



# Evaluation of the Central Nepal hotspot project using the process tracing methodology

## Summary report

April 2020



## Executive summary



Since 2015, the Freedom Fund has been operating the Central Nepal hotspot project, supporting a network of locally-based non-governmental organisations to reduce the number of children working in the Adult Entertainment Sector (AES) in the Kathmandu Valley. These are venues where young women and girls are often engaged in harmful work, and where the commercial sexual exploitation of children is known to take place.

In 2019, the Freedom Fund commissioned Progress Inc. to conduct an independent evaluation of the Central Nepal Hotspot to assess progress since inception. The purpose of this evaluation is twofold: i) to assess the contribution of the hotspot project towards the observed reduction in prevalence of minors in the AES, and ii) to examine other aspects of the hotspot project's performance.

### **Process tracing - the reduction in the prevalence of minors in the AES**

It is understood that there has been a notable reduction in the numbers of minors working in Kathmandu's AES. A prevalence study by Dank et al. 2019 found significantly lower numbers than those estimated by several studies a decade prior (Terre des hommes 2009, Shakti Samuha 2008, MWCSW 2008 and NHRC 2004). Reducing the number of minors working in the AES sector has been the overarching goal of the hotspot, and in order to determine the extent to which the hotspot project contributed towards this impact a Process Tracing methodology was employed. In this evaluation, Process Tracing starts from a known outcome – in this case the reduction of minors – and examines the preceding events and activities that collectively led to the outcome. This study comprises a sample of 103 interview and group discussion respondents, including both stakeholders who are engaged in and external to the project.

The vast majority of study participants agreed or somewhat agreed (78%) that the reported reduction in minors aligned to what they had witnessed personally. Five potential pathways leading to this change were assessed. There was a strong consensus that the two pathways which resulted in demand-side changes – namely (1) increased government inspections of venues and (2) changes in the law – had been the most instrumental in reducing the numbers of minors working in the AES. Of the stakeholders interviewed, 60% (42 out of 70) noted these two outcomes as being the most impactful. This view was widely expressed among different stakeholder groups within and external to the hotspot project, including AES workers, AES venue owners and managers, government representatives and NGO partners. The high number of mentions and the diverse range of stakeholders who concurred on this point, makes this a highly credible finding.

Within each of these two causal pathways, the evaluation examined the specific activities and outcomes that made the strongest contribution to the realisation of the pathway. Details are provided on pages 5 & 6.

This assessment also involved identifying key actors whose efforts drove the observed changes. Among respondents who believed increased inspections to be the main causal mechanism for reducing the prevalence of minors: 90% acknowledged the role played by the Freedom Fund's partner NGOs in bringing this about. This sentiment was most strongly expressed among owners and managers of AES venues. Among interviewees who believed changes in the law were the most important mechanism for reducing the prevalence of minors, 64% credited the work of the NGOs. This

was most strongly expressed among AES workers and central government. Collectively, this provides robust evidence that the partner NGOs have played a pivotal role in reducing the demand for minors in the AES.

### **Other evaluation findings - progress against stated objectives**

While the process tracing focused on the higher-level impact, the rest of the evaluation examined the progress of the hotspot against its original objectives and against the OECD DAC evaluation criteria of effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, and sustainability. During the period 2015 – 2018 the hotspot project had been working towards three objectives. This evaluation concludes there has been considerable progress towards these objectives, although this has been more evident in some areas than others.

**1) Create systems and services necessary for the minors to speedily, safely, and permanently leave the sector where CSEC exists:** The project has supported AES workers to create alternative livelihood options for workers to permanently exit the sector. The hotspot has also promoted individual empowerment and well-being of those still within the sector - 64% of workers interviewed felt they were more aware of their rights after being associated with Freedom Fund partners. While AES workers highlighted the importance of vocational services and education support, there were questions about whether these were sufficiently aligned to the jobs market and of sufficient scale to be effective.

**2) Reduce the use of children in the industry by influencing customers and employers not to engage minors:** As mentioned above, the project played an important role leading to the reduction of minors working in the AES. In addition to this higher-level work, direct outreach with owners and managers has also resulted in improved practices of AES employers, including age verifications, better working conditions and less arbitrary pay. This finding was evident when comparing between AES venues within and outside of the hotspot project. The deterrence effect of legal cases against employers and venues was also raised by a number of respondents, with news of the 299 legal cases supported by Freedom Fund partners spreading through business and social networks. Furthermore, the hotspot project has begun working towards shifting norms of venue customers, and a behaviour change campaign was launched in 2019. The evaluators see demand-side interventions as having been particularly effective and recommend that they be a continued focus.

**3) Prevent children from being recruited into jobs that put them at risk of commercial sexual exploitation:** The project has contributed towards prevention by positively shifting attitudes among community members in source communities where minors are at-risk of knowingly or unknowingly entering the AES. The shift was achieved by spreading awareness about the risk of unsafe migration and increasing parents' willingness to keep their daughters in school.

Results of the project are considered proportionate to the comparatively limited financial and human resources that were devoted to this pillar of the work. By bringing together local NGO partners to share learning and plan joint actions, the hotspot model is efficient by pooling project resources and knowledge, as well as amplifying the effects of advocacy to government and businesses. However, the review highlighted some areas where improvements in efficiency could be made, such as narrowing down the scope of activities performed by partners and encouraging each organisation to develop more specialist services and expertise.

The project has had an impact on local systems and these changes hold a degree of permanency - there have been changes in the law, changed behaviours amongst local law enforcement, an anti-trafficking movement in Kathmandu has been spurred and a Community of Practice established amongst NGOs – these outcomes should represent durable change. Nonetheless, there are concerns about outcomes backsliding after the project ends. There is limited viability for NGOs to maintain current activities without continued external funding, and it should be a priority for the Freedom Fund and its partners to find other funding sources or to handover the activities to other entities, preferably the local government.

Finally, although this project has been effective in reducing the number of children working in AES venues, the broader goal of ending CSEC in the Kathmandu Valley is not fully realised. There is emerging evidence that some elements of the commercial sex industry have shifted to more hidden settings – such as in less formal AES venues, on the street and through online forums. In response to this, continued attention and interventions are still needed to tackle the sexual exploitation of children in the Kathmandu Valley.

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## Acronyms

AES	Adult Entertainment Sector
CSEC	Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
FF	Freedom Fund
INGO	International Non-governmental Organisation
MAC	Monitoring Action Committee
MWCSW	Ministry of Women, Children & Social Welfare National
NCRC	National Child Rights Council
NHRC	Human Rights Commission Nepal
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
OECD DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee
WOFOWON	Women Forum for Women in Nepal

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## Background

### Aim of the Central Nepal hotspot project

In recent years, there has been a notable growth in venues that make up the adult entertainment sector (AES) in Nepal. These are venues where young women are often engaged in harmful work, and where the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is known to take place. The nature of this exploitation varies across venues, ranging from workers being made to flirt with customers to being forced to engage in intimate activities and sexual intercourse.

