



Building  
community:  
**Annual Impact  
Report 2020**



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# CEO Letter

## The power of local frontline communities



**We successfully liberated 28,914 people, ensured the return of 58,659 children to school, directly impacted on 904,807 individuals, and contributed to systems change affecting millions of women, men and children in slavery or at risk of being enslaved.**

NICK GRONO,  
CEO, THE FREEDOM FUND

Last year was devastating for the world's most vulnerable communities, which bore the brunt of the economic fallout of lockdowns and the erosion of rights that governments too freely indulged under cover of their covid responses. This has been evident in the countries in which the Freedom Fund works, and the consequence has been increased exploitation and trafficking of those most at risk.

However, amid all the negative fallout, we have also learned a huge amount in these past months: about the people we work with and the people we serve; about the fragility of socio-economic systems and the interconnectedness of the issues we face; and about the transformative power of local, community-based solutions to enable people to survive and adjust to global crises and new realities.

At a time when governments were still scrambling to field a response, and often overlooked or lacked the resources to reach the most marginalised groups, 95 of our local grassroots partners mobilised rapidly and worked tirelessly - at no small risk to themselves - to supply essential emergency support to over 250,000 highly vulnerable individuals, the majority women and children. Combined with their parallel awareness-raising and government engagement efforts, our partners impacted the lives of many more.

More broadly, we retooled our ways of working to ensure we could continue to effectively serve communities vulnerable to slavery. We virtually launched our Freedom Rising program, designed to build a powerful and representative anti-slavery movement

led by women and survivors. And we invested ever more heavily in our local partners. With them we successfully liberated 28,914 people, ensured the return of 58,659 children to school, directly impacted on 904,807 individuals, and contributed to systems change affecting millions of women, men and children in slavery or at risk of being enslaved.

Looking ahead, in the coming year we will expand our work into Bangladesh and Indonesia, continue to grow our support for survivor- and woman-led organisations, double down on our work in both apparel and seafood supply chains, expand our program working with the most vulnerable agricultural workers in Nepal, and explore how we can help end the exploitation of children - mainly girls - in the commercial sex trade or domestic servitude.

The economic devastation inflicted on the most vulnerable will be with us for many years to come. The Freedom Fund and its frontline partners are committed to scaling up our efforts to support these communities as they build their resilience and capacity.

We continue to be immensely proud of our frontline partners - and grateful to our donors, without whom none of our achievements would be possible.

In gratitude,  
**Nick Grono**  
CEO, The Freedom Fund

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

**"We had no time to eat or wash our hands...we were like prisoners or bonded slaves."**

FREEDOM RISING  
PARTICIPANT, INDIA



“I didn’t know how much my salary was and we were not allowed to ask. We had to follow the Thai captain’s orders and we were too frightened to raise any complaints.”

SURVIVOR, THAILAND



## Slavery still exists

Slavery did not end in the 1800s. It exists, persists and permeates the world in industries and places we would never imagine. Over 40 million men, women and children are in slavery around the world today, more than in any other time in history. One in four of them are children, and the majority are women and girls.

Although slavery is illegal everywhere, it still happens in every single country. This crime touches us all. It taints the clothes that we wear, the food that we eat and the phones that we use. Slavery is also hugely profitable for criminals, generating over \$150 billion a year in profits for the perpetrators. Built on intricate structures of bribery, deceit, coercion and profiteering, slavery thrives on and reinforces discrimination and inequality.

Modern slavery takes many forms, but in every instance men, women and children have lost their freedom, often lured into bondage with the promise of decent work, trapped there by debt and violence. It is a debasement of our common humanity.

## From vulnerability to power

Victims of modern slavery share underlying vulnerabilities that include inequality, isolation and discrimination. Local frontline organisations are the key to ending modern slavery, but working in isolation, their impact is limited. Similarly, there are survivors, practitioners and philanthropists committed to the cause, but too often they don’t talk to each other. There is a moral imperative to act, but the anti-slavery space lacks data about what works to end extreme exploitation.

**The Freedom Fund’s role is to help move marginalised communities from vulnerability to power.** We believe in the transformative power of community-led interventions. Our model scales the work of frontline organisations, bringing them together for outsized impact. We strategically invest philanthropic dollars to maximise social outcomes. And what makes the Freedom Fund different is that we rigorously measure what works and invest in the interventions that are most effective to end modern slavery.

We are honoured to be part of a global movement to end extreme exploitation. Our vision is a world free of slavery, and we need your help. Together, we can end the scourge of modern slavery.



## Our Global Impact

Lives impacted

904,807



Victims liberated

28,914



Community freedom groups supported

10,264



At-risk children in school

58,659



Kevin Groom, © Freedom Fund 2021

## The Liberation of the Harawa-Charawa

On Nepal's southern plains, for centuries, Dalit families have spent their lives toiling in the fields and homes of wealthy landowners in agricultural bonded labour. Here, a traditional system of slavery known as Harawa-Charawa targets a marginalised group who experience discrimination and violence due to caste, social status and harmful gender norms.

Agricultural bonded labourers work up to 17 hours a day, often paid by their "landlords" in rice instead of cash. Many cannot meet basic human needs and live in extreme poverty. With no alternatives to access credit, communities borrow money from their landlords at illegally high interest rates of up to 60 percent, trapping them in an inescapable cycle of forced work and intergenerational slavery. Until recently, their existence was barely acknowledged by policymakers.

The Freedom Fund has been supporting Harawa-Charawa communities since 2015, and in that time we've witnessed transformative change. Efforts by our frontline partners have generated historic achievements, including the increased visibility of Harawa-Charawa bonded labour and unprecedented backing by the government. Much of this success derives from the mobilisation of the Harawa-Charawa communities themselves.

Our work has funded local civil society to engage Harawa-Charawa in support groups, where greater understanding and self-awareness of their own situation have proven critical to empower Harawa-Charawa to take control of their own lives

and identify solutions to finally claiming their rights. With the Freedom Fund's support, local partners have become more strategic in their advocacy and have supported thousands of workers to receive a fair wage for the first time in their lives.

Building upon the hundreds of community groups supported by our local partners, the Freedom Fund then supported the establishment of the Harawa-Charawa Network, a group of bonded labour survivors representing the needs of their communities and advocating to end bonded labour. The network has gone from strength to strength over the past few years, moving from a loose group of community activists to an organised network with elected representatives in chapters across three districts as well as a national-level committee elected in January 2021 to lead the network for the next three years.

