

Northern India Hotspot

ANNUAL REPORT / FOR PERIOD 1 JANUARY TO 31 DECEMBER, 2015

The Northern India hotspot was launched in March 2014, building on past work supported by one of the Freedom Fund's founding investors, the Legatum Foundation. In early 2015, the Freedom Fund committed to an expanded three year program aiming to reduce the prevalence of bonded labour and trafficking in 27 districts of the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Now working with 19 partner organisations, the hotspot focuses on achieving the following outcomes:

1. **Reduce prevalence** in the specific communities in which our partners are working, through direct prevention, protection and prosecution interventions
2. Improve the **wider enabling environment** for freedom by:
 - a. Strengthening the functioning of government safety nets
 - b. Improving the effectiveness of government structures such as district vigilance committees and child welfare committees
 - c. Building public awareness and changing attitudes about bonded labour and trafficking
 - d. Increasing legal deterrence so that traffickers do not enjoy impunity but instead are more likely to face arrest and prosecution
3. **Increase civil society's capacity** for sustained and effective action
4. Support **rigorous research and evaluation** in the hotspot

During 2015, our community-based partners scaled up their outreach and worked with 1,570 community freedom groups. These groups serve as the backbone of program sustainability, because group members continue to take on more responsibility for their communities, share information with others, engage in collective action, and encourage reduced exploitation. Partners' expanded programs continued to focus on many different contexts of forced and bonded labour, including in brick kilns and stone quarries; traditional agricultural debt bondage; child trafficking for multiple types of harmful labour; and commercial sexual exploitation. While most of the partners have a core focus on community engagement, the hotspot relies on their different strengths, for example: vocational training of adolescent survivors; legal actions; women's economic empowerment; transitional education for former child labourers; or interstate rescues.

2015 marked an important maturing of the work of our partners and the hotspot as a whole:

- Several partners became much more confident to work with the authorities to **remove individuals from bonded labour and trafficking** and work for their long-term reintegration and recovery;
- The regular **exchange of expertise** within the hotspot became an almost unique model of continuous NGO collaboration on the issue in India;
- They also collectively used their expertise to **help officials at local, state and national levels** to tackle bonded labour and trafficking;
- We were able to use the hotspot as a focus for **research innovation**, testing out new program learning approaches and prevalence measurement;
- We enabled partners to spell out together their **common practice standards regarding rescue, reintegration and legal action**.

Overall, during 2015, the program was able to engage over 53,000 people in its activities, and directly liberated 3,873 individuals, significantly over-achieving against the targets set.

Operating context

There were several unexpected developments in northern India's political, environmental, and civil society climate throughout 2015:

The earthquakes in April in Nepal caused some partner organisations located in areas close to the border to delay activities and others to participate in response efforts, providing relief materials and managing shelters for those leaving Kathmandu. Also, throughout 2015, other partner organisations needed to address increased vulnerabilities of project communities as an irregular monsoon season affected many in Uttar Pradesh, diminishing crop yields and affecting livelihoods.

Political tension between India and Nepal also resulted in difficulties for local communities near the border. Our partner organisations implementing projects in these areas reported that project participants were unable to work during this time and continue to experience a subsequent loss of income. Elections in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, as well as the election of Child Welfare Committee (CWC) members were held. As a result, partner organisations had to re-schedule activities and begin building relationships with newly elected officials.

Increased scrutiny of NGOs receiving foreign funding affected partner organisations and banks as procedures for receipt of foreign funds changed. Our partner organisations were not negatively affected by this as a result of their diligence in complying with existing stipulations and ensuring ongoing compliance.

There were also some positive contextual factors: Various government programs were launched in program areas, including the provision of pensions to rural families living in poverty, ensuring basic amenities (such as potable water, latrines, and electricity) for low-income communities, and the activation of the Integrated Child Protection Scheme, which helps secure the safety of children. Across the hotspot, partner organisations facilitated linkages between community members and these schemes, providing housing, financial inclusion, and child protection, improving the social, financial, and physical well-being of project participants.

Headline results

Since program inception in 2014:



During 2015:

1 2,727 individuals liberated with follow-up support

Partner organisations supported 2,727 individuals to exit slavery. Our partners organised rescue efforts alongside government officials and police, mobilised communities to pressure slaveholders, empowered communities to negotiate improved wages and working conditions, and intercepted victims in route. This achievement is particularly noteworthy as it represents the increased coordination among partner organisations, utilising one another's strengths to ensure that individuals were successfully liberated and subsequently provided necessary resources, such as psychosocial, economic, and legal support. Organisations less experienced in conducting liberation activities requested support from other partner organisations, equipping staff with the knowledge and skills needed to conduct rescues in the future, and establishing program synergies. Collaborative relationships with the Labour Department and other government stakeholders led to greater stakeholder coordination throughout the process of facilitating liberations. Additionally, networking activities coordinated by partner organisations developed relationships with other local organisations leading to more liberations and greater civil society collaboration.

