

Research into the effects of covid-19 and current livelihood opportunities in south-eastern Nepal

Summary

The Freedom Fund (<https://freedomfund.org/>) identifies and invests in the most effective frontline efforts to eradicate forced labour and human trafficking. We select key geographic areas – our hotspot projects – known to have high rates of exploitation, and where our interventions are most likely to have the greatest impact.

The Freedom Fund and its local partners in Nepal are implementing a three-year program to significantly reduce the prevalence of agricultural bonded labour in Nepal and support survivors to achieve sustainable freedom.

To help build the evidence base and design appropriate programmatic responses, the Freedom Fund is commissioning a research study to: (1) Understand the impact of covid-19 on Harawa-Charawa, Haliya and Kamaiya communities; and (2) Assess what decent employment and livelihood opportunities exist in these communities, and what support is most crucial to enable Harawa-Charawa, Haliya and Kamaiya agricultural labourers to secure and remain in decent work, and sustain a future free from exploitation.

The Freedom Fund anticipates this to be a seven-month project, with work commencing in August 2021 and two final reports due in February 2022. Timelines and research activities will be adaptable in response to shifting covid-19 and other related risks.

Eligibility

Both individual researchers as well as organisations and consortia are invited to submit proposals for this research. Researchers must be based in Nepal, or associated with a Nepal-based organisation with the capacity to conduct field work in provinces 2, 5 and 7. Applicants must also have demonstrable subject matter expertise and operational experience to deliver this project. Offers will be rejected if any illegal or corrupt practises have taken place in connection with the award.

Budget

Approximately USD 80,000 has been made available for this research project. Budgets will be reviewed with respect to the strength of the proposal in meeting the project objectives in a cost-effective manner, we do not simply prioritise the lowest budget.

Proposal deadline

Proposals should be submitted via email to Orla Jackson and Matilde Chora (ojackson@freedomfund.org, mchora@freedomfund.org) on or before 20th July 2021. **Proposals should be no more than 3 pages, plus CVs and annexes. Interviews will be arranged with shortlisted candidates 26th - 28th July.**

Background to agricultural bonded labour in Nepal

The Freedom Fund identifies and invests in the most effective frontline efforts to eradicate forced labour and human trafficking. We select key geographic areas – our hotspot projects – known to have high rates of exploitation, and where our interventions are most likely to have the greatest impact.

Nearly 400,000 people including women and children are estimated to be in agricultural bonded labour across Nepal. The government has tried to improve the situation for some but efforts have been fragmented and failed to address bonded labour nationally. The three largest groups affected are the Harawa-Charawa, Haliya and Kamaiya. There has been limited interaction between bonded labour groups, and while there are cultural and geographical differences between them, the issue and the systemic changes required to address it are similar. The covid-19 pandemic will continue to increase vulnerability to bonded labour.

The Freedom Fund and its partners are implementing a three-year program to significantly reduce the prevalence of agricultural bonded labour in Nepal and support survivors to achieve sustainable freedom with three overarching outcomes:

1. A united movement of agricultural bonded labour groups is formed and active at the national level.
2. The government changes policies to address agricultural bonded labour and provide support services for survivors.
3. Agricultural bonded labourers have greater resilience as a result of accessing government and NGO support services.

Impact of covid-19

Over the past year, the covid-19 pandemic has put enormous strains on vulnerable groups, especially migrants, women and children. In Nepal, children and adults in forced or bonded labour are facing hunger, disease, abuse and an inability to move to safer places. As part of the Freedom Fund's hotspot program, partner NGOs have worked closely with the target population throughout the pandemic and have observed the devastating impact, particularly in agricultural bonded labour communities. Agricultural daily labourers live hand to mouth. During lockdowns, when they have been prohibited from working, they do not have enough food to feed their families nor have cash to absorb shocks such as medical costs.

While the government-imposed lockdowns helped to tackle the spread of the virus, the communities argue that the resulting starvation and extreme poverty has brought a greater risk to their immediate survival. The impact of covid-19 pandemic on agricultural daily wage earners is also increasing the need for children to work to support their families.