The Freedom Fund (FF) is a global organisation that identifies and invests in frontline efforts to eradicate modern slavery in countries and sectors where it is most prevalent. Since August 2015, FF and its local partners have been working in the Kathmandu Valley to reduce the number of children working in the AES. During the period of 2015 to 2018, the project's objectives were the following (although they have since been revised in 2019):

1. Strengthen the ecosystem to help minor girls (and others) leave commercial sex work.
2. Reduce demand for minor girls in the adult entertainment sector and commercial sex work.
3. Reduce the number of minor girls entering into commercial sex work and jobs or industries, which put them at risk of entering commercial sex work.

The Freedom Fund project employs a 'hotspot' approach, with a focus on identifying and funding an exemplary group of local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to work in a complementary and comprehensive manner. The range of hotspot activities include preventing vulnerable girls from entering the AES, supporting existing workers in safely and permanently exiting harmful work, prosecuting exploitative employers and customers, as well as drawing on the NGOs' expertise to inform laws and government policies.

A 2019 prevalence study by Dank et al 2019 commissioned by the Freedom Fund, suggests a significant reduction in the number of minors in the AES over the past decade. Dank's study estimates approximately 10,000 females working in the AES in Kathmandu Valley – of which 1,600 are minors. Earlier estimates by the NGO Terre des hommes (2009), NGO Shakti Samuha (2008), the Ministry of Women, Children & Social Welfare (2008) and National Human Rights Commission Nepal (2004) all reported much higher numbers, ranging from 1,760 to 13,200 minors working in the AES.

### Purpose of this evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the contribution of the hotspot towards the observed reduction in prevalence of minors in the AES, as well as examine the overall performance of the hotspot project.

The key evaluation questions were:

1. What has been the contribution of the hotspot project, if any, in reducing the prevalence of minors within the AES? [Contribution towards impact]
2. To what extent has the hotspot and its partners made progress towards the three stated

objectives? [Effectiveness]

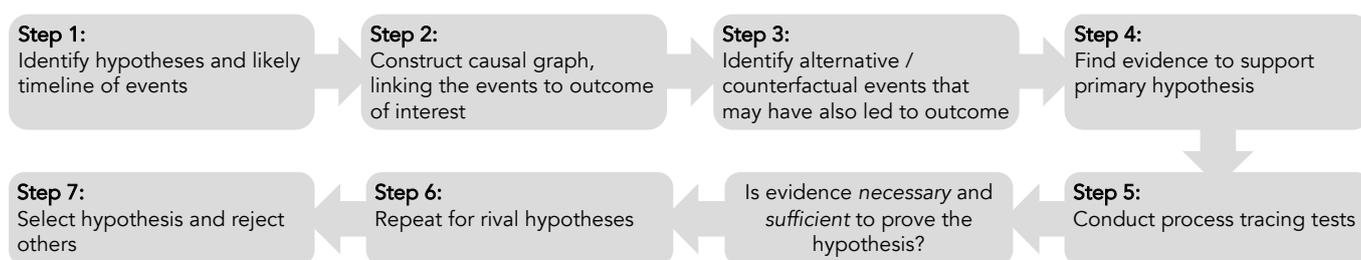
3. Based on the impact achieved as a result of partner activities, are the results proportional to the investment of time and resources? [Efficiency]
4. Considering the change in context, are the hotspot's current goal and objectives still relevant? Are there any emerging priorities or activities that should be incorporated into future hotspot activities or any existing activities that could be deprioritised? [Relevance]
5. To what extent is the progress of outcomes likely to be sustained? What should the focus be for the remainder of the funded period to ensure that the impact achieved thus far is maintained and that the reduction in the prevalence of minors in the AES continues? [Sustainability]

The results of this evaluation are intended to produce actionable recommendations for the remainder of the Freedom Fund's project funding, as well as provide lessons learnt for other civil society groups and funders who work with the AES or on the issue of CSEC in Nepal.

## Methodology

The process tracing method was selected for this evaluation as it is well suited for identifying and assessing causal inferences, particularly where there is a known outcome (ie, the reduction in prevalence of minors) and the aim is to look back in time to identify probable actions and events (within and outside of the hotspot project) that contributed to the outcome.

The particular method used in this evaluation was one adapted from Ricks and Liu (2018). The steps followed are outlined below:



One unique feature of process tracing is the systematic collection and triangulation of qualitative evidence, which is used to compare the strength of evidence and draw conclusions about the likely causal pathway/s that led to the known outcome. This is done via the use of 'tests' to compare the quality of evidence for and against possible causal pathways ('hypotheses'). In the context of this evaluation, the tests were adapted to assess the following:

1. The amount of evidence that show change through a particular causal pathway – this is deemed as having *necessary* evidence; and
2. The extent to which there are divergent sources of evidence that corroborate a particular causal pathway – this is deemed as having *sufficient* evidence.

The collection of evidence in this evaluation was entirely qualitative, based on feedback from 103 stakeholders – made up of 70 respondents who provided input via one-on-one semi-structured interviews, plus 33 participants through focus group discussions. This sample consisted of a broad range of stakeholders, it included people directly involved with the hotspot project (either as participants of project activities or NGO staff) as well as those who were fully external to the project. Among participants of project activities – namely: prospective/current/former AES workers, owners/managers of AES venues and community group participants in source communities – the selection of respondents was randomised to elicit diverse views across those who were strongly and weakly engaged with the project. The randomisation was done at three levels: firstly by selecting randomised activities, secondly by randomising NGOs who perform the activities, and thirdly by randomising participants within those project activities. The table below illustrates the sampling method for each stakeholder group.

Stakeholders interviewed		Sampling method	Sample size
Internal to hotspot project	Partner organisations (includes TA partner)	All hotspot partners	14
	AES workers	Randomised from list (partner referral)	10
	- Current workers		9
	- Former workers		4
	- Prospective workers		
AES venue owners & managers	Randomised from list (partner referral)	5	
Freedom Fund hotspot management team	Purposive	3	
External to hotspot project	AES workers not being supported by the project	Snowball (independent)	6
	AES venue owners & managers not being engaged by the project	Randomised from list (independent)	3
	NGOs and INGOs working in similar sector	Purposive (independent)	3
	Police	Purposive (independent)	2
	Community group representatives	Purposive (independent)	2
	Government officials	Purposive (independent)	5
Central government	4		
Local government			
Total			70