2 1,570 community freedom groups supported

1,570 community freedom groups were supported by our partner organisations in 2015. Knowledge on human rights, child rights, and legal provisions, as well as human trafficking, slavery, and risky migration continued to improve among these groups. The groups' increased confidence strengthened their ability to lead local advocacy and negotiation efforts to improve their situation. This was evident as group members began to provide assistance to vulnerable members of their community – advocating for children to be sent to school rather than away to work.

3 1,303 individuals graduated from vocational courses

Partner organisations enabled greater opportunities for community members to participate in skill-building trainings, focusing on trades such as tailoring, computer literacy, animal husbandry, agriculture, and catering. 1,303 individuals, (500 adults and 803 youth), participated in and graduated from skill-building training programs with the goal of providing increased income for their household, ultimately reducing vulnerability to trafficking and dependence on others for their livelihood,

4 7,267 people gained access to government services

7,267 individuals gained access to government services in 2015, including vital registration documents, unemployment allowances, social security, widow pension, and old age pension social services. This 2015 achievement represents the ability of partner organisations to assert the rights of project participants and ensure local officials provide community members with available services. Access to documentation and government services ensures that community members are benefiting from government programs to which they are entitled, increasing self-sufficiency and reducing root causes of bonded labour and trafficking such as poverty and illness.

5 747 legal cases were supported

Partner organisations continued to strengthen the legal components of their projects. Additional Legal Aid Centres (LAC) were established across the hotspot and a Standard Operating Procedure was developed for NGOs and Legal Advocates, outlining the legal provisions and acts related to bonded labour. A total of 747 legal cases were supported, promoting the rights of survivors of human trafficking and bonded labour, while simultaneously facilitating legal action against perpetrators.

2015 proved to be a significant year for providing ground-level input into existing local, state, and national systems. Individual partner organisations' activities as well as collective efforts through the Human Liberty Network enabled positive developments on systemic drivers of trafficking and bonded labour in northern India.

At the national level, partner organisation, Prayas, coordinated events and meetings with various ministries, including the Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Welfare and the Ministry of Home Affairs. These meetings were conducted to share priorities identified by partner organisations, to understand the priorities of government ministries, and to establish areas for collaboration. Prayas organised two workshops in western India and one in southern India, gathering key NGOs, community, business, and government stakeholders. These meetings were organised with the specific goal of establishing procedures for inter-state rescue and repatriation process for victims of trafficking. Relationships developed through these workshops enabled partner organisations not only to share best practices for interstate rescue and repatriation, but to be involved in rescue operations in other states, supporting repatriation efforts to Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. This resulted in the effective liberation and repatriation of individuals working in Rajasthan, Delhi, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Jammu, and Punjab. **Additionally, as an outcome of the workshops, the Ministry of Home Affairs organised the first national-level Consultation on Trafficking on October 7, 2015, with support from Prayas.**

In order to transport people into situations of slavery and trafficking, traffickers often use the railway system. Because of this, **establishing standard operating procedures and mechanisms for identifying instances of trafficking within the railways** becomes an important mechanism for interception. As a result, Prayas contributed to the development of an official railway standard operating procedure as well as the establishment of model stations, which proactively identify and swiftly respond to cases of trafficking. Two other partner organisations were selected to manage railway-based Childline centres.

At the state-level, meetings and conversations led to positive collaboration between partner organisations and the government. In **Uttar Pradesh**, the State Plan of Action for Trafficking, drafted by partner organisations in 2014, was reviewed by stakeholders, refined, and endorsed by state bodies, including the Uttar Pradesh State Child Protection Commission. Following the presentation of the action plan, the Uttar Pradesh Department of Police requested that partner organisations facilitate training for anti-human trafficking units (AHTU) across the state, which are responsible for combining law enforcement and rehabilitation efforts. Similar efforts were implemented in **Bihar** as partner organisations trained law enforcement officials and local government representatives with the goal of increasing project participants' access to government services. The National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD), a government-recognised training institute, also expressed interest in coordinating with partner organisations to publish and endorse documents and best practices developed by the Human Liberty Network.

Prayas invited **business and industry leaders** to Delhi to attend a conference on slavery and trafficking, engaging these leaders to address slavery which is present in their industry. In addition, partner organisations and key stakeholders involved in our southern India program also attended, to promote cross-hotspot collaboration. As an outcome of this conference, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Confederation of Indian Industry committed to addressing exploitation, influencing their networks, and sharing information with their states' business chapters. Some business representatives also agreed to consider providing their corporate social responsibility funds to address slavery.