Among the new leaders is Rajbati Mandal. Before joining one of the Freedom Fund's community groups, Rajbati was largely confined to her home and feared speaking in public. She gained confidence through her participation in the group and became one of its most active members, speaking out about exploitation and caste and gender discrimination. Rajbati rose through the ranks, progressing from vice-chairperson of the Siraha district network to her current position as the national level treasurer.

The voices of the Harawa-Charawa Network are leading the fight against Harawa-Charawa bonded labour. They are now participating in high level meetings with provincial and federal government, demanding action against their exploitation. The activation of the Harawa-Charawa Network speaks to the power of our model, which combines support for frontline communities with strategic advocacy and movement building to dismantle systems of exploitation.

# Building community

The Freedom Fund is a leader in the global movement to end modern slavery. We identify and invest in the most effective frontline efforts to eradicate modern slavery in the countries and sectors where it is most prevalent. Partnering with visionary investors, governments, anti-slavery organisations and those at risk of exploitation, we tackle the systems that allow slavery to persist. Working together, we protect vulnerable populations, liberate and reintegrate those enslaved and prosecute those responsible.





## Community lies at the core of everything we do.

- We build community by connecting and resourcing frontline organisations, which hold the key to ending modern slavery. We fund grassroots organisations as a group and foster their collaboration through communities of practice.
- We build community across the anti-slavery movement by cultivating leaders and sharing knowledge.
- We bring together survivors, practitioners, philanthropists and other diverse perspectives to foster dialogue about what works to end slavery.
- And we have convened a community of like-minded philanthropists who share a common goal.

At the Freedom Fund, we are proud to be part of a global movement that is ending modern slavery, and we value the knowledge of those most directly affected by slavery.

We fight slavery through three targeted, mutually reinforcing approaches. Taken together, these approaches help move vulnerable communities from isolation to connection and power, challenging the systems that allow slavery to persist.

**“The fear has gone from my body and soul. I have courage and confidence now. The biggest freedom I’ve got is the strength to speak out about our issues. Everyone has the right to live in freedom, and everyone must fight for their rights to be free.”**

ONE OF THE HUNDREDS OF FORMER BONDED LABOURERS WHO WORK TO FREE FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES IN NORTHERN INDIA.



### Hotspots

Many interventions to tackle human rights challenges suffer from a lack of focus, with philanthropic resources being spread too thinly to produce real impact. We concentrate our efforts on a small number of slavery hotspots, investing in a range of interventions that reinforce each other to maximise impact. We currently support over 130 partners in nine hotspots across six countries. Investing in the grassroots organisations that know what it takes to end slavery is highly impactful and provides excellent value for money.



### Global initiatives

Our global initiatives address critical issues relevant to the prevention and eradication of modern slavery. Built around four inter-related themes – supply chains, strategic litigation, safer migration and treatment of mental trauma – our initiatives are informed by our frontline work and generate knowledge, solutions and actions that influence key actors to end modern slavery.



### Movement building

We strengthen the global movement of anti-slavery activists by providing the platforms, knowledge and tools for them to connect and work together more effectively. Through programs like Freedom Rising, we’re building a powerful and representative anti-slavery movement led by women and survivors.

**“Nobody will be able to trouble us if we stay together. We were individual fingers. Now we are a fist.”**

FEMALE SURVIVOR OF BONDED LABOUR, 35 YEARS OLD.



## The power of community

The textile industry in the state of Tamil Nadu provides vital jobs and incomes, especially in poorer communities. The industry is a key supplier to major clothing brands around the world. However, in parts of the industry, workers suffer in exploitative situations. Labour abuses and sexual harassment persist within a sector with large numbers of women and girls.

These women and girls are there for a variety of reasons, most often to support their families financially. The textile industry is one of the few areas of opportunity and as such, the choice to take up this work is not much of a choice at all.

However, in some cases, the factory managers and owners capitalize on the workers' need to survive by forcing them to work long hours without sufficient breaks, by verbally, physically and sexually harassing women workers and paying extremely low wages. Often, the workers do not feel safe to raise a complaint or demand better, and there is very little enforcement of the laws that are in place.

The Freedom Fund has partnered with organizations in Tamil Nadu for the last five years to reduce exploitation in the textile industry. Through local organising by worker groups and community groups, and through collective efforts by these frontline partners, true change has begun.

Small groups of workers have started raising their voice, initially for better safety, food, and hygiene at work, and more recently for better wages. At the same time, our frontline partners are networking together and giving wider policy support to these efforts. To support this movement – and in particular women and survivors, who are those most affected by exploitation in the textile industry – the Freedom Fund launched Freedom Rising, a program designed to elevate women and survivors into positions of greater power within the movement.

The organizing within these communities creates the perfect environment for a sector-wide supply chains global initiative that advocates for greater transparency and accountability within the apparel industry as a whole. This powerful combination amplifies the knowledge and experience of frontline partners in order to work with brands and retailers to expand their commitments beyond the garment factories that they buy from directly, to also address risks in textile production facilities.



# This is what impact looks like

Total invested  
**\$56.6M**



Lives impacted  
**904,807**



Individuals accessing social & legal services  
**470,546**



Number of at-risk children in school  
**58,659**



Victims liberated  
**28,914**



Legal cases assisted  
**5,818**



Community freedom groups supported  
**10,264**



Micro-enterprises started  
**28,519**



Cost per person  
**\$50**



# Hotspot impact numbers



TOTAL INVESTED



LIVES IMPACTED



INDIVIDUALS ACCESSING SOCIAL & LEGAL SERVICES



MEMBERS IN COMMUNITY FREEDOM GROUPS

## Northern India

HOTSPOT LAUNCHED IN 2014

\$13.6M

276,406

96,401

71,891

## Southern India

HOTSPOT LAUNCHED IN 2015

\$8.7M

217,458

199,880

52,641

## Rajasthan

HOTSPOT LAUNCHED IN 2018

\$3.4M

61,216

47,476

8,387

## South-Eastern Nepal

HOTSPOT LAUNCHED IN 2014

\$6.1M

68,611

7,046

16,534

## Central Nepal

HOTSPOT LAUNCHED IN 2015 AND FINISHED IN 2020

\$5.2M

48,959

24,673

20,432

## Ethiopia

HOTSPOT LAUNCHED IN 2015

\$7.9M

140,979

42,808

68,608

## Thailand

HOTSPOT LAUNCHED IN 2015

\$10.9M

74,760

51,190

8,872

## Myanmar

HOTSPOT LAUNCHED IN 2020

\$0.6M

14,739

1,072

399

திராவிட மக்கள் சேவையார் சி.ச.நெடுமலை  
அரசு உதவியும்பள்ளி - மூத்தாம்பட்டி

“[The Freedom Fund’s] focus on at-risk communities empowering themselves is truly transformative.”