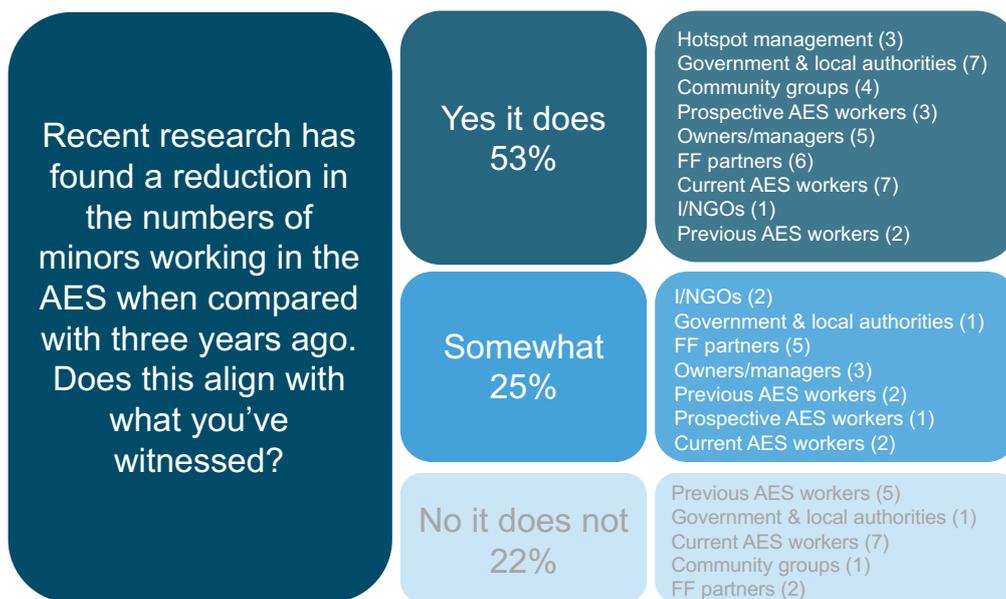
Survey questionnaires and interview guides were developed jointly by Progress Inc and the Freedom Fund. All interviews were conducted by trained Progress Inc staff, in either Nepali or English depending on the respondents' preferences. Field work took place between April and May 2019 and the evaluation timeline is as follows:

Apr 2019	Apr – May 2019	Jun – Aug 2019	Sep 2019	Dec 2020
Desk-based review of project documents and relevant research on AES. Finalisation of research protocols and interview guides.	One day of training followed by four weeks of interviews. All interviews were conducted by Progress Inc. staff: Pooja Koirala, Amanda Manandhar Gurung, Bibhav Basnet.	Qualitative data cleaning, coding, analysis and report writing.	Draft report submitted to the Freedom Fund for review.	Final report incorporating Freedom Fund's feedback.

## Project's contribution towards impact

### Observations on whether there has been a reduction of minors in the AES

The evaluation began by assessing the extent to which the respondents' own experience and observations aligns with the findings of the recent prevalence study, which indicated a reduction in the number of minors working in the AES in Kathmandu.



\*Government & local authorities refers to representatives from central government, local government and the police  
 \*\* Presented in an order proportionate to group size

The vast majority of stakeholders (78%) agreed or somewhat agreed that there had been a reduction in the number of minors working in the AES when compared with three years ago. These stakeholders were varied in their perspectives and direct exposure to the issue, which gives strength to this finding.

### Causal pathways which led to a reduction of minors in the AES

Below is the framework derived from the project's theory of change, with five causal pathways (represented vertically) which could all theoretically lead to the project goal of reducing the prevalence of minors. The pathways are not meant to be mutually exclusive, rather they could progress concurrently and also in mutually reinforcing ways.

Based on feedback from the evaluation respondents, there was a strong consensus that the two pathways focusing on demand-side changes – namely the (1) increased inspections of venues and (2) changes in law, most notably the passing of the Children's Act 2075 (2018) – had the strongest effects on reducing the prevalence of minors in the AES. Of the stakeholders interviewed, 60% of them (42 out of 70) noted these two actions as being the most impactful. This view was widely expressed among different stakeholder groups within and external to the hotspot project, including AES

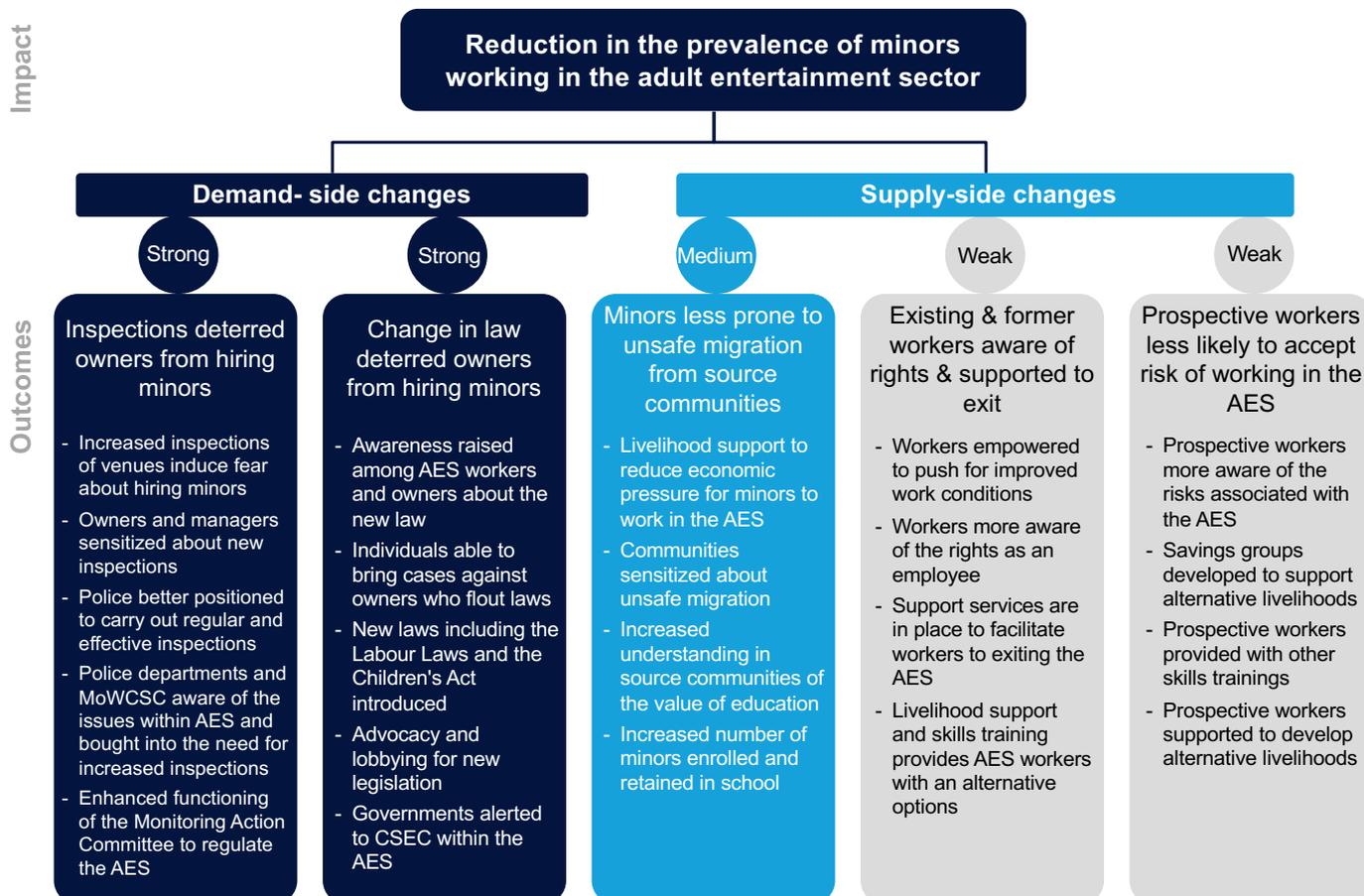
workers, AES venue owners & managers, government representatives and NGO partners. The high number of mentions and the diverse range of stakeholders who concurred on this point, makes this a strongly credible finding.



