thailand. The Freedom Fund has undertaken various in-depth evaluations to measure the impact of our work on reducing exploitative labour in the Thai fishing industry. ©Jittrapon Kaicome/The Freedom Fund

Case Study 3: Learning from the anti-slavery movement in Brazil

Using social network analysis to map social networks of Freedom Rising leaders in Brazil

The Freedom Fund's flagship Freedom Rising program is a transformative leadership program designed to support and connect frontline leaders – especially women and survivors – to challenge the systems enabling exploitation in their communities.⁶⁹ The program works to build trust and collaboration among organisations, addressing various forms of exploitation, including child labour, bonded labour, sex trafficking and forced marriage. In 2024, the Freedom Fund commissioned Ignited Word to conduct an assessment that used social network analysis (SNA) to empirically measure and assess the network of Freedom Rising leaders in Brazil, including the nature and strength of relationships between individuals and organisations.⁷⁰ The assessment served as a baseline to measure change over time and guide how the network can be grown and made more inclusive, particularly for people with lived experience of slavery and from other marginalised backgrounds. The assessment was designed around key questions regarding the nature and outcomes of network building and used a mixed-methods design and analysis, combining qualitative, quantitative and network-based instruments. Data collection was conducted via a visioning exercise, an SNA survey and a sensemaking session.


The assessment found that despite the program's recent launch, clusters (groups of people interacting with each other) were already present. This reveals a naturally high level of interconnectedness within the anti-slavery movement in Brazil, although there was clear room for growth. However, the assessment also found that Freedom Rising participants interact primarily to share information, with far fewer connections being made to share resources. Participants identified this "scarcity mindset" as the biggest challenge for the movement, as a competitive funding environment discourages resource sharing. Furthermore, more than 25% of survivors have no connection to other survivors, and survivors have half the number of connections compared with non-survivors. Additionally, fewer survivors are seen as influential or as leaders within the network. Based on these findings, the assessment was able to provide recommendations to further strengthen the program's movement building. These included fostering stronger survivor-to-survivor relationships to improve their connectivity and collective influence within the network and adopting an assets-based lens (building on positives rather than trying to fix what's broken) to leverage shared priorities and aspirations and foster greater solidarity within the network. The assessment therefore demonstrated that SNA is an effective method for analysing social networks and providing strategic insights into how to further strengthen them.



Measuring the impact of normative change interventions

Although cultures have hegemonic normative frameworks, not everyone ascribes to the same values or has the same nuanced understandings of these frameworks. It can therefore be extremely challenging to measure the impact of normative change interventions since there is a need to measure both changes and variations in normative beliefs. Various tools have been developed for measuring normative change. These include:

- [Social Norms Analysis Plot \(SNAP\)](#). The SNAP framework, developed by CARE International, looks at specific norms and their influences (including sanctions). It uses Photovoice, Sensemaker® (described earlier) and focus group discussions to capture and measure social norms and normative changes. It has been successfully used to measure social normative change by CARE and other actors.⁷¹
- [Social Norms Exploration Tool \(SNET\)](#). This participatory learning and action tool, developed by USAID, the Gates Foundation and Passages, guides the exploration of social norms through a five-phase process: plan and prepare, identify reference groups, explore social norms, analyse findings and apply findings.⁷² Although SNET was not designed only to be used in evaluations, the clearly structured tool can be integrated into monitoring and evaluation approaches.
- [Community-level participatory approaches](#). The Learning Collaborative to Advance Normative Change has compiled a guide to measuring social norms. It includes various community-level participatory approaches that can be used for this purpose, such as pile sorting, body mapping, and social mapping and influence.⁷³ UNFPA, Drexel University and UNICEF have produced a similar participatory resources toolkit for social norms measurement.⁷⁴
- [GEM Scale](#). Developed by Promundo, this scale consists of 24 questions for measuring changes in gender norms and attitudes associated with manhood.⁷⁵



A still from a TV clip aired as part of a norms and behaviour change campaign, launched by Girl Effect and the Freedom Fund in Ethiopia, which challenged harmful norms that enable child domestic worker exploitation and aimed to shift employer attitudes. The campaign outcomes were measured through a comprehensive baseline and endline evaluation. Those pictured are actors.