UK HOME OFFICE, OCTOBER 2020

# Frontline organisations are the key to ending modern slavery

## The hotspot model

Frontline organisations have the legitimacy and know-how to end slavery in their communities. We partner with local organisations to directly combat slavery in defined regions where it is highly concentrated, what we call “hotspots”.

We currently support over 130 partners in nine hotspots across six countries. Our model is a highly effective way to fight slavery and provides excellent value for money.



# Northern India hotspot

Ending  
trafficking,  
bonded labour  
and child labour  
in Uttar Pradesh  
and Bihar, two of  
India's poorest  
states.

"Now there's no  
pressure, no fear.  
That's why I like it...I  
don't fear."

SURVIVOR OF BONDED LABOURER



Katherine Round for the Freedom Fund and CIFF

## Achievements in 2020



**131,699 people were linked to new government services** particularly those that are proven to reduce vulnerability to exploitation like job cards, labour registrations, health cards and food welfare. Much of this was through Covid Emergency Response Fund grants where partners were encouraged to connect relief recipients to government entitlements.



**165 communities with a total population of 93,995 were declared slave-free** as they had reached a stage where they were free from exploitation, able to access rights and prevent exploitative practices in their communities. These communities will now be at the forefront of the new strategy to drive down child labour throughout the States of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.



**51,024 individuals received emergency support** to address needs resulting from the covid-19 pandemic. Partners provided critical emergency relief, including food aid, covid-19 prevention materials and hygiene packs and micro-grants.

[Click here for more information →](#)



# Southern India hotspot

Ending bonded labour of young women and migrant workers in the textile industry.



Matt Porteous, © Freedom Fund 2021

## Achievements in 2020



**The Tamil Nadu Alliance**, a forum of NGO networks representing over 100 grassroots organisations, urged leading international businesses to sign on to the Tamil Nadu Declaration, which includes specific commitments to promote decent working conditions further along their supply chains. Brands and retailers are now working closely with the alliance.



**Gaining new policy commitments.** During 2020, the Tamil Nadu Alliance has been recognised by government bodies as a key partner, positively representing the issues that affect thousands of textile workers, as well as helping government take important actions for workers' rights.



**Spotlighting conditions for migrant workers.** Our partners undertook fact finding in 88 migrant worker settlements and 41 mill hostels, in preparation for deepening our work with migrants and setting up groups through which they can improve their living and working conditions. The findings revealed shocking and harmful treatment of these workers; for example, in 97% of settlements nobody had access to the public food distribution system.

[Click here for more information →](#)



# Child Labour Free Jaipur – Rajasthan hotspot



© Freedom Fund 2021

Ending child labour in the apparel and handicraft industries.

## Achievements in 2020



**Independent follow-up evaluation shows better government performance.** The evaluation found systemic improvements in enforcement in Jaipur through an increased number of rescues and filing of legal cases, as well as higher than expected school enrolment among reintegrated children in Bihar. Importantly, despite covid-related school closures during which we would have expected to see an increase in child labour, many children and adolescents in Jaipur had not started working.



**Model of community-based reintegration for child trafficking survivors:** Our partners continue to carry out follow-up visits to families with returned children to ensure that each household is receiving food ration cards and other government services. In the past, rescued children were frequently re-trafficked after they were brought home, because nothing had changed about their vulnerability. Today the re-trafficking rate has dropped to 1.7 percent.



**Video conferencing for children's legal testimonies:** The hotspot ensured that one of its Bihar trafficking cases was included in the Indian Supreme Court's piloting of video conferencing for victims of child trafficking. For these children, video conferencing from their home state is safer and less traumatic than travelling hundreds of miles back to Jaipur, and it should also enable convictions to come through more quickly.

[Click here for more information →](#)



# South- Eastern Nepal hotspot

Ending the  
exploitation  
of bonded  
labourers under  
the Harawa-  
Charawa  
system.



Jenna Mulhall-Brareton, © Geneva Global 2021

## Achievements in 2020



**The hotspot increased its focus on strategic advocacy**, targeting policies and programs at all levels of government. We supported the development of the Harawa-Charawa Network, a survivor-led advocacy group, to play a leading role in direct engagement with government.



In April 2020 Nepal formed a National Land Commission with a **mandate to distribute land to landless people across the country**. Hotspot partners have developed strong relationships with the Land Commission and are collaborating to make sure Harawa-Charawa communities are included to drastically reduce dependency on exploitative landlords.



**Hotspot partners worked with seven municipalities to set local minimum wage rates**. Through this work, 1,140 Harawa-Charawa have accessed minimum wage for the first time. Being paid a fair wage for their labour directly increases household income and decreases dependency on local landlords for loans.

[Click here for more information →](#)



# Central Nepal hotspot

Ending the  
exploitation  
of children  
in the adult  
entertainment  
sector.

“They are completely changed, we don’t see any small girls working there, and the environment of the restaurant is also family-friendly.”

NGO FIELD OFFICER



Jenna Mulhall-Breton, © Geneva Global 2021

## Reflecting on what we achieved

The central Nepal hotspot was established in August 2015 to bring an end to the issue of internal trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children in Kathmandu’s adult entertainment sector. At the time, an estimated 13,000 women were working in the sector, a third of whom were children.

The Freedom Fund partnered with 14 local NGOs to implement a comprehensive strategy targeting minors and their communities, the government and the owners and customers who drive the demand for minors. We brought significant new resources and technical assistance to frontline partners.

The hotspot achieved remarkable success. Over five years our partners provided social and legal services to 24,673 individuals, which directly contributed to 2,258 children and adults leaving situations of exploitation. A 2019 prevalence study found approximately 1,650 children working in the sector, significantly lower than earlier estimates.

Based on this progress, the Freedom Fund decided to exit the central Nepal hotspot in December 2020, the first hotspot to complete a full program cycle. The frontline organisations we are proud to have partnered with will continue to work together to eliminate this crime.