*“When the government created the policy, it ‘hit’ them [the venue owners]... Police are now monitoring better, and they are realizing that children in these venues is an issue to be concerned about.” – local NGO supported by the Freedom Fund.*

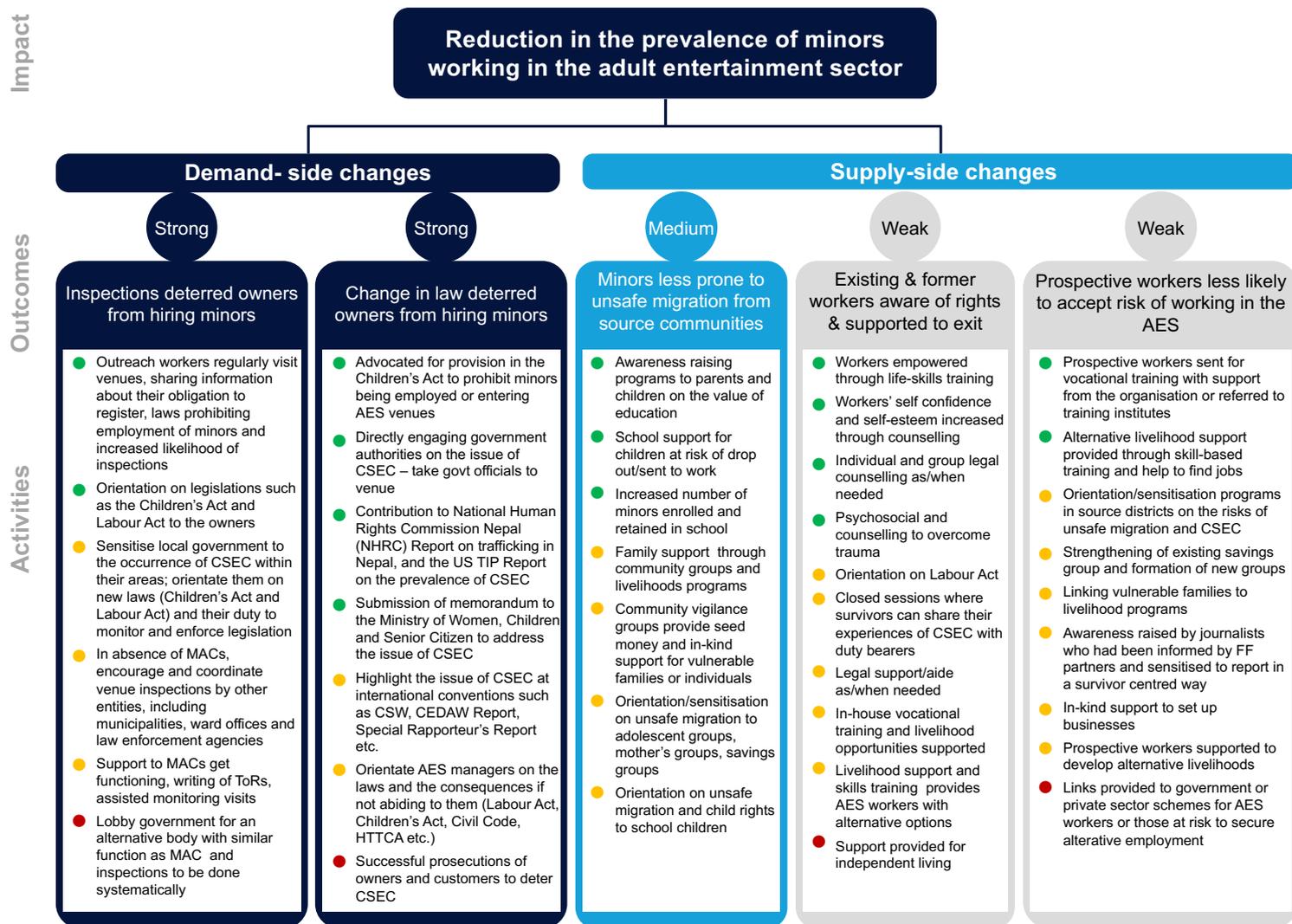
The role of increased inspections and changes in the law were seen as intertwined by many of the interviewees. For some, the threat of inspection was believed to be the biggest deterrent factor, and inspections had increased because there were changes in the law; for others, the fact that the law had changed was the biggest deterrent factor, although, this was effective because there was also implementation of this law, and increased inspections were in effect ensuring owners were clear about the punitive implications of not adhering.

The other three pathways, focusing on supply side-changes, were far less frequently mentioned by the respondents as the cause for the reduced prevalence of minors. Nine of the respondents (13%) credited the reduction in unsafe migration from source villages as a key contributor to the reduced prevalence of minors in the AES. In particular, they cited the effectiveness of the awareness campaigns in highlighting the risk of their children migrating unaccompanied to Kathmandu as well as promoting a higher value among parents to keep their daughters in school. The other two pathways – relating to actions to support existing, former and prospective AES workers – received only a few mentions, each of these pathways was credited by five respondents (7%) only.



## Project activities that contributed to a reduction of minors in the AES

Within each of the causal pathways, the evaluation examined the specific activities that made the strongest contribution to the observed reduction in the prevalence of minors in the AES. The range of activities delivered by the Freedom Fund partners are listed below, and the extent to which each activity led to the causal pathway being realised is indicated by the colour ranking system (green = strong, amber = medium, red = weak):



### The importance of direct services for survivors and at-risk workers

The findings above suggest that direct services may not be the main mechanism for ending exploitation in the AES. While recognising this, the evaluation team would like to make a distinction between macro-level systems change and individual needs, especially the needs of survivors and those at high-risk of extreme exploitation.

Direct services are highly impactful for the survivors and at-risk individuals who access them. Feedback from the women and girls interviewed highlights that direct services drastically improve their day-to-day experiences and longer-term trajectory.

Counselling and livelihood support have helped to empower workers to safely leave the sector and find alternative livelihoods. While direct services also inform workers about their rights and give them the confidence to push for them to be met, helping them to improve their experience at work and reduce or eliminate the exploitation experienced.

### Awareness raising needs to be complemented by broader structural changes

These results seem to suggest that even though girls and women may be made aware of the levels of exploitation in the AES, they also need viable alternatives and the freedom to exercise their choice.