Sustainable livelihoods

Before covid-19, there was a significant need to connect agricultural bonded labourers to decent work. Alternative employment and livelihood opportunities are primary mechanisms for community members to sustainably escape bonded labour. It is likely that this need has grown exponentially since the pandemic with even more vulnerable people forced into exploitative working conditions.

Background to this research

Objective

This research project will consist of two complementary components:

1. **Participatory research** with Harawa-Charawa, Haliya and Kamaiya agricultural labourers in provinces 2, 5 and 7 to understand the impact of covid-19 and its aftereffects on their communities.
2. **Market assessment** of available employment and livelihood schemes, and supplementary services that are needed to enable agricultural labourers in provinces 2, 5 and 7 to access and remain in these schemes.

Key research questions

The research plan will be developed following selection of the researchers and should seek to answer some of the following questions. As part of the contracting process, the list below will be further reviewed and refined with the selected research team's advice.

Part 1: Participatory Research

- a. What have been the most significant impacts of covid-19 on families in Harawa-Charawa, Haliya and Kamaiya communities? Key areas for investigation include: health, education attendance, income and debt, food security and employment. How has the impact differed across provinces 2, 5 and 7?
- b. How has the impact of covid-19 affected women and men, adults and children in these communities differently? Particular attention should be paid to changes in care duties as a result of school closures, domestic and gender-based violence, and early marriage.
- c. What have been the demographic changes in the Harawa-Charawa, Haliya and Kamaiya communities as a result of the pandemic, in particular inward and outward migratory flows?
- d. How have these changes affected the local labour market in terms of demand and supply of workers, wage rates, loan and working arrangements with landlords?

Part 2: Market Assessment

- a. What does decent employment and livelihood mean for Harawa-Charawa, Haliya and Kamaiya families? What suitable options exist for communities in provinces 2, 5 and 7?
- b. What training, employment and livelihood schemes are available in provinces 2, 5 and 7? This includes, but should not be limited to, schemes provided by federal and local governments, NGOs, aid donors and private sector employers.
- c. What are the most significant barriers that prevent agricultural labourers accessing and completing these schemes? To what extent do these barriers become more (or less) significant based on gender, caste, ethnicity and other socioeconomic characteristics?
- d. Following completion of these schemes, what are the further barriers that prevent agricultural labourers from securing and remaining in decent employment and livelihood? To what extent do these barriers become more (or less) significant based on gender, caste, ethnicity and other socioeconomic characteristics?
- e. What supplementary services are needed to enable Harawa-Charawa, Haliya and Kamaiya agricultural labourers to access these schemes, and afterwards, secure and remain in decent employment and livelihood?
- f. Pragmatically speaking, what supplementary services should be prioritised by the Freedom Fund's hotspot program, and what services should form the focus of broader advocacy to local governments and aid donors?

Research methodology

There are two distinct parts to this study - Participatory Research and Market Assessment - each using a different data collection method to answer a different but interrelated set of research questions. The Freedom Fund invites the researcher to propose a data collection approach that they believe would be most suitable for achieving the objectives of this research project.

The proposed methodology should address the following:

- **Participatory research:** Describe in brief how the research team will identify and hold discussions with an inclusive range of community members. Please explain how interactions will be deliberately designed to encourage participation and candid feedback from marginalised groups, and how power dynamics between different community members would be minimised and managed.
- **Market assessment:** Please outline the types of stakeholders who will be invited to provide inputs into the assessment, and the team's approach for securing their participation. We anticipate that participants would

include officials from provincial and local government departments, training and employability service providers and local employers.

