

Slavery and Women- Theory of Change

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Empowering Women to End Slavery:

1. The problem to be addressed, context and main challenges:

From country to country, continent to continent, the first-hand testimonies of women who are emerging from slavery tell how the daily exploitation of their labor is consistently compounded by rape and sexual violence. The reports of survivors show that the lack of sexual autonomy and reproductive rights – and the sheer horror of absolute vulnerability - is almost always an intrinsic part of women's experience of slavery:



Ms Anyiel was abducted into slavery in Northern Sudan: *"My abductor told me that I was his slave and I had to do all the work he told me to – fetching water and firewood, looking after animals and farming. When I was 12, he said he wanted to sleep with me. I could not refuse because I was a slave. I had to do everything he wanted, or he could have killed me."* BBC News, Southern Sudan, 3/16/07



Siba Chaudhary in Nepal, was given as a household slave in Nepal in return for access to land for her family (photo shows Siba performing in a street play against slavery): *"The (landlady's) sister's husband tried to abuse me sexually, several times. He used to come to my room. I would cry, so he never succeeded."* Siba says she was usually fed with leftovers, and was beaten and verbally abused by some of the women she worked for. BBC News, Western Nepal, 3/2/07

And in Haiti, Free the Slaves partner organization *Limyè Lavi* explains: *"Servant girls are especially vulnerable*

to sexual abuse and exploitation. Boys or men in the household often view them as convenient objects for sexual gratification and domination. A servant girl is sometimes derisively called a “la-pou-sa-a” or a “there-for-that”. These girls are sometimes abruptly expelled from the household especially if they become pregnant.”

Slavery is the complete control of a person by another, exercised through violence and threats, for the purpose of economic exploitation. Especially for women and girls, whether in forced prostitution or other forms of slavery, sexual violence is a typical expression of that control.

The extent and extremity of that violence takes us to the edges of what we can bear to consider: A study of the violence that trafficked women in the European Union had been subjected to included broken bones, loss of consciousness and gang rape. Many of the women continued to have health problems related to unsafe abortions, unhealthy weight loss, suicidal depression and drug addiction.¹ Another study of women trafficked to the European Union found that 95% of victims had been violently assaulted or coerced into a sexual act.² The mental and physical health impacts can be lifelong: An assessment of trafficking in girls in Nepal found that 38% of rescued victims suffered from HIV/AIDS, as well as STIs and tuberculosis.³ To understand the extent of harm inflicted on people in slavery today, it is important to note that one of the main ways that women and children gain their freedom is by being discarded and left to fend for themselves when they are abused beyond the point of usefulness to the slaveholder. For FTS workers and partner organizations, these research reports serve to aggregate the succession of individual encounters we have had with women and children whose emotional and physical devastation goes on long after they escape, are rescued or cast out of slavery.

The scale of the problem:

Unlike other crimes of comparable severity, human trafficking is hidden and largely unreported. Because of this, the scale of modern slavery is not precisely known. In fact, in most societies, the victims of slavery can be seen openly at work, and, to the untrained eye, they are indistinguishable from those who are doing similarly hard, undesirable jobs, but who are paid and are free to leave.

In other contexts, slavery goes on behind closed doors, especially in the cases of prostitution and domestic servitude. Slavery is unreported because its victims are kept in constant fear, for themselves and their families. It goes unreported because law enforcement personnel are often unskilled in identification and in many societies, frankly disinterested. It goes unreported because the public is unaware. In places where slavery is prevalent, many people believe that it is simply part of the order of things. This is especially true in terms of attitudes toward women in slavery in prostitution and in domestic servitude.

Yet there are increasing efforts to quantify the problem and its magnitude, and to address it as a higher priority:

- In its 2004 Trafficking in Persons report, the U.S. government indicated that 600,000 – 800,000 individuals were trafficked across international borders each year, of which 80% were women and girls, and up to 50 percent were under 18 years old. It found that the majority of these transnational victims were trafficked into commercial sexual exploitation.
- In research published in 2000, Dr. Kevin Bales, now President of Free the Slaves, estimated approximately 27 million people were being held in slavery around the world. This research was based on published estimates, government reports, NGO research, and prosecutions. He then evaluated the credibility of sources in order to come to best estimates for countries and regions. The research showed that most of slavery’s victims were not moved between countries and that a high proportion were held and forced to work without significant movement to another area, even within a country.⁴

1 Zimmerman, Cathy. *The Health Risks and Consequences of Trafficking in Women and Adolescents: Findings from a European study.* London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine 2003.

2 Zimmerman, Cathy. *Stolen Smiles: A Summary Report on the Physical and Psychological Consequences of Women and Adolescents Trafficked in Europe.* London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. 2006.

3 Bal Kumar KC, Subedi G, Gurung YB, Adhikari KP. “Nepal Trafficking in Girls with Special Reference to Prostitution: A Rapid Assessment.” ILO, 2001.