[Click here for more information →](#)



# Ethiopia hotspot

Ending the vulnerability and exploitation of women and girls migrating for domestic work, and reducing child domestic servitude.



Sergi Reboredo / Alamy Stock Photo

## Achievements in 2020



**Comprehensive reintegration model for returnees.** Our partners adjusted project plans to respond to covid-19 in a manner that met safety and government requirements. We launched a comprehensive reintegration model for returnees from Lebanon, who had for the most part been expelled by their employers as a consequence of the pandemic. Through our Emergency Relief Fund, partners implemented a variety of activities to raise awareness about covid-19 and prevent its spread, while distributing food to those struggling to meet basic needs and providing direct support to returnees.



**Human trafficking prevention.** Partners worked with local community groups to deliver awareness-raising messages on safer migration, prevent school drop-out of young girls and strengthen local systems and structures to promote safer migration and address labour exploitation.



**6,913 individuals participated in community freedom groups.** Despite being unable to meet in large groups, the Ethiopia hotspot partners supported 876 community freedom groups, including school groups, community conversation groups and multi-sectoral groups.

[Click here for more information →](#)



# Thailand hotspot

Ending forced  
labour in the  
seafood industry.



Lisa Kristine, © Freedom Fund 2021

## Achievements in 2020



Despite the pandemic, our partners' public **advocacy helped secure deadline extensions** on immigration status renewal, access to social security support for temporary workers and a cost reduction in covid-19 tests mandated for migrants renewing their immigration status.



An international partner successfully advocated for two major U.S. supermarkets to **monitor supplier compliance** with requirements around transshipment at sea, a practice frequently connected to exploitation and abuse of fishing crew.



**Local partners secured remedy for migrant workers** employed in multiple sectors affected by the pandemic. In one case related to the unfair dismissal of 26 factory workers, a partner facilitated worker participation in successful advocacy that secured \$120,000 in compensation.



Using an effective model for coordination among migrant worker leaders, local officials and employers, one partner secured cooperation from multiple government agencies to **advance migrant worker rights**. Partners supported workers in factories to better understand their rights and organise under elected committees to negotiate better terms and conditions from employers.

[Click here for more information →](#)



# Myanmar hotspot



Freedom Fund 2021

Ending the trafficking of women and girls into China for forced marriage and childbearing.

## Achievements in 2020



**77 community groups were established, and 399 group members trained and supported.** Despite limited access to communities throughout 2020, partners established community freedom groups to serve as critical entry points to empower communities to understand how to protect themselves against exploitation.



**16 legal cases assisted, 8 of which resulted in convictions.** Our partners supported survivors of trafficking to pursue legal cases against perpetrators responsible for recruiting and delivering the women into the situations of exploitation. All eight convictions, five of which were cases of forced marriage, resulted in ten-year prison sentences.



**31,088 individuals received emergency support to address needs resulting from the covid-19 pandemic.** Freedom Fund partners contributed to an extensive response and relief effort, distributing food, hygiene and sanitation materials, clothes, and covid-related prevention supplies to vulnerable communities.

[Click here for more information →](#)



## Rita's story – From landlessness to community leader

Housing is a basic human right in India, but several marginalised groups are unable to access their government entitlements to land due to caste and gender discrimination. Rita Devi used to be a landless low-caste woman from Bihar, one of India's poorest states. She and her husband were daily wage workers who lived with their extended family of seven in a small hut. Because they didn't own the land, they were vulnerable to exploitation by the landowner. Rita struggled to make ends meet, and believed that owning land was impossible for people like her.

When she heard about a government land scheme, she tried to apply but was turned away from the office three times. It was unprecedented for a woman of her caste to apply for a land grant, let alone become a landowner, and the elders from her village ridiculed her for not knowing her place. Rita's husband was threatened by the bullying, and he warned her not to pursue the matter or risk being ostracised further, even though owning land would provide the family with dignity and a pathway out of exploitation. Rita was disappointed, but not defeated.

Rita found hope when she attended a freedom community group run by one of the Freedom Fund's northern India hotspot partners, Duncan hospital. During the group's meetings she learned about her rights and how to access them, and she gained an appreciation for the power of collective action. She realized that she could achieve her dream of owning land. Rita became an active participant in the community freedom group's activities, and this bolstered her confidence.

Undeterred, Rita and three other women went to the government offices again with land applications for 18 families in their village. Rita was pregnant at the time, but that didn't stop her. The application process required them to visit the officials several times, and the travel was taxing Rita, but she didn't give up. With the help of the Duncan team, she followed up on her applications and heard about a state-level rally on land rights that was being held in a city eight hours away. Rita knew this rally would be her only opportunity to meet directly with government officials, so she travelled to the rally with three other women and her two-month old baby. At the rally, she met with a government minister and directly handed him her application.

The official was so moved by Rita, a Dalit woman who travelled for eight hours with an infant on behalf for a just cause, that he spoke highly of her and promised to approve her application as soon as possible. After her meeting with the minister, 18 families in her village became landowners.

Today, Rita is a community organiser who helps mobilise women to apply for land rights. With her help, over 50 families are in the process of getting land rights, something they never would've dreamed of before her support.

The Freedom Fund is honoured to support women like Rita, leaders who are bringing transformative change to their communities. We hope that in the coming months many other women like Rita will come forward to share their success stories with the world.



## Beyond the numbers: Notable systems change in 2020

Advocacy efforts by our frontline NGO partners in Thailand resulted in the government **extending the deadline for migrant workers to renew their documentation**, giving over 1 million workers the chance to renew or extend their visas during the pandemic.

Thanks in part to the advocacy of our central Nepal hotspot partners, **Nepal ratified the UN Palermo Protocol**, a global legally binding instrument to prevent trafficking in persons, especially women and children.

**Ethiopia issued a new proclamation** on the prevention and suppression of human trafficking, which reflects recommendations put forth by our Ethiopia hotspot partners.

Our southern India hotspot partners helped coordinate the collection of over 1.5 million physical signatures through 204 local organisations in 23 states in just 20 days, on a petition for **emergency cash assistance for poor families**.

Nepal's 2020 budget announcement made **specific reference to Harawa-Charawa communities** as target beneficiaries, following engagement efforts and evidence put forward by our frontline partners in south-eastern Nepal.