The limitations of awareness campaigns is the reason why the FF hotspot project conducts awareness raising always in parallel with other structural interventions. These include setting up workplace grievance mechanisms to give adult workers a greater voice in challenging the hiring of minors, and directly supporting children to safely exit employment and re-enrol into education.

The FF recognises that better knowledge can improve individual decisions and actions. But in addition, girls and women also need to have mechanisms that enable and protect them against the pressure exerted by employers and earning expectations from families.

Stakeholders from across the spectrum attributed the reduced number of minors in the sector to demand-side changes. This feedback was most strongly expressed by owners/managers, government (national and local), I/NGOs and hotspot management, and the vast majority of the FF partners saw this as the main factor. That a diverse range of respondents concurred with this observation gives significant weight to this pathway. Furthermore, these stakeholders have typically been involved for a number of years and sit at a level where they observe overall trends.

63% of those interviewed believed reduced demand has led to the reduction in minors in the AES

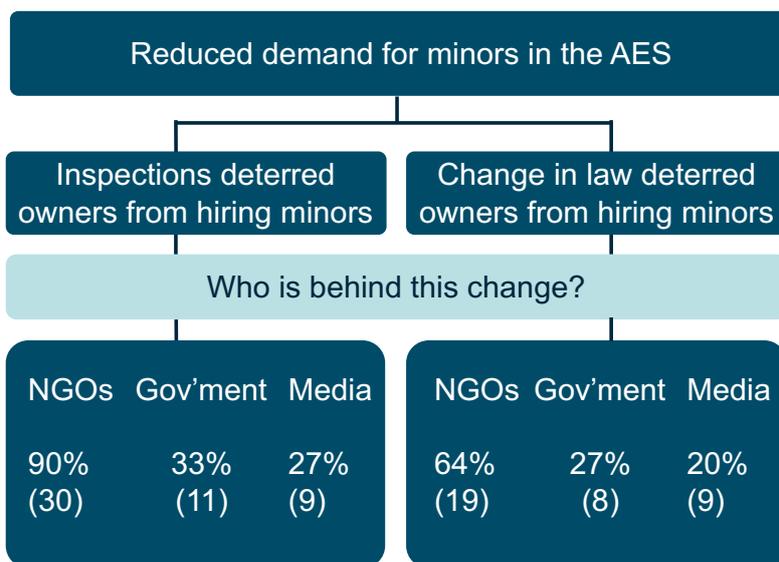
Owner/managers (8)  
Government & local authorities (9)  
I/NGOs (3)  
Hotspot management (3)  
FF partners (10)  
Community groups (2)  
Current AES workers (6)  
Prospective AES workers (1)  
Previous AES workers (2)

\* Presented in an order proportionate to group size

The role of increased inspections and changes in the law were seen as intertwined by many of those interviewed. For some the threat of inspection was believed to be the biggest deterrent factor, and inspections had increased because there were changes in the law; for others, the fact that the law had changed was the biggest deterrent factor, although this was effective because there was also implementation of this law. Either way, the efforts invested into advocating for the AES to be incorporated into the Children’s Act and Labour Act, making employers aware of the new laws, and coordinating inspections and raids were all seen as highly pivotal to reducing the demand for minors in the AES.

### Actors who contributed to a reduction of minors in the AES

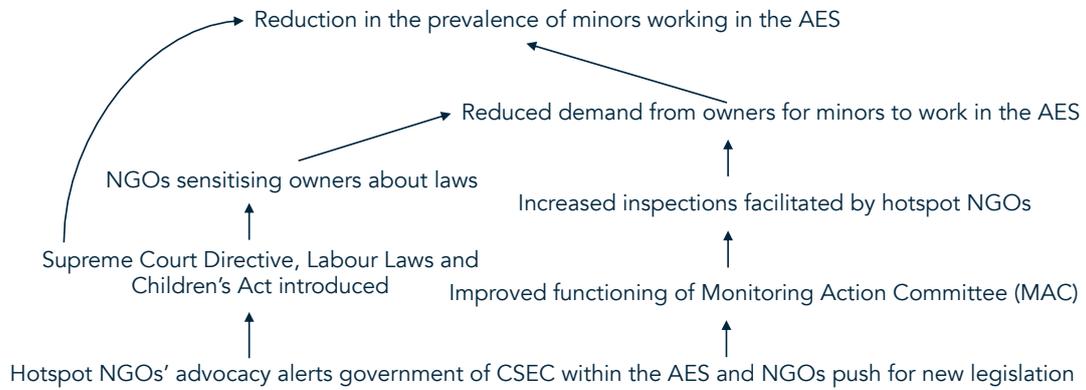
Part of the scope of this evaluation was to also identify the key actors whose efforts were most critical in driving the observed changes. Among respondents who believed inspections to be the main causal pathway for reducing the prevalence of minors: 90% acknowledged the role played by the NGOs in bringing this about and this sentiment was most strongly expressed among owners and managers of AES venues. Among interviewees who believed a change in the law was the most important mechanism in reducing the prevalence of minors, 64% credited the work of the NGOs, most strongly expressed among AES workers and central government. Collectively, this provides robust evidence that NGOs, most of whom are supported by the Freedom Fund, have played a pivotal role in reducing the demand for minors in the AES.



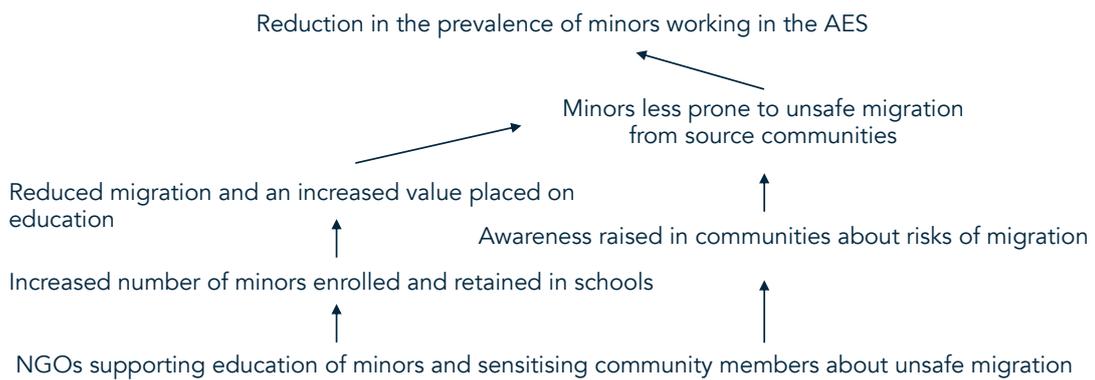
As stakeholders have different incentives for highlighting their own work or demoting the work of another group, weights were applied to control for these potential biases – after weighting the results the order and distribution remained the same. Results presented above are without the weighing.

## The full causal pathways that lead to a reduction of minors in the AES

### Primary causal pathway established:



### Secondary causal pathway established:



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## Project effectiveness, efficiency, relevance & sustainability

While the process tracing component of the evaluation looked at the broader picture in assessing the contribution of the project to the observed impact (ie, a reduction the prevalence of minors in the AES), this section focuses on examining the performance of the hotspot project itself. The research questions are categorised into four themes: effectiveness, efficiency, relevance and sustainability – in line with the evaluation criteria recommended by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC).