4 Bales, K *Disposable People, New Slavery in the Global Economy.* University of California Press, 2000.

- In research published in 2005, the ILO estimated there are 12.3 million people in forced labor of all types around the world. This was an estimate that relied more heavily on governmental sources than Dr. Bales' research.⁵

Underlying causes:

Women especially are pushed into slavery due to the gender dimensions of poverty: women in poor communities not only suffer from the general lack of economic opportunities, but their choices are further narrowed by requirements that they only undertake a limited range of occupations or that they should remain confined to the household. When these harmful ideologies of women's secondary status are present alongside extreme poverty, it is a lethal combination that permits their bodies to be regarded as commodities. Even in conditions of relative poverty, where the structures of economic opportunity are skewed against young women, it is those women who refuse to live within their constricted options, that are most at risk from traffickers who arrive with the only appealing offer of a better life

In addition to pervasive gender discrimination against women there is a second dynamic at work that increases vulnerability to slavery: the ample supply of potential victims is matched by an equally plentiful economic demand for their products and services. Slave-made goods continue to be traded because the global economy lacks effective mechanisms for excluding them. And in the case of slavery in prostitution, in most countries the social construction of the sexuality of men and women permits the sexual abuse of women and sustains the demand for commercial sex. This economic demand also persists because there is an almost negligible enforcement of national laws and international conventions against slavery and trafficking in many countries. This allows slaveholding businesses and brothels to turn immense profits without any tangible threat of prosecution.

2. Lessons learned from approaches to resolving the problem:

A. Ending violence; enhancing recovery. FTS' experience in partnering with grassroots anti-slavery movements in Ghana, Haiti, India, Nepal and Sudan over the past five years has led us to several conclusions about how women can put an end to the violence perpetrated against them, achieve a measure of recovery, and in the process contribute to the overall elimination of slavery. The following strategies emerge from our experience:

- 1) **Prevention:** Women need to organize together to develop the capacity to respond to violence and threats, identify those at risk of trafficking and intervene directly to prevent victimization. Locally-based groups need to be networked together for protection, technical support and training. These groups can also take a range of actions to address the underlying causes of women's vulnerability to slavery, especially holding government and law enforcement accountable for upholding human rights.

***Example 1:** In Nepal, local women's groups coordinated by the Women's Skill Creation Center (WOSCC) are now able to directly challenge parents and the girls if they suspect young women are about to be trafficked. Usually then, the parents send the trafficker away. The groups also report on the trafficker's presence and often get him arrested.*

- 2) **Rescue and group-based emergence from slavery:** These community-based networks, when linked with an effective NGO, provide the basis for rapid identification and rescue of women and girls taken into slavery. For reasons of safety and accessing legal rights, rescues generally must occur in collaboration with police. It is even more effective if there is the chance for groups of women to define their own strategies for emerging out of slavery, rather than relying on rescue of individuals by outsiders. Although it is difficult to reach and assist women still in slavery so that they can make their own conscious decisions to leave, this process provides the most reliable basis for sustaining participants in freedom.

⁵ "A Global Alliance against Forced Labour", ILO 2005

Example 1: In north India, women's groups organized by Manav Sansadhan Evam Mahila Vikas Sanstha (MSEMVS) are bringing their whole families out of debt bondage through deciding to send their children to transitional schools (rather than working for the slaveholder) and deciding which vocational skill to learn that will provide an income, so they can refuse to be held in debt bondage. They are organizing in resistance to violence against women and early or forced marriage, and insisting on being included in public health care services.

Example 2: In Nepal, village groups immediately report to Gramin Mahila Srijanshil Parivar (GMSP) when a young woman goes missing. GMSP sends a staff person to hunt down the woman and the trafficker at the bus station in Kathmandu and surrounding hotels (usually awaiting sale and transfer to Mumbai). GMSP is usually successful in finding them, and in ensuring their return and future protection.

Example 3: In Nepal, Shakti Samuha will be visiting women in the "cabin restaurants" (effectively brothels) and massage parlors to find out women's perceptions of what exactly would enable them to take the risks of deciding to leave.

- 3) **Recovery and social reintegration:** Key requirements for full recovery include: safe haven; standards of care that actively rebuild the survivors' self-determination and help them internalize an awareness of their human rights; having access to reliable earned income; on-going access to health care, especially for STDs and other physical and psychological illnesses and trauma; access to legal redress; safe return to family if possible, or being part of a local support network. FTS partners are learning how important it is to educate and engage a variety of health professionals in understanding and meeting the needs of women survivors, at the same time as empowering women with knowledge of their reproductive rights and how to get the care they need.

Example 1: In Haiti, Limyè Lavi is organizing small groups of adult women survivors of the restavèk system who are finding that the trauma of childhood abuses still affects their lives, relationships and opportunities. As the women assist each other with the long process of recovery, their willingness to share their stories on the radio and in local meetings helps communities to decide not to allow more children to become domestic slaves.

Example 2: In Nepal, GMSP has supported women in the past two years in pressing 26 prosecutions against traffickers. They explain that their success in 22 of those cases so far (with 4 cases pending) has been enormously helpful in restoring the women's status