**Supporting  
resilient  
communities  
during the  
pandemic**



Neeta Minz, © Freedom Fund 2021

The past year has been one of terrible hardship, especially for the world's most **vulnerable communities**. It has also been a year of community resilience, and a vindication of many of our long-held beliefs in the power of local, **people-centred solutions**.

Total funds raised

\$2M



Lives impacted

250,725



Number of communities supported

196



Total frontline organisations supported

95



## Covid-19 Emergency Response Fund

As the devastating impact of the covid-19 pandemic became clear, the Freedom Fund moved quickly to set up an emergency response fund to offer immediate small-scale funding to our 95 frontline partners working with highly vulnerable communities in Brazil, Ethiopia, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Thailand. The funds were used to provide small cash payments and relief supplies, as well as support advocacy on behalf of marginalised communities.

These funds supported 196 communities, **directly impacting 250,725 lives**.

The ERF achieved so much with limited resources and time because the intervention was owned and driven by affected communities and frontline groups. Our model allowed us to quickly bring resources to the communities that needed them most thanks to our connection to the frontline.

We are humbled by the life-saving work of our frontline partners, and we are thankful to the donors who have contributed to the ERF, without whom these achievements wouldn't have been possible.



**“During lockdown...I had no money...Now my shop has enough stock and is running well. My family and I are very happy.”**

COVID EMERGENCY RESPONSE  
FUND BENEFICIARY.

## Indian women at the heart of the community response

In our northern India hotspot, the lockdown proved an unexpected stress test for our grassroots model. Amid all the negative impact, the frontline response highlighted impressive long-term beneficial effects of the resilience that has been built over the past five years. Many of our target communities were able to mitigate the effects of the crisis far better than communities outside the program area. Throughout the hotspot, partners reported that many of our project communities are assisting others, whether it is helping villages set up grain banks to avoid exploitative loans, or assisting local authorities in mapping needy families or tracking out-of-state migrants so they can receive entitlements.

During the onset of the pandemic, communities in our project areas struggled to meet daily needs as the lockdown forced many families already on the brink into unemployment. In one of our project areas, about 200 young women started making and selling masks, which provided much-needed support for their communities and families. The Freedom Fund provided vocational training programs to young women to learn how to sew and make masks, helping marginalised communities cope with the pandemic and the related economic fallout.

The crisis has been challenging for all, but there are clear signs of improved resilience and response capacity in communities which have enjoyed past investment in collaborative community structures and grassroots organising. Our experience suggests that the hotspot model's emphasis on strengthened community structures and frontline NGOs can offer vital protection against external shocks and greatly facilitate life-saving crisis response activities.

# Women and survivors leading the fight

**"I strongly feel there is place for women leadership, and Freedom Rising is really shaping the women leaders."**

ANTI-SLAVERY LEADER

**"Women must discard fear."**

FREEDOM RISING PARTICIPANT



**We believe that a powerful frontline movement led by women and survivors is key to advancing the fight against slavery.**

**“I should be able to help all women know their rights...I must help them do that. That is my ambition.”**

ANTI-SLAVERY LEADER

The movement to end slavery must be led by those most affected by it, and the Freedom Fund is supporting and strengthening those leaders through a program we launched in 2020, **Freedom Rising**.

Women and girls comprise over 70% of those in slavery today, and gender discrimination is a key factor that drives exploitation. Yet very few women or survivors are supported to become leaders in the anti-slavery movement. This needs to change.

- Freedom Rising’s goal is to build a powerful and representative anti-slavery movement led by women and survivors. The program builds on the Freedom Fund’s existing work and enables us to scale our impact by equipping individuals with the necessary skills and support to lead more effective organisations and build collective power. It is unique for its:
- Explicit focus on elevating **emerging leaders**, especially those who have traditionally been excluded from positions of leadership such as women and survivors
- Grounding in **local context**, with local training in leaders’ own languages
- Emphasis on building **stronger and more strategic organisations**
- Ultimate goal of building a more **effective and inclusive movement**.

To create the conditions for a more inclusive and vibrant anti-slavery movement, transformative change is required at three levels – the leader, the organisation and the movement.

- **The Leader** – Each cohort of leaders will receive 12 months of leadership and technical skills training, focused on personal growth and leadership development, organisational management and movement-building. Due to the risks posed by covid-19, the program will start with online learning before moving to in-person when safe to do so.
- **The Organisation** – The training will be complemented by work to strengthen leaders’ organisation, networks and support them to play more active roles in the global anti-slavery movement.
- **The Movement** – After completing the year-long leadership training, participants will be formally introduced to the program’s alumni network, enabling them to continue to build and strengthen connections at the local, regional and international levels.

#### **Supporting and promoting the leadership of women and survivors**

Freedom Rising directly addresses the lack of support for and representation of women and survivors in the anti-slavery movement. The recruitment process will prioritise women and survivor candidates. Course content will highlight the value of lived experience and cover issues such as bias, discrimination and challenging social norms. Both male and female participants will be equipped to become advocates for gender justice and survivor leadership both within and beyond their organisations.

# Taking the local to the global

Research and evaluation are integral to the work of the Freedom Fund. Our research is rooted in the realities of frontline organisations and community members, and we are committed to making slavery visible, amplifying survivors' voices and identifying the best anti-slavery interventions – underpinned by empirical evidence. It is therefore critical that we understand the nature and scale of the problem, as well as what works for whom in what context, so that anti-slavery efforts can be more efficiently targeted.



**Our research helps us understand what works to move vulnerable communities from isolation to power. Since our founding, we have:**

**Designed and implemented a best in class monitoring system and processes for our more than 100 frontline partners.**

**Published a total of 77 reports, produced through collaborations with 41 research organisations from 12 countries.**

**Within that body of research, published nine prevalence studies to quantify the scale of worst forms of child labour, forced labour, sex trafficking and forced marriage.**

**Examined the broader systems that enable slavery to persist, with 20 of our reports focusing on business responses and 14 on government responses to modern slavery.**

## Understanding what survivors need to sustain their freedom

Survivors need to be leading the conversation about their own freedom. A study by the University of Nottingham's Rights Lab, Praxis and the Freedom Fund explores which reintegration services are most pivotal for sustaining trafficking survivors' freedom. The report presents the findings of 88 interviews with survivors of trafficking in the Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. While there is no single pathway to sustained freedom, respondents emphasised that access to decent employment, education and knowledge of their labour rights were critical for securing long-term freedom. Survivors' lived experiences of sustained liberation must become a focal point of research, and our report is an important step in that direction.