### Effectiveness: achievement of project objectives

*Under the theme of 'effectiveness', the evaluation has sought to answer the following questions:*

- *The extent to which the hotspot and its partners have made progress towards the three stated objectives?*
- *The extent to which the hotspot contributed towards the reduction in the prevalence of sexual exploitation of minors within AES (including via community and prevention work)?*

This evaluation considers the hotspot to have made significant progress towards the three project objectives – although progress has been much more straightforward for some of the objectives, and more complex in others.

#### **Objective 1 - create systems and services necessary for the minors to speedily, safely, and permanently leave the sector where CSEC exists**

The Freedom Fund partners have mainly adopted a “soft” approach to supporting workers in ending existing forms of exploitation within the AES, and to help workers – particularly minors - safely and permanently exit the AES over the medium term.

The majority of AES workers associated with the project stated they now feel more empowered and confident - 64% of workers interviewed felt they were more aware of their rights after being associated with FF partners. For some, this meant being able to refuse activities of a sexual nature, or being aware of rights about pay and benefits, for others this was not accepting emotional and or physical violence. Their description was also echoed by the venue owners interviewed, who noted that workers have become more vocal and demanding of their conditions of work.



*“We know that we should be getting payment according to time we worked, different salaries according to time [i.e. part time vs full time], that there should be no touching without permission otherwise it counts as harassment even if it is just hand holding. We don't have to go with anyone, even if the owner says so, we are not slaves.” - AES worker participating in the hotspot project.*

AES workers participating in the project highlighted the importance of vocational training, income generation and educational support in helping them explore alternative employment outside of the AES sector, however they also noted that the business grants offered by NGOs were too small to be of real use.

In contrast to the Freedom Fund approach, the government bodies take a penalising stance towards the AES, with monitoring by bodies such as the Monitoring Action Committees, and police raids for inspections or arrests. While these are essential in terms of long-term and overall reduction of demand by owners as described in the prior sections of this report above, it does not appear to assist minors to exit the AES in a sustainable manner. In these raids, minors being employed would also be arrested which would be traumatic for them. Minors would also be summarily fired or left without work, and without an alternative livelihood, minors would have no choice but to return to the sector for work.



*“Other work [outside of the AES] are difficult to get without an education... there's no choice, we have to survive, we have to eat.” – a former AES worker.*

To minimise the unintended harm of raids and arrests, it's important that FF partners continue to work directly with workers to promote individual empowerment and well-being, and create alternatives for workers to gradually, safely and permanently exit from the sector.

## **Objective 2 - reduce the use of children in the industry by influencing customers and employers not to engage minors**

As detailed in the earlier sections, this evaluation has found that the hotspot activities have made a remarkable achievement in reducing demand for minors in the AES – primarily through legislative changes and increased inspections. Interviewees have credited FF's NGO partners for their visible role during the policy making process, and subsequently working with lower-levels of government to implement the policies through inspections and raids.

A further form of deterrence, prosecution of owners and customers, has also been pursued by the project. Since the hotspot began, 299 legal cases have been supported by FF partners. These cases are believed to have created a deterrent to engaging with minors – with news of arrests and prosecutions spreading through business and social networks. However, to truly reduce the demand for children, these punitive approaches need to be complemented with other activities to challenge systemic business practices and social norms.

To date, many of the hotspot activities have focused on shifting the practice of employers, and the evaluation has found that the project has been very effective towards this objective. As detailed in our analysis of the causal pathways, policy change and police inspections facilitated by FF partners have resulted in concrete change among venue owners and managers. The employers and AES workers who are supported by the project have seen increased age verification requested by employers and better working conditions such as improved working hours and less arbitrary pay. During individual interviews with the five owners engaged with the project, all of them were aware of the Children's Act and Labour Act and knew about the punitive repercussions if these were not followed. In contrast, employers and AES workers not engaged with the project noted that there has been no change in the hiring of minors and exploitative working conditions – which suggests that FF partners are having a direct effect on the employers engaged with the project, and this change is not uniform across all employers in the AES.

In relation to shifting norms among AES customers, the evaluation has found only nascent hotspot activities working toward this objective. In 2018, the Freedom Fund published the report 'Minors in Kathmandu's adult entertainment sector: What's driving demand?' which was the first ever report looking at the issue of CSEC in Nepal through a perpetrator lens. This was followed by a behaviour change campaign in April 2019 targeting men who frequent AES venues to improve their knowledge, attitudes and behaviours towards minors in the AES. The results of the behaviour change campaign will be released in early 2020. The evaluation team recommends that the hotspot project could do more work directly targeting customers.

### **Objective 3 - prevent children from being recruited into jobs that put them at risk of commercial sexual exploitation**

This objective is delivered primarily through activities to create awareness at the community level about unsafe migration, discourage young people from entering the AES sector, and support at-risk young girls to obtain jobs outside of the AES.

The project activities have positively created attitudinal change among the community members, by spreading awareness about negative aspects of unsafe migration. Of the 9 at-risk women and girls interviewed (4 in Kathmandu and 5 in rural source communities), 6 of them were familiar with the risks of unsafe migration and sex trafficking, and spoke about the dangers of unaccompanied minors heading to the city to look for jobs. This increased awareness has been further reinforced by the formation of local protection committees that work as watchdogs to prevent trafficking in the area, the effectiveness of this was acknowledged by a member of the local government and the role of FF partners in the formation was credited.

Working in parallel with the above, the community level campaigns also emphasise the value of keeping girls in school – which has resulted in a clear attitudinal shift among parents. At the beginning of the project, NGOs often have to play a visible role in supporting the education of underprivileged children, who would have otherwise been compelled to quit studies to look for jobs. However, the community group members interviewed remarked that things are different now, with many parents encouraging their children to continue their education rather than sending them off to work.

The changes observed in the source villages that are supported by the project are highly encouraging. In the case of Sindhupalchowk, the positive effects of the intervention has been impressive enough to convince the local government to scale up the educational support intervention. However, perhaps in areas where FF partners are operating, unsafe migration to the city and into the AES has reduced or even stopped, but there are still new entrants from other source areas. This objective is being fulfilled in areas that partners are operational in, but unfortunately the tide will not be stemmed without national coverage. Therefore, raising awareness of unsafe migration and sex trafficking is an activity the government should become responsible for.



*"Due to the awareness of the risks associated with AES, job preference is shifting towards unskilled wage work, mining along rivers etc." – local NGO supported by the Freedom Fund.*

## Efficiency: investment of project resources

*Under the theme of 'efficiency', the evaluation has sought to answer the following questions:*

- *Based on the impact achieved as a result of partner activities, are the results proportional to the investment of time and resources?*

Considering the observed reduction in the number of minors working in the AES, the resources invested seem proportionate to the amount of time, human and financial resources invested. The reduction in minors is believed to be the result of persistent efforts over the past three years and equally, the sustained investment. Notwithstanding, there are some areas where the evaluators believed efficiency could be improved.