Additionally, UN Women has produced a recent discussion paper looking at the challenges of measuring social norms and different approaches for measuring gender norms, with illustrative examples.⁷⁶

However, as highlighted by Case Study 4, it is also possible to measure normative change with more traditional evaluation tools such as surveys, providing the questions are carefully worded and cover different domains (e.g. knowledge, social norms and behaviours) and different types of norms (descriptive and injunctive).

Case Study 4: Learning from the anti-slavery movement in Ethiopia

Evaluating a norms and behaviour campaign targeting employers of child domestic workers

In 2022, the Freedom Fund partnered with Girl Effect Ethiopia to promote the rights of child domestic workers (CDWs) in Addis Ababa through a norms and behavioural change campaign (NBCC). The NBCC targeted CDWs' employers and aimed to reduce CDWs' working hours and increase their access to education. The campaign utilised a multimedia approach centred on narrative-based TV advertisements and social media stories. This was coupled with on-the-ground activation workshops with employers of CDWs in the targeted sub-cities. Altai Consulting designed a baseline and endline survey to assess the NBCC's impact.⁷⁷ The surveys captured more than 1,400 employers' knowledge of child labour laws and their norms and behaviours linked to treatment of CDWs. Findings were stratified according to reported campaign exposure. The questions were worded so as to capture knowledge, norms (descriptive and injunctive) and behaviours, making it possible to ascertain whether the campaign had only changed knowledge or had started to have a deeper impact on social norms relating to child domestic work and employers' behaviours.

The endline found that supportive knowledge and attitudes towards CDWs tended to be greatest among respondents who were reached directly by the campaign, and there were signs that the campaign was starting to shift some norms relating to how CDWs were perceived compared with other children. The evaluation method successfully generated helpful lessons learned relating to the campaign messaging that can be built into future initiatives. Recommendations included treating employers as allies to encourage community buy-in and framing CDWs as children in need of care and protection, like employers' own children, to encourage employers to have greater personal investment in their CDWs.

Measuring the impact of business compliance interventions

Social compliance audits are a frequently-used tool for supporting businesses to identify issues of labour exploitation in their global supply chains. To support auditors and businesses, internal and external compliance metrics are typically developed, including checklists for businesses to measure their compliance with specific modern slavery legislation and open-source interactive tools. These include The Code, which was developed by ECPAT and its tourism sector partners to help travel and tourism businesses to assess the risk of child sexual exploitation and trafficking in their organisations.⁷⁸ Similarly, Walk Free has developed a modern slavery benchmarking tool that allows businesses to complete a self-assessment looking at risks of modern slavery in their systems.⁷⁹

However, while social compliance audits do have the power to help businesses identify forced labour within their supply chains, concerns have been frequently raised that the findings do not necessarily capture the reality on the ground due to the limited timeframe of audits and the possibility of harmful practices being intentionally hidden.⁸⁰ A report by Human Rights Watch therefore concluded that social compliance audits are not adequate proof of due diligence.⁸¹ Instead, tools should be developed and implemented in collaboration with affected communities.

To have a more realistic assessment of business compliance, it is therefore important for audits to use a human rights due diligence approach where auditors consult with broader stakeholders, including workers and affected communities. In other words, voluntary initiatives need to put workers and other rights holders front and centre. Worker-driven social responsibility initiatives have been particularly successful in placing workers at the centre of programs designed to reduce their exploitation and pushing for compliance monitoring mechanisms that provide workers with a chance to be heard. For instance, the Fair Food Program has taken measures to ensure audits are rigorous, independent and made known to the public, alongside effective complaints mechanisms that can be used to report abuses.⁸² For a specific example of measuring business compliance using a human rights due diligence approach, see Case Study 5.