**"For me freedom is the capacity to raise a voice freely to demand my rights."**

FEMALE SURVIVOR, 40 YEARS OLD.

## Driving systems change to prevent children from abusive work

The Freedom Fund has been increasingly focused on achieving systemic change, by challenging the norms and rules that enable modern slavery to persist. The findings from an evaluation of our former central Nepal hotspot trace the sweeping change that our frontline partners has helped achieve, resulting in a significant reduction in minors working in adult entertainment venues and highly vulnerable to sexual abuse. This major shift across the sector was largely attributed

**"Change is coming slowly, people are feeling that they should not put up with abuse."**

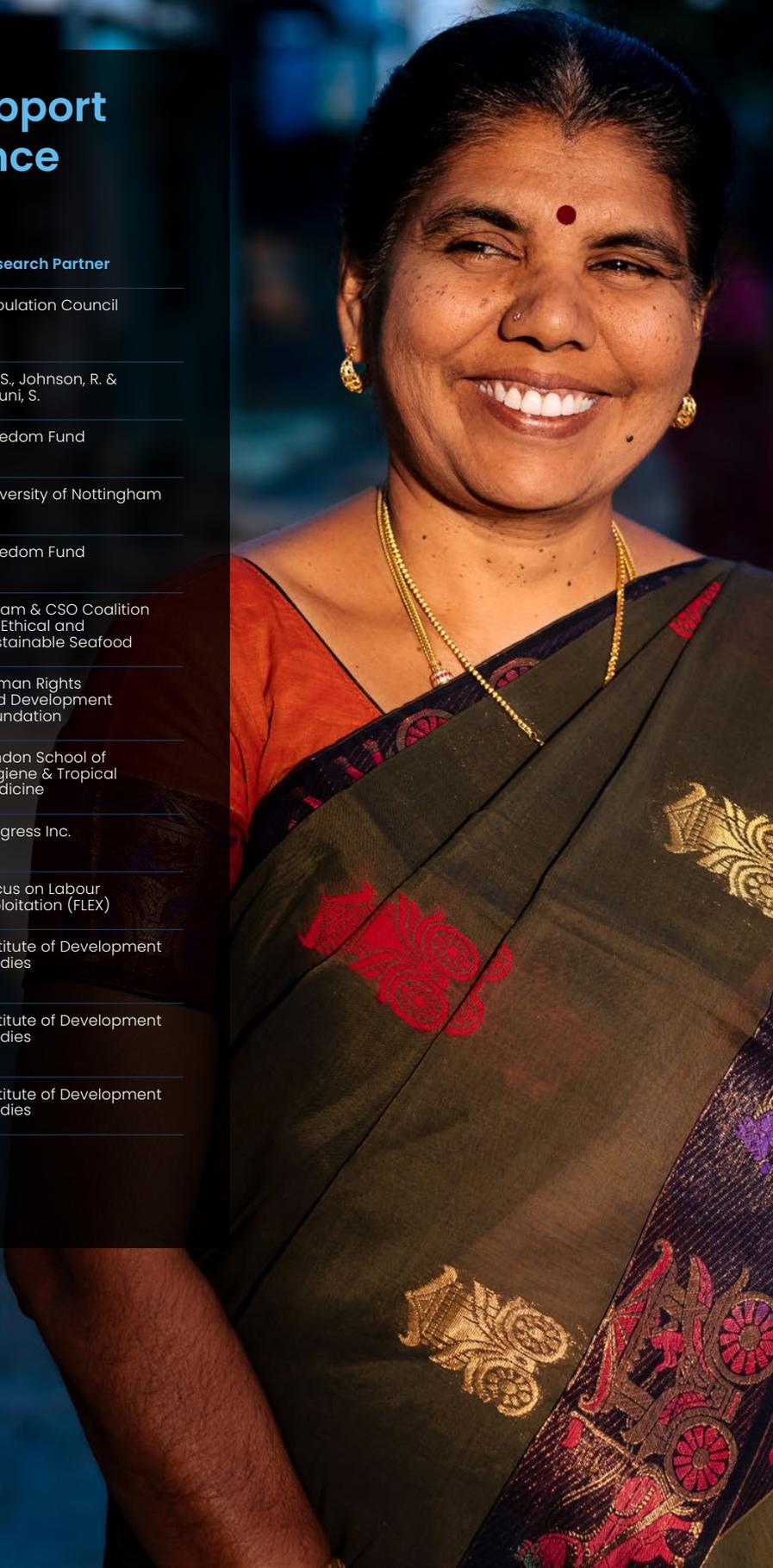
LOCAL NGO SUPPORTED BY THE FREEDOM FUND

to the enactment and effective implementation of new laws that ban children in these venues. There was strong sentiment among government officials and business owners that the Freedom Fund's NGO partners played a visible role in advocating for the stricter laws, facilitating government inspections and sensitising employers.

## The Freedom Fund's support for research and evidence

Date	Report Title	Research Partner
Mar 2021	Reducing the prevalence of child domestic servitude in Addis Ababa: Stakeholder and expert scoping study ↗	Population Council
Mar 2021	Preventing trafficking and protecting vulnerable young women through economic empowerment ↗	Ali, S., Johnson, R. & Opuni, S.
Jan 2021	Reflecting on the year that was: Lessons from the covid frontlines ↗	Freedom Fund
Oct 2020	The lived realities of sustained liberation in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, India ↗	University of Nottingham
Sep 2020	Global pandemic, local devastation: Frontline efforts to support the most vulnerable ↗	Freedom Fund
June 2020	Impacts of the covid-19 pandemic on small-scale producers and workers: Perspectives from Thailand's seafood supply chain ↗	Oxfam & CSO Coalition for Ethical and Sustainable Seafood
May 2020	Judicial harassment against labor rights activists ↗	Human Rights and Development Foundation
May 2020	Meneshachin scoping study: A global synthesis and analysis of responsible recruitment initiatives targeting low-wage, migrant workers ↗	London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine
April 2020	Evaluation of the Central Nepal hotspot project using the process tracing methodology ↗	Progress Inc.
Mar 2020	Worker-driven social responsibility: Exploring a new model for tackling labour abuse in supply chains ↗	Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX)
Feb 2020	Evaluation report on the results of the interventions to reduce the prevalence of bonded labour in Tamil Nadu ↗	Institute of Development Studies
Feb 2020	Evaluation report on the results of the interventions to reduce the prevalence of bonded labour in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh ↗	Institute of Development Studies
Feb 2020	Evaluation of the South-eastern Nepal hotspot to reduce the prevalence of bonded labour ↗	Institute of Development Studies

Our research reports can be found at:  
[freedomfund.org/newsroom/category/our-reports/](https://freedomfund.org/newsroom/category/our-reports/) ↗





**Changing the  
systems that  
allow slavery  
to persist**

Ultimately, the last step on the **journey from vulnerability to connection and power is systems change**. The Freedom Fund defines this change as transforming the systems that allow slavery to persist. By systems, we mean the root factors that enable slavery, such as vulnerable communities, failing legal systems, irresponsible business practices, weak civil society and others.