In assessing the efficiency of the project, there are several specific aspects of the hotspot that should be highlighted as good practice:

- **The Community of Practice model is efficient and beneficial.** It has served as a network for NGO partners to come together, share their experiences and learn from each other.
- **Organisational capacity has also been improved.** The NGO partners listed numerous trainings received through the hotspot project that they felt strengthened their organisations. Staff working within partner organisations felt that they had been given ample opportunities to improve their skills.
- **The FF hotspot team had the relevant expertise and were well-equipped** to guide the project was a common view among the NGO partners. They also found FF responsive to their needs. For example, following reports of depression among some frontline staff, FF commissioned a technical assistant provider (Community Development & Research Organisation Nepal) to support FF partners and frontline staff in addressing their psychosocial health issues.

On the other hand, the evaluation team also found a number of opportunities for improving the efficiency of the project:

- **The scope of activities performed** by some partner organisations might be too wide, leading to already limited resources being spread too thinly across a variety of activities. This is particularly acute in the provision of livelihood support activities, with FF partners only given a modest budget to implementing these interventions. In turn, this small budget only allows each NGO to support a limited number of beneficiaries, neither reaching a sufficient scale nor level of specialisation that is required for livelihood interventions.
- **There may be duplication between partners** in some of the services provided, and agreeing on clearer delineation of duties in terms of geographic coverage or specialisation may help increase efficiency. In addition, the numbers of beneficiaries reached could be increased this way.
- **Project reporting were perceived as very time consuming** and as taking up a lot of human resource, drawing staff away from delivering services. FF requires reporting in English which exacerbates this. Staff also felt a pressure to show immediate results, but given the nature of the work this isn't always feasible.

In summary, it can be said that the results of the project is proportionate with the time and investment from the FF into the partner organisations. The hotspot model helps to amplify the effects of project resources, by encouraging cross-learning and capacity building among NGO partners, however more can be done to coordinate their efforts to minimise duplication and encourage specialisation.

## Relevance: appropriateness in an evolving context

Under the theme of 'relevance', the evaluation has sought to answer the following questions:

- Considering the change in context, are the hotspot's current goal and objectives still relevant?
- Are there any emerging priorities or activities that should be incorporated into future hotspot activities or any existing activities that could be deprioritised?

Given that CSEC within the AES has not been eliminated, the goal of the hotspot project is clearly still relevant. The progress achieved thus far - evidenced in the reduction in the prevalence of minors in the AES - illustrates the significance of the hotspot project. Notwithstanding, the context of CSEC and the AES in Nepal has evolved, particularly shaped by more families and communities made vulnerable by the climate crisis and natural disasters, as well as emerging opportunities made possible by Facebook and other online platforms.

To fit this changing context, some adjustments to the project activities are recommended:

- **Target informal venues within the AES:** While FF partner activities appear to have been successful in improving the practices in more established venues, particularly the *Dohoris*, there remains a proportion of AES venues that are run informally, many of which are non-registered and are fairly mobile, such as *khajaghars* (teashops) where exploitation of minors is believed to persist. To remain relevant there should be more activity which focuses on such venues that operate beneath the radar.
- **Tackle CSEC outside of AES venues:** Amongst FF partners 15% reported that they believed the nature of exploitation to have changed, and that exploitation was now more frequently taking place in private residences outside of the AES or that minors were being contacted through the internet. The current model is not set up to tackle this form of exploitation. The FF has commissioned a scoping study to better understand whether there is a trend for exploitation of minors within Kathmandu to now happen outside of the AES, and to understand exactly what form this is now taking
- **Increase focus on customers:** While outreach work with owners/managers has been deemed effective in reducing demand, there has been less of a focus on outreach focusing directly on customers. It is noted that a behaviour change campaign targeting customers has taken place, with results due in early 2020. Nonetheless, there is scope to run other interventions to target customers. For example, alongside successful conviction of customers who engage in CSEC, more media coverage could be generated to spread awareness that sex with an underage minor is a prosecutable crime.
- **Tailor skills provided to market demand:** there may be an oversaturation in the market for certain livelihood skills, such as tailoring or hairdressing/beauticians. Some partners such as Women Forum for Women in Nepal (WOFOWON) have started providing more innovative skills such as computer skills training. FF partners should continue to provide a range of skills demanded by the market such as fixing mobile phones, plumbing, or electrical skills.

## Sustainability: maintaining impact

Under the theme of 'sustainability', the evaluation has sought to answer the following questions:

- To what extent is the progress of outcomes likely to be sustained?
- What should the focus be for the remainder of the funded period to ensure that the impact achieved thus far is maintained and that the reduction in the prevalence of minors in the AES continues?

Continuity of momentum and impact after the project funding has ended is seen as a concern. At the time of writing, a succinct sustainability strategy is missing, and project partners are worried about maintaining the progress made thus far and avoiding backslide. While some of the project's achievements are considered to have sustainable components, there is still a need to identify funding to ensure the continuation of activities that will sustain outcomes.

There have been significant changes in the AES context since the project was designed. Given the environment has changed, adaptation of the core focus of the project would be needed to ensure further reductions in the exploitation can be made. There is strong evidence that the number of minors working in the sector has reduced when compared with three years ago, systematic changes that made this possible – reduced demand brought about by increased inspections and changes in the law – need to be safeguarded. FF partners believe that the reduction in minors was possible due to their consistent efforts in advocating with the government and pressing for monitoring of venues.

A number of successes of the project should be considered to hold a degree of sustainability. The Children's Act and Labour Act have been changed to ban minors in the AES. These achievements are significant, not only do they firmly set a precedent, but they mark a permanency of this position in that the legislature surrounding the topic has been formally amended. In addition, inspections increased in part owing to the trainings have been provided to police force and evidence provided by NGOs, both of which are changes to broader government systems and likely to have a durable effect.

The hotspot project has spurred an anti-trafficking movement in Nepal and promoted the voices of survivors and at-risk groups. A Community of Practice has been established among NGOs, and hundreds of local groups – including mothers' groups, credit and savings groups, youth clubs and watch groups – have been established to tackle human trafficking. These groups will serve as a localised means of continuing to support livelihoods, spread awareness of the risks of working within the AES and unsafe migration, and teach minors about their employment rights after the hotspot has ended.

Additionally, the resource centres provided by some of the FF partners will also allow the workers to continue furthering their knowledge and skills, and improve their livelihoods. One partner is starting peer-to-peer sessions, where past workers support current and prospective workers in raising awareness of exploitation in the AES and their rights to recourse. Such self-initiatives from FF partners is a positive step towards ensuring sustainability.



