

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

External program evaluation: Ending agricultural bonded labour in Nepal

January 2024

INTRODUCTION

The Freedom Fund is a global fund with the sole aim of helping end forced labour and human trafficking. We are a catalyst in the global effort to end forced labour and human trafficking, working in the countries and sectors where it is most prevalent.

Through our investments and support, we aim to shift power, so that frontline organisations and communities can shape and drive the change required to bring forced labour and human trafficking to an end.

By partnering with survivors and those at risk of slavery as well as visionary investors, governments and anti-trafficking organisations, we bring together the knowledge, capital and will needed to dismantle the systems that allow slavery to exist and thrive.

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Freedom Fund has been working on the issue of caste-based bonded labour in Nepal for almost a decade. In 2014, it established the south-eastern Nepal hotspot program targeting the Harawa-Charawa bonded labour communities. Since 2021, with funding from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), the Nepal program expanded its focus to catalyse a national effort against bonded labour, working in the far west with Haliya and Kamaiya bonded labourer communities through a new partnership with ActionAid International Nepal and their local partners. At present, our community-based program supports eight local NGOs, and delivers various form of services for women, men and a significant number of children trapped in exploitative child labour. Additionally, the program also supports a national-level united movement—the Joint Struggle Committee—that was formed in 2022 and advocates for the liberation of the Harawa-Charawa and the full inclusion of Haliya and Kamaiya in the government’s rehabilitation schemes.

SCOPE OF CONSULTANCY

The Freedom Fund is seeking a research consultant or team to conduct an external evaluation of the Nepal hotspot program to examine the impacts of its program interventions aimed at reducing the prevalence of agricultural bonded labour in Nepal. Our program partners are operating in Provinces 2, 5 and 7. The Freedom Fund

anticipates this project will take up to five months, with planning commencing in February 2024 and final reports due by June 2024.

ELIGIBILITY

Individuals and organisations with relevant research experience are invited to submit proposals for this evaluation. The lead applicant must be a legally registered entity according to the laws of the country in which it operates. The Freedom Fund has a strong preference for individuals and organisations based in Nepal.

BUDGET

A fee of approximately US \$25,000 has been made available for this evaluation. 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. This is a fixed price contract.

INTRODUCTION TO THE FREEDOM FUND AND ITS WORK IN NEPAL

The Freedom Fund is a global non-profit organisation that identifies and invests in the most effective frontline efforts to eradicate forced labour and exploitation in the countries and sectors where it is most prevalent. We work with frontline organisations to help protect vulnerable populations, liberate, and reintegrate those exploited and prosecute those responsible. By partnering with survivors and those at risk of exploitation as well as visionary investors, governments, and anti-trafficking organisations, we bring together the knowledge, capital and will needed to dismantle the systems that allow forced labour and exploitation to exist and thrive. Through our investments and support, we aim to shift power, so that frontline organisations and communities can shape and drive the change required to bring exploitation to an end.

In 2014 the Freedom Fund established a program targeting “Harawa-Charawa”, a traditional system of agricultural bonded labour affecting marginalised Dalit communities in the southeast of Nepal. Harawa-Charawa bonded labourers work up to 17 hours a day and are often paid by their “landlords” in rice instead of cash. Many cannot meet basic human needs and live in extreme poverty. Due to a combination of discrimination, poverty, landlessness, and a lack of access to credit, communities borrow money at illegally high interest rates of up to 60% per annum. The debts are frequently passed from generation to generation, with little possibility of families escaping the cycle.

The Madhesh and Lumbini Provinces (also referred to as Province 2 and 5) have the highest intensity of multidimensional poverty, with an estimated 2.3 million households classified as ‘poor’ and lacking in public services. The largest concentration of forced labour in the country affects about 70,000 households residing in six of the eastern Terai districts of Madhesh Province. In particular, 8.7% of households in Madhesh Province have a school-age child who is not attending school, the worst rate across all seven provinces. Work is agricultural and largely seasonal, and child labour remains common among Harawa-Charawa, as throughout the sector: 55% of child labour in Nepal occurs in agriculture.