- **Phase(s) of data collection:** Whilst there are two parts to the study, it may be possible and more cost-efficient to combine the data collection for both parts of the study. For example, data collection for each part of the study being done concurrently in the same location.
- **Collection of qualitative and quantitative data:** Describe the data collection methods including the types of data collection tools that will be used and how these will be developed. Please also describe how respondents will be sampled for each part of the study and the target number of respondents for each.
- **Analysis of qualitative and quantitative data:** Please outline how both types of data will be analysed, for instance what software will be used. We will be looking for you to demonstrate how you will ensure rigor and accuracy of the analysis, in addition to processes to ensure data quality.
- **Operational and ethical considerations:** Highlight possible ethical or operational issues with the proposed methodology, such as interviews with children or disclosure of sexual exploitation or intimate partner violence. If the project aims to apply for ethical approval from an Institutional Review Board, please describe which institution and your experience with such processes. If not, then please describe your process to ensure that suitable experts (including survivors) are advising on the ethical procedures for this project.

Project deliverables and high-level timeline

The tentative schedule of main deliverables is as follows. As part of the contracting process, the timeline below will be further reviewed and refined with the selected research team's advice.

Main deliverables	Proposed timeline
Desk review of project documents and internal reports	Aug 2021
Research protocol finalised, incorporating feedback from the Freedom Fund	
Training of interviewers and data collectors	Sep to Dec 2021
Fieldwork and data analysis	
Part 1: Participatory research on the impact of covid-19	Nov 2021
– Presentation of preliminary findings	
– Validation of results with partner CSOs and affected communities	
– Draft of Report #1 submitted to the Freedom Fund for review	
Part 2: Market assessment of available employment and livelihood schemes	Jan 2022
– Presentation of preliminary findings	
– Validation of results with partner CSOs and affected communities	
– Draft of Report #2 submitted to the Freedom Fund for review	
Report #1 and #2 finalised, incorporating feedback from the Freedom Fund	Feb 2022
Dissemination of results	

Budget

The Freedom Fund has budgeted approximately USD 80,000 for this project. Budgets will be reviewed with respect to the strength of the proposal in meeting the project objectives in a cost-effective manner, we do not simply prioritise the lowest budget.

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

- Personnel cost
- Precautions for covid-19 (such as personal protective equipment, infrared thermometers, etc.)
- Other direct costs (such as training and meeting costs, travel and accommodation, tablets, etc.)
- Overheads
- VAT and other taxes, if applicable

Please note that costs related to report translation, design and printing will be borne by the Freedom Fund.

Proposal format

Interested parties should prepare a proposal of **no more than 3 pages plus annexes**. Proposals should contain the following sections:

1. Short biography of principal investigator(s) and key team members, outlining relevant subject matter expertise and prior experience leading similar research projects. CV of the principal investigator should be included in the annex. Past report(s) from similar projects could be included as a link or in a separate annex.
2. Methodology, addressing the topics listed in the 'Research methodology' section of this RFP.
3. Team structure, defining the role and time commitment of key team members.
4. High-level work plan for key project phases and deliverables.
5. Proposed budget in USD.

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

Criteria for evaluating proposals

In evaluating proposals, the Freedom Fund will use the criteria below. Offers will be rejected if any illegal or corrupt practises have taken place in connection with the award.

When evaluating, we will also be looking for proposals to demonstrate how the research design will achieve efficiencies (for instance, by combining the fieldwork for both parts of the study).

Technical criteria	Weighting
a. Contextual knowledge of the research team, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Knowledge of issues relating to agricultural bonded labour and situations of marginalised ethnic groups in Nepal.- Knowledge of the economic, social & political environment in Nepal, especially provinces 2, 5 and 7.	30%
b. Technical capacity of the research team, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Experience with qualitative and quantitative methods and demonstrable understanding of participatory research and market assessments.- Language capacity (Nepali).	40%
c. Team structure and staffing levels are adequate to deliver quality outputs within the desired timeframe.	20%

Financial criteria	Weighting
d. Consideration of all potential expenses.	10%

Proposal timeline and submission instructions

24 June 2021	Release of RFP.
By 20 July 2021 11:59pm Nepal time	Final proposals due. Please submit all documents to Orla Jackson and Matilde Chora (ojackson@freedomfund.org, mchora@freedomfund.org) with "Proposal for research in Nepal" as the email subject line.
By 23 July 2021	All shortlisted research teams will be notified.
By 30 July 2021	Discussions held with shortlisted research teams.
Early-August 2021	Contract signed with selected research team.