*"Before in restaurants, employees felt ashamed, they would give different names but they are now giving their real names. Change is coming slowly, people are feeling that they should not put up with abuse." – local NGO supported by the Freedom Fund.*

Nonetheless, there are concerns that without continued pressure from NGOs the focus will be taken off the AES, inspections may reduce, prosecutions may fall and the issue of CSEC could drop down the government's agenda. For the remainder of the project period, the partners need to engage local police forces and government representatives to ensure inspections continue. Currently there is no funding saved for the continuation of this work, seen as a concern.

This evaluation seeks to highlight that there is no clear means or mechanism in place to ensure the continuation of activities currently funded by the hotspot project. As a priority, the project should focus on finding other sources of funding for the partner NGOs, or handing over activities to another entity, preferably the government to continue providing livelihood assistance, education support, enforcing inspections, and awareness raising. The view of the evaluators is that without a clear sustainability strategy it is difficult to foresee the activities and outcomes being maintained.

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## Conclusion and recommendations

The reduction in the prevalence of minors in the AES – as indicated by the prevalence study by Dank (2019) – is corroborated by the observations among interviewees. Two-third of the respondents to this evaluation said that they have seen fewer minors in the sector compared to three years ago. In particular, AES employers and workers have noted the harsher environment that discourages the hiring of children in AES venues. Clearly, the work of NGO partners during the policy making process of the Children’s Act and Labour Law, and subsequent support to lower-level government departments in conducting raids and prosecuting offenders have strongly contributed to the reduction in prevalence.

Based on the findings from the evaluation, the study draws attention upon a few aspects that need to be considered by the FF within the remaining time period of the hotspot project. In addition, we also offer suggestions for other civil society actors – NGOs and INGOs – who are working to end CSEC and other forms of exploitation in the AES in Nepal.

### Recommendations for the Freedom Fund

#### **Sustain progress observed**

1. The FF should continue working with partners to develop the sustainability strategy. The sustainability strategy should determine which activities partners should focus on for the end of the funded period and afterwards, in order to safeguard project outcomes. The sustainability strategy should also assist in determining how activities can be continued, whilst reducing reliance upon the FF.

### Recommendations for other civil society actors

#### **Continue activating government mechanisms**

2. Ensure inspections of venues are continued by activating government mechanisms. Partners should advocate for an official government structure to be put in place to continue venue inspections, this structure could replicate the MAC or be an alternative. Advocacy efforts should target specific ministries such as the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen; Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security; National Child Rights Council (NCRC) and Municipal Government
3. Continue to advocate as a standalone body or coalition of locally based organisations. This body should be locally-owned in that the organisations determine their own agenda and work to deliver it, rather than directed by a funder.

#### **Continue pressure on employers**

4. Hone-in on the more exploitative venues within the AES, such as dance bars. Efforts should include outreach to employers to improve practices and to spread awareness of the Children’s Act 2075 (2018) and Labour Act 2074 (2017).
5. Increase focus on hidden or ‘underground’ venues beyond the AES. Research is currently underway into these venues - ensure research is shared with relevant NGO groups and funders. Research should also inform design of interventions that are appropriate and effective to tackle exploitation in these venues.

### **Increase pressure on customers**

6. Target perpetrators and 'bystanders' of exploitation through a demand-side campaign to develop more positive and respectable norms. A behaviour change campaign that targets potential perpetrators is already underway, conducted by Equal Access. This campaign is being evaluated, results are due in April 2020. Contingent upon the results of the evaluation, NGOs should consider ways of continuing and scaling up the campaign.
7. Focus on increasing numbers of prosecutions of customers, in addition to continuing case work to prosecute owners. Some partners are already working on prosecutions however there is typically less of a focus on customers. Those working in the field should aim to create media coverage and spread awareness that sex with an underage minor is a prosecutable crime.

### **Continue support for AES workers**

8. Increased knowledge and confidence seem to have occurred. Focus on forming mechanisms where workers can exercise their rights and negotiate with employers. These mechanisms should include partnerships between workers and trade unions (Nepal Trade Union Congress and the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Union), as well as workplace committees, peer-to-peer networks etc.
9. Livelihood support should be informed by market demand and designed to prepare workers for jobs that are readily available. For instance, in fixing mobile phones or working with computers. Where training is provided towards setting up of a business, this training should be coupled with finance support such as linking participants to microloan institutions.

### **Prevent risky migration of girls from source areas**

10. Support norms around the value of girls continuing education. These norms could be bolstered by mobilising government support (as with the case in Sindhupalchowk). Efforts could focus on getting the government to roll out these norms and messages within existing national-level programs.
11. Take the awareness sessions in source communities to national scale via government mechanisms. Safer migration is already embedded in the school curriculum, NGOs should work with government to determine a means of reaching adults on a national scale.

### **Strengthen coordination between NGOs**

12. More coordination and geographic delineation among frontline NGOs would help to avoid duplication of responsibilities.
13. Consider NGOs specialising in specific areas and partner NGOs referring workers/ at-risk individuals to those with specific specialist skills, for instance in psychosocial counselling, legal cases, livelihood support etc.

Reduced demand due to the combined deterrent effect of increased inspections and changes in the law

**Necessary evidence established:** strength of evidence in that the majority of stakeholders (63%) reported demand-side changes in terms of the reduced demand due to the decreased likelihood of owners hiring minors and linked this back to either the deterrent effect of the new laws or increased inspections. This group includes AES workers, central government, local government, FF partners, owners, and international NGO representatives.

**Sufficient evidence established:** the breath of stakeholders crediting demand-side changes constitutes sufficient evidence. Potential incentives for answering in a particular way were taken into consideration in determining whether this was sufficient. As such, it was determined that the group didn't have ulterior motives to respond in this way.

The above both sit on the positive side of each spectrum, and as such go a considerable way towards affirming the causal inference. As such the pathway passes the smoking gun test. However, it is not strong enough on both to constitute the doubly decisive test being passed.

**Rival hypothesis is substantially weakened.** The rival hypothesis was that reduced demand is due to norm changes of customers or owners that are independent of the hotspot's work, mass media coverage, governmental changes that are independent of the hotspot's work, or that changes are due to the work of other organisations.

The media is not considered a major determinant, it was mentioned by only 9 stakeholders as having a contributory role. Respondents credited the hotspot organisations for their activities that led to the reduction of demand, none mentioned other child rights groups or organisations. Non-beneficiaries also did not mention other organisations. In terms of government changes independent of the hotspot's work, there was no evidence in the study to indicate that the changes would have taken place without the pressure from the hotspot, however, there was no concrete evidence to the contrary either. It is reasonable to assume that any new policies were significantly influenced by the advocacy of the FF partners. No elements of the rival explanation would pass the necessary nor sufficient tests, therefore they are considered to be discounted.

Minors are less prone to unsafe migration

**Necessary evidence** – only 14% (10/70) respondents reported that minors are less prone to unsafe migration. While this gives some strength to this hypothesis it is not sufficient to consider it necessary.

**Sufficient evidence** – although there is some breath to the voices affirming this hypothesis (group includes prospective AES workers, community groups, local government and FF partners). Given that none of the previous or current AES workers, nor the owners, report this trend. We cannot say there is sufficient evidence.

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