When the hotspot first began in 2014, the Freedom Fund partnered with local NGOs working in Harawa-Charawa communities to deliver services such as education and alternative livelihoods while forming hundreds of community groups to raise awareness about employment rights as well other rights frequently denied to the community such as citizenship, education, and healthcare. In 2015, the Freedom Fund provided resources to support the first district level Harawa-Charawa meetings. Empowered through their participation in the community groups, the meetings enabled activists to come together and share their ideas and experiences. This quickly became a catalyst for the movement and Harawa-Charawa Committees were formed by 2016 across our three program districts (Siraha, Saptari and Dhanusa). In 2017, the Freedom Fund facilitated a process for the district level committees to elect 11 national level representatives, marking the formation of the Harawa-Charawa Rights Forum.

In 2020, the hotspot transitioned to a more advocacy-focused program, centred around the Harawa-Charawa movement with a few core NGO partners. Since 2021, this shift has been bolstered with a grant from Norad for 30 million NOK from March 2021 to June 2024. With the Norad grant, the program has continued to focus on movement building and government advocacy and expanding from a focus solely on the Harawa-Charawa and the southeast, to a national effort against bonded labour, working in the far west with Haliya and Kamaiya bonded labourer communities through a new partnership with ActionAid International Nepal and their local partners. Our current partners are operating in Provinces 2, 5 and 7 where there are high populations of the three groups: Province 2 with the Harawa-Charawa, Province 5 with the Kamaiya and Province 7 with the Haliya. Our partners support over 700 community groups across the three provinces.

BACKGROUND TO THIS EVALUATION AND MAIN OBJECTIVES

The scope of this evaluation is to examine the impact of the Freedom Fund's current project in the reduction in the prevalence of agricultural bonded labour in Nepal, particularly the Harawa-Charawa, Haliya and Kamaiya groups, based on its three main outcomes. An external evaluation of the project is a requirement under the agreement between Norad and the Freedom Fund, to document outcomes and/or effectiveness of the project, for accountability purposes. While the Norad fund concludes in 2024, the insights and recommendations from the evaluation findings will inform and guide actions, given that the Freedom Fund intends to continue support for the issue in the future.

Outcome 1: A united movement of agricultural bonded labour groups is formed and active at the national level.

Outcome 2: The government changes policies to address agricultural bonded labour and provide support services for survivors.

Outcome 3: Agricultural bonded labourers have greater resilience as a result of accessing government and NGO support services.

The evaluation should be guided by the OECD/DAC's evaluation criteria (coherence, relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability). Based on the outcomes, the main key objectives for the evaluation are:

1. To what extent has the current project been relevant in addressing the needs and demands of the agricultural bonded labourers, based on its three main outcomes outlined above? Please consider how the intervention's relevance align with the implementing contexts, identified problems, and needs of the project participants.
2. To what extent has the project been effective in achieving its objectives and outcomes. Please elaborate on how and why the intervention has or has not achieved them.
3. To what extent was the implementation of the project efficient? Please consider the cost-efficiency and timeliness aspects of the project, and whether the results were achieved with reasonable use of resources.
4. To what extent it is anticipated that the effects of the current project will continue after the conclusion of the Norad funding in 2024? Please consider the factors that are likely to influence the sustainability of the project, and how might they contribute to or hinder its continuation in the future?
5. Make practical recommendations to improve the Nepal hotspot program based on the evaluation findings and lessons learnt.

MAIN EVALUATION QUESTIONS

As part of the contracting process, the evaluation questions will be refined with the advice of the selected research team. Some indicative questions are included below to support the proposal evaluation design.