**We tackle systems change by supporting grassroots organisations on the frontline of the fight against slavery, and we complement this support by engaging directly with governments, businesses and media through our global initiatives.** By addressing cross-cutting issues like safer migration, mental health, strategic litigation and supply chains, we make it possible for millions of more vulnerable people who do not interact directly with our frontline partners to benefit from better anti-slavery policies.



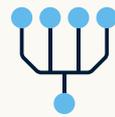
## Global Initiatives

Our global initiatives are a critical component of our commitment to the frontline. These initiatives generate knowledge, solutions and actions that influence governments, inter-governmental organisations, businesses and funders to end modern slavery. Each global initiative addresses a key issue or approach that is related to modern slavery prevention or eradication. The initiatives link organisations and strategies at the global level with the grassroots approaches of our hotspot partners, facilitating collaboration across stakeholders to encourage greater combined impact.



## Legal Strategies

Seeks to develop and test new avenues of legal accountability and strengthen the enforcement existing legal frameworks on slavery.



## Supply Chains

Seeks to eliminate modern slavery in corporate supply chains by focusing on key levers of reform throughout the supply chain ecosystem.



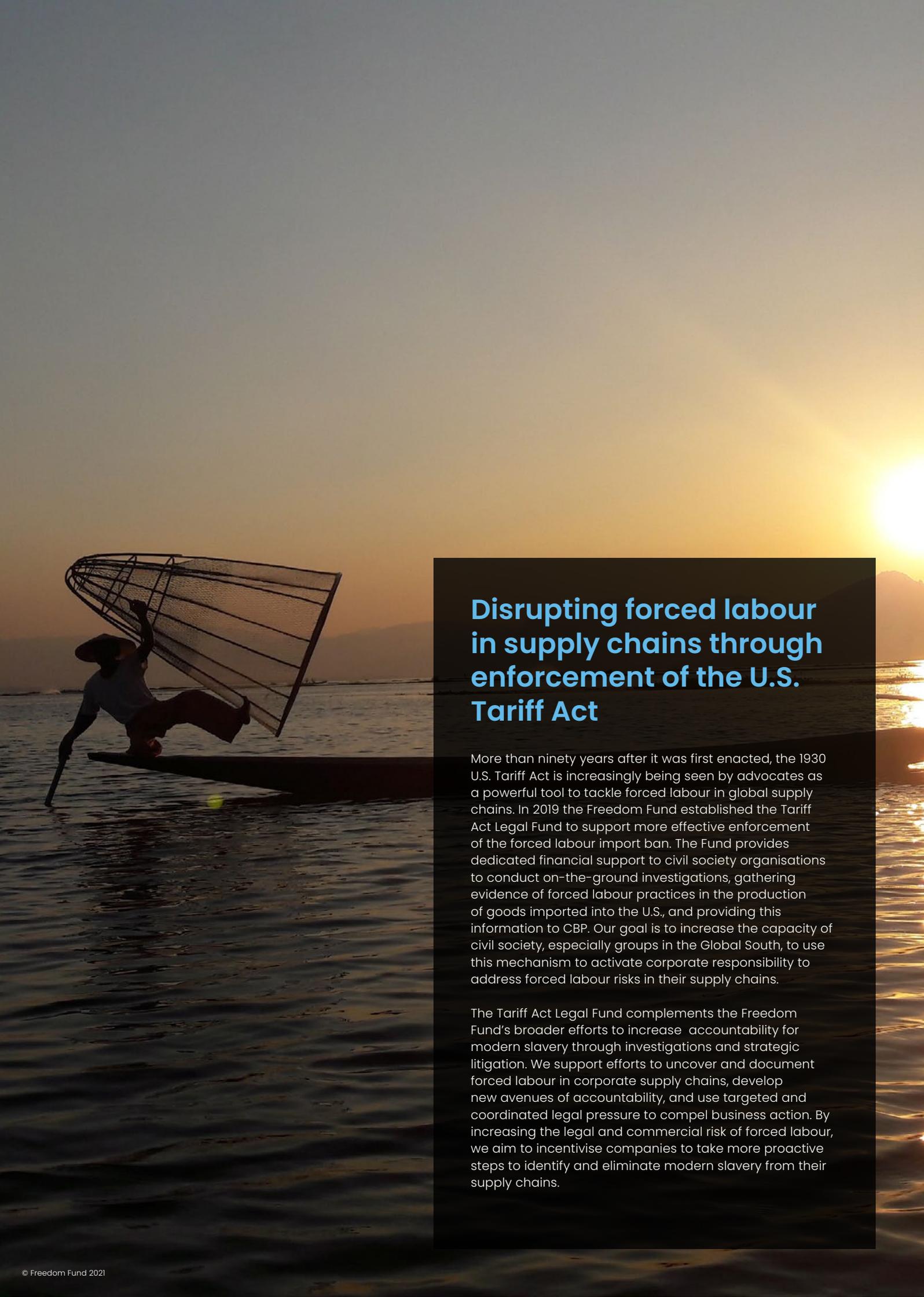
## Treatment of Mental Trauma

Seeks to identify and test approaches to treating mental health and trauma among victims and survivors of slavery in low resource settings and foster an informed and global discourse on this issue.



## Safer Migration

Seeks to generate robust evidence on what puts migrant workers at risk of exploitation and what interventions and strategies are needed to mitigate the risk.



## Disrupting forced labour in supply chains through enforcement of the U.S. Tariff Act

More than ninety years after it was first enacted, the 1930 U.S. Tariff Act is increasingly being seen by advocates as a powerful tool to tackle forced labour in global supply chains. In 2019 the Freedom Fund established the Tariff Act Legal Fund to support more effective enforcement of the forced labour import ban. The Fund provides dedicated financial support to civil society organisations to conduct on-the-ground investigations, gathering evidence of forced labour practices in the production of goods imported into the U.S., and providing this information to CBP. Our goal is to increase the capacity of civil society, especially groups in the Global South, to use this mechanism to activate corporate responsibility to address forced labour risks in their supply chains.