Pursuing our goal to strengthen local organisations' program approaches and sustainability, we coordinated numerous capacity development workshops, focused on programmatic, financial, and administrative functions. 2015 training areas included mental health, anti-trafficking approaches, and legal interventions. Partner organisation representatives attended a workshop on counselling for female survivors of human trafficking facilitated by the National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD) in Delhi. Selected partner organisations also participated in an exposure visit to Volunteers for Social Justice (VSJ) in Punjab to understand their approach to addressing bonded labour in brick kilns. Partner organisations participated in a refresher course on Community Maturity Tools (CMT) led by Free the Slaves (FTS) to learn about strategic and outcome-focused anti-trafficking interventions. To strengthen the legal components of the program, we coordinated an exposure visit focused on establishing effective Legal Aid Centres (LACs). During this visit, technical assistance provider Justice Ventures International (JVI) provided legal technical support and training.

With the objective of strengthening financial systems, policies, and internal controls, as well as ensuring compliance with the national Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) guidelines, the Centre for Promoting Accountability (CPA) provided on-site support and training workshops to partner organisations.

Learning

Eight of the partners worked with the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and Praxis India to collect 353 life stories, mostly of individuals in slavery or affected by trafficking. They then analysed all the stories over a four-day workshop to identify causal factors that can help communities break the cycles of exploitation. The partners then reviewed the activities and services that they are providing in order to see how closely their programs address each of these factors. Key issues arising from this process are also being used to within the prevalence study which 15 partners started to implement in their intervention communities towards the end of 2015. This prevalence study breaks new ground by using pictorial tools to enable respondents to engage more fully and accurately with the survey and to enable them to collectively pool and analyse their information on bonded labour and trafficking.

Partner organisations also conducted research to inform more specific aspects of their project design and to establish data points to strengthen knowledge-sharing efforts. Partner organisation Aangan Trust conducted a Pilot Action Report to identify risk factors that increase children's vulnerability to forced labour and trafficking as well as protective factors which aid them in avoiding exploitative situations. Data was collected utilising the organisation's child safety application, which was administered by volunteer community-based child protection workers. Surveying 86 children in its working areas, Aangan Trust's research found that the majority of these children had significant experience with identified risk factors, namely social exclusion, exposure to abuse and violence, disruption of childhood (lack of access to education and prevalence of child marriage), lack of adequate supervision and safe spaces, weak or inaccessible legal and social protection systems, and financial crises. Protective factors identified include adequate adult supervision at home and in the community, access to birth registration and other vital documents, non-formal and formal education, financial resources, and health resources, as well as awareness of human and child rights. As a result of these findings, the organisation developed a series of "next steps", including an increased focus on working alongside families - specifically mothers - school officials, and government officials to improve collaboration and promote increased protective factors for children in vulnerable communities.

Legal technical service provider, JVI, conducted a survey of Legal Service Authority (LSA) representatives and NGOs in order to understand the roles, responsibilities, and gaps in the delivery of legal assistance to NGOs and communities involved in addressing bonded labour and trafficking issues. The results of this survey indicated that LSAs lack the awareness of these issues and of the specialised needs of survivors. While LSAs are currently overloaded with requests, there are opportunities for increased collaboration with NGOs. These collaborations have the potential for improving free legal services provided to communities in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh as well as assistance in dispute settlement.

Looking ahead

Key priorities have been identified for 2016, including:

- **Child rights**

In early 2016, we will support partner organisations to strengthen their understanding of relevant child protection provisions and acts as well as standardising Child Protection Policies across the hotspot to ensure that they adhere to the highest standards.

- **Ensuring minimum standards for liberation and reintegration**

A Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) toolkit related to liberating individuals in situations of bonded labour and trafficking, and facilitating their effective support and repatriation will be finalised and rolled out. Trainings and workshops to introduce this tool will be organised in order to promote trauma-informed standards of care for project participants across the hotspot.

- **Increasing joint national and state level engagement efforts**

This will involve engaging key community and government stakeholders as well as increasing the awareness of the general public on issues related to human trafficking and bonded labour.

- **Strengthening livelihood program components**

With the goal of increasing the impact of program components related to income generation, business creation and vocational training, technical assistance will be provided to partner organisations in 2016. Two organisations have been identified for this purpose. Partner organisations will participate in capacity building efforts to promote best practices in livelihood activities so that program participants might benefit from long-term impact and increased access to capital.

- **Continued support for monitoring and evaluation**

In 2016, organisations will continue to learn about effective methods of measuring, monitoring, and evaluating project implementation. Ongoing learning focused on community maturity, action research, and organisational growth and impact will be emphasised.