Case Study 5: Learning from the anti-slavery movement in Thailand

Measuring compliance to a business's ethical recruitment policies

In 2016, Thai Union (TU), the world's largest producer of shelf-stable tuna products, launched its Ethical Migrant Recruitment Policy after recognising that migrant workers across the industry and the wider region were bearing an inordinate cost during recruitment processes. The policy requires agencies working with TU to be fully transparent about charges. Any agencies found to be charging illegal or irregular fees beyond those pre-agreed are terminated and ordered to pay back the worker. To ensure recruiters comply with the new policy, TU partnered with the Migrant Workers Rights Network (MWRN), a membership based civil society organisation for workers from Myanmar who were working in Thailand. Together, TU and MWRN implemented a series of steps designed to curb irregular fee charging practices, including asking questions about fees at each step in the recruitment process. TU and MWRN also provided a grievance mechanism for workers that can be accessed via Facebook, phone or Viber and which has clear timeframes for specified investigations and actions.

In 2018, the Freedom Fund commissioned an independent six-month evaluation of TU's ethical recruitment policy.⁸³ The evaluators interviewed workers and their families, and recruitment agency and TU representatives. TU reported that it was now easier to recruit workers, comply with social compliance audits and retain staff. Their workers also reported higher levels of job satisfaction and feelings of safety. However, they remained unsure about resignation procedures and were still nervous about logging grievances due to inherent power inequalities. Further, although the recruitment agency had formalised the policy's procedures, it had found them hard to implement and faced hostility from other agencies for not charging fees. Overall, the evaluation found that successful policy implementation was due to high level buy-in from TU and their partnership with a civil society actor that truly understood the recruitment process. However, going forward, the relationship between TU and MWRN will need to strike a fine balance between partnership and MWRN remaining independent, particularly as TU pays the latter a stipend to promote sustainability. The evaluation also noted challenges with cascading ethical recruitment practices to sub-agencies used by recruitment agencies at a local level. While the partnership is a promising example of human rights due diligence, the evaluation emphasised the importance of independently evaluating promising interventions to better understand actual outcomes, including unintended ones.

CONCLUSION

Modern slavery is a complex issue that requires multi-faceted, holistic interventions to ignite meaningful and sustainable systems change. To achieve this, it is vital to evaluate whether programmatic efforts are delivering the desired outcomes. By identifying and building on successful approaches while adjusting or discontinuing those with undesirable consequences, modern slavery actors can drive more effective actions to transform the underlying conditions that enable slavery to persist.

Measuring systems change can be challenging, but it is entirely possible. Systems are dynamic, with change often emerging from interconnected interventions over extended periods, following non-linear and unpredictable pathways. This complexity makes it harder to identify which intervention – or combination of interventions – has had the greatest impact, and the role of external factors. Further, systems involve diverse actors, so determining whose perspectives to prioritise when assessing change adds to the intricacy.

To reflect these distinctive features of systems change, accompanying, carefully planned and innovative measurement approaches are needed that recognise that traditional evaluation methods are not always suited to more complex interventions. Effective systems change measurement should be embedded in the design phase, incorporating a clear theory of change that articulates the intended outcomes. It must account for the longer timeframes and larger budgets typically required, be attentive to unintended outcomes and use multi-stakeholder analysis with an intersectional lens to understand how different parts of the system are affected. Evaluators also often need to employ a combination of methods that have proven successful for measuring complex interventions, such as process tracing, outcome harvesting and social network analysis.

Continued investment in developing new monitoring and evaluation approaches that are fit for purpose is therefore essential. This ensures that time, efforts and resources are used as effectively as possible and that programming is based on continuous learning. Modern slavery actors only stand a chance of eradicating modern slavery once we fully understand the impact of our interventions and can build on and learn from our successes and failures.



Samut Sakhon, Thailand, where the Freedom Fund works with partners to reduce exploitative labour in the Thai fishing industry. ©Jittrapon Kaicome/The Freedom Fund



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VISION

Our vision is a world
free of slavery.

MISSION



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

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