1. To what extent has a united movement against bonded labour been formed and what was the program's contribution towards this?
2. How has the program influenced and contributed to the changes in the government policies, at both local and national level, and what specific policy revisions have been observed as a result of the program interventions?
3. What is the impact of government and NGO support services that the program helped the Harawa-Charawa, Haliya, and Kamaiya groups access?
4. How have the targeted agricultural bonded labourers accessed and utilised the services offered by the program? What specific aspects of these support services and schemes have proven most effective in building resilience among agricultural bonded laborers?
5. What were the biggest challenges and barriers faced by the Nepal program in achieving its objectives, and how have these obstacles been addressed or mitigated? What were the internal and/or external factors that inhibited the program participants in making the most of the program interventions?
6. How sustainable is the impact of the program, and what factors (if any) have contributed to the long-term positive outcomes for the Harawa-Charawa, Haliya, and Kamaiya groups? Were there any (unintended) negative consequences of the program, particularly considering the cross-cutting issues including gender, human rights, climate and environment, and corruption?
7. Based on the evaluation findings, what are the overall lessons and practical recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of the Nepal hotspot program in achieving its objectives and further contributing to the reduction of agricultural bonded labour prevalence?

TARGET PARTICIPANTS OF THE EVALUATION

The main participants for this evaluation are local and national government and civil society actors, program participants, including the members of the Joint Struggle Committee, as well as the Freedom Fund's senior management. It is expected that the evaluation team will also engage with the Freedom Fund Nepal team and the eight implementing partners, who will use this evaluation to inform the existing program design and delivery as well as future program development.

RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The Freedom Fund invites individuals and organisations to propose an approach that would be suitable to achieve the objectives of the evaluation. The proposed methodology should address the below:

Mixed-methods approach: The Freedom Fund seeks to obtain both quantitative and qualitative findings from the evaluation. Therefore, applications that describe a comprehensive mixed method approach would be given preference. Kindly include the data collection methods and sources of information. Please be clear about whether research will be done in-person and/or remotely, and the rationale for this.

Stakeholder participation: Please outline which stakeholders you will engage with at different stages of the evaluation process and justify your proposed sample and its size. Describe how a sample of respondents will be obtained; consideration should be given to how these individuals can be accessed and engaged with in a manner which encourages honest responses. The evaluation is not expected to exhaustively cover all locations in which the Nepal hotspot operate, but rather, a selection of an appropriate set of respondents.

Operational and ethical considerations: Highlight any logistical, ethical and/or safeguarding issues with the proposed methodology, such as encouraging candid responses through in-person and/or remote interviews, handling of potentially sensitive information, confidentiality of respondents, sensitivity and respect to stakeholders, Do No Harm etc. Please indicate how you will monitor responses and mitigate response bias that may influence the evaluation. Note that we expect the team (or its subcontractors) to include fluent Nepali speakers to administer data collection.

Data quality and analysis: Describe the procedures that will be in place to ensure a high level of data quality, and tools used for (qualitative and/or quantitative, as relevant) data analysis. Describe the data analysis plan, including data analysis software, proposed analysis methods and a rough timeline. The work plan should allow for sufficient time for inputs from the Freedom Fund and Norad before finalisation.

The research approach should adhere closely to ethical principles and safety concerns of the evaluation participants and researchers themselves. If there are any other elements considered to be crucial to a successful evaluation, please include them in your proposal.

The research will be contracted by the Freedom Fund US and supervised by our Research and Evaluation Manager based in London. The Freedom Fund anticipates working closely with the research team through all stages of the project.

REPORT WRITING

The final report, based on a pre-agreed structure with the Freedom Fund, should not exceed 20 pages, excluding annexes. All findings and conclusions must be substantiated by references to evidence sources, and their magnitude or representativeness should be duly commented upon. The report is expected to include the following sections:

1. Executive summary, which includes an overview of the purpose, methodology with limitations, key findings, and recommendations
2. Introduction and background
3. Evaluation questions and objectives
4. Methodology, including methodological challenges and potential limitations of the evaluation
5. Key findings
6. Discussion and recommendations
7. Conclusion