The Tariff Act Legal Fund complements the Freedom Fund's broader efforts to increase accountability for modern slavery through investigations and strategic litigation. We support efforts to uncover and document forced labour in corporate supply chains, develop new avenues of accountability, and use targeted and coordinated legal pressure to compel business action. By increasing the legal and commercial risk of forced labour, we aim to incentivise companies to take more proactive steps to identify and eliminate modern slavery from their supply chains.

## Catalysing systems change in the apparel industry

The apparel industry is one of the highest risk sectors for modern slavery. Severe human and labour rights violations can be found throughout the apparel supply chain – from cotton picking to textile spinning in mills and garment production in factories. International brands and retailers wield significant power to improve the conditions for workers in their supply chains. But whereas there has been progress in brands and retailers acting to improve standards in garment factories, including improvements in supply chain transparency, there has been minimal attention on tackling exploitative practices further down the supply chain.

The Freedom Fund's apparel sector program focuses on addressing forced and child labour beyond the first tier of the supply chain. Our systems change approach connects local programs in Jaipur and Tamil Nadu with a sector-wide supply chains global initiative that advocates for greater transparency and accountability within the apparel industry as a whole. This powerful combination amplifies the knowledge and experience of frontline partners to generate top-down pressure on brands and retailers to expand their commitments beyond garment factories and to address risks in textile production facilities.

In collaboration with the southern India hotspot the Freedom Fund's supply chain program supports the Tamil Nadu Alliance, a grassroots civil society network, to engage with international brands and retailers sourcing textiles from the region. Our focus is the implementation of the Tamil Nadu Declaration, a call to action for brands and retailers to address forced labour in textile spinning mills. Launched in 2020, the Declaration provides a roadmap for brands and retailers to engage in a sustainable, grassroots-led initiative based on five key goals: transparency, policy engagement, purchasing practices, worker-centred monitoring and collective grievance mechanisms.

This model has the potential to significantly shift business practices in the sector, by providing a platform for frontline groups to bring global corporate attention to the reforms needed at local level. Crucially we see this work as having the potential to general impact beyond our hotspots by pushing for industry-level change. Through partnerships with international NGOs such as Fashion Revolution, we are using Tamil Nadu as a case study to build momentum for greater supply chain transparency and accountability for the benefit of textile workers across the globe.





# The anti-slavery movement in a post-covid world

Although many countries where we work are still devastated by covid, we look ahead with hope. We have a much clearer picture of where and how we can best invest our efforts and resources, and with the knowledge that we and our partners are better set up than many to find creative, impactful and sustainable solutions, working with and through local stakeholders and communities, whose stories and voices we will continue to share.

# Planning for the future

By 2025 we will:

1. Transform the systems affecting 10 million people in slavery hotspots.
2. Generate the knowledge and solutions to drive government and business action and mobilise funding for the anti-slavery cause.
3. Empower the global anti-slavery movement by supporting a new generation of frontline Freedom Leaders and by directly strengthening at least 200 civil society organisations.
4. Ensure that the Freedom Fund is the vehicle of choice for investors who wish to direct their funding to the frontlines of the fight against slavery.



We will launch new programs in Brazil, Bangladesh, and Indonesia.



We will explore new programming to prevent the exploitation of child domestic workers in Ethiopia and more broadly in Africa.



We believe more funding must support survivor leadership. Committing to investment in these individuals, organizations and initiatives will create space for more survivors to lead the movement in meaningful ways, ensuring that anti-slavery interventions become more tailored and relevant.



We will roll out Freedom Rising to 100 leaders in southern and northern India, providing online and in-person leadership training, and mentorship support to leaders as they rebuild and recover from the impact of the pandemic.



We plan to launch the second phase of the Tariff Act Legal Fund, capitalising on the growing momentum around the Tariff Act to seek increasing enforcement of the U.S. forced labour import ban.



We will support partners across our programs to advocate for inclusion of the most marginalised populations in national covid-response plans.



We will conduct major new research studies into the number of children affected by slavery-like practices in Ethiopia and Brazil.



We will support a range of initiatives to provide economic security to survivors of slavery.

# Community of donors

The Freedom Fund is grateful for the generous backing from all its investors and donors in 2020. With their support we are transforming the lives of hundreds of thousands of people in slavery or at risk of it.

## Anchor investors



## Other investors

British Asian Trust  
Comic Relief  
Dorothea Haus Ross Foundation  
Elkes Foundation  
John Lewis Foundation  
Laudes Foundation  
Lisa Wolverton  
The Dolby Family  
The ELMA Relief Foundation  
The Millby Foundation  
UBS Optimus Foundation  
UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office  
UK Home Office  
U.S. Department of State, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons

## Directors

**Alan McCormick (Chair)**  
Managing Director,  
Legatum

**Andrew Doust**  
Founder and CEO,  
Plenitude Partners

**Natasha Dolby**  
Co-Founder,  
Freedom Forward

**Grace Forrest**  
Founding Director,  
Walk Free Foundation

**Molly Gochman**  
Artist  
and Human Rights Activist,  
Stardust Fund

**Felicity Gooding**  
Deputy CEO,  
Minderoo Foundation

**Diane Edgerton Miller (until March 2021)**  
President and CEO,  
Cassiopeia Foundation

**Mahendra Pandey**  
Senior Manager, Forced Labor  
and Human Trafficking  
Humanity United

**Philippe Sion**  
Managing Director,  
Humanity United

## Council of Advocates

Our Council of Advocates is a select group of passionate activists and philanthropists dedicated to supporting the Freedom Fund's mission. Members play a key role in the Freedom Fund's work, contributing their intellect, passion, advocacy and financial support.

The current members of the Council of Advocates include:

**Michelle Yue (Chair)**  
The Millby Foundation

**Natasha Dolby**  
Freedom Forward

**Minh Dang**  
Survivor Alliance

**Molly Gochman**  
Stardust Fund

**Debbie Salkind**  
Bright Horizon Fund

**Lisa Wolverton**  
Wolverton Foundation

**Catherine Zennström**  
Zennström Philanthropies