PROJECT DELIVERABLES & HIGH-LEVEL TIMELINE

Main deliverables	Proposed timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kick-off meeting with the Freedom Fund team. Desk review of the Nepal program documents and discussions with the Freedom Fund team. 	Feb 2024
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a suitable methodology to answer the evaluation objectives outlined above, presented as a detailed research protocol that includes a realistic sampling strategy, all relevant data collection tools, work plan and a detailed overview of ethical considerations. Finalise research protocol and tools. 	Feb-Mar 2024
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary data collection completed. 	Mar-Apr 2024
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data cleaning and analysis. Presentation of preliminary findings for internal review and discussion. 	Apr 2024
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft report shared for review and discussion. 	May 2024
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalise report, based on a structure pre-agreed with the Freedom Fund. 	Jun 2024
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participate in dissemination activities with the Freedom Fund. 	Jun 2024

In addition to the main deliverables listed above, the research team is also expected to discuss with the Freedom Fund any proposed design changes and share regular updates on the progress of field activities.

BUDGET

The Freedom Fund has budgeted approximately US \$25,000 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 with the following breakdown:

- Personnel costs
- Fees to local research partners or subcontractors, if applicable
- Other direct costs – e.g. travel, software licenses, devices for data collection
- Overheads
- Value Added Tax or Goods and Services Tax, if applicable

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

PROPOSAL FORMAT

Interested parties should prepare a proposal of no more than five pages, plus CVs and annexes. Proposals should contain the following sections:

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

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

EVALUATION CRITERIA & SCORING

In reviewing proposals, the Freedom Fund will use the following criteria:

Technical criteria

Weighting

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Technical capacity of the research team (including local partner and subcontractors if relevant), including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience of conducting program evaluation, with demonstrable understanding of relevant quantitative and | <p>50%</p> |
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qualitative research techniques (dependent on the proposed method).	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proven experience producing detailed reports in English, with a strong focus on qualitative findings. • Fluency in English and Nepali. 	
2. Contextual knowledge of the research team, including on:	20%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarity with the inter-generational bonded labour situation in Nepal. Previous work with Harawa-Charawa, Haliya and Kamaiya will be advantageous. • Knowledge of economic, social and political environment in Nepal, particularly of the three groups. 	
3. Team structure, including:	20%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate staffing levels to deliver quality project outputs within the desired timeframe. • Contribution of Nepali and/or Nepal-based researchers, ideally in key roles such as Principal Investigator or Co-Investigator where they are recognised as authors of the evaluation. • Established infrastructure within Nepal for collecting data. • Gender diversity among the team members. • Team members with fluency in English. Proficiency in Nepali and other local languages would be advantageous. 	
Financial criteria	
4. Costs are proportionate to the scale of work being proposed, and consideration of all potential expenses.	10%
Total	100%

COMMISSIONING TIMELINE

Release of this Request for Proposal.	12 Jan 2024
Proposals due.	26 Jan 2024
Please submit all documents to Toni Adebayo-Oke at tadebayo-oke@freedomfund.org with "Proposal for Program Evaluation: Nepal" as the email subject line.	10am UK time
All shortlisted research teams will be notified, and interviews will be scheduled.	2 Feb 2024
Interviews will be held.	5-9 Feb 2024
Clarifications/discussions with the preferred teams.	13 Feb 2024
Contract signed with selected team.	20 Feb 2024

DEADLINE & SUBMISSION

Proposals should be submitted via email to Toni Adebayo-Oke with Proposal for Program Evaluation: Nepal” as the email subject line at tadebayo-oke@freedomfund.org no later than **26 January 2024, 10am UK time**. Proposals should be submitted in English and in Word or PDF format. Proposals should be no more than 5 pages, plus CVs and annexes.

PAYMENT AND JURISDICTION

Applicants should observe that the Freedom Fund is a United States 501(c)(3) public charity. The awarded contract will be governed by and construed in accordance with the laws of the State of New York, United States of America, without regard to principles relating to conflicts of law. All payments to the consultant under the awarded contract shall be agreed upon therein, in compensation for the services provided, and directly related to the approved costs of the required services when/if applicable. Contracts will always be drafted in United States dollars.

CONFIDENTIALITY

This Request for Proposal and associated documents are the property of Freedom Fund and confidential. Apart from using Freedom Fund documents to respond to the request, you shall not disclose any details, to any other person or organisation, and shall treat this RFP and your response with complete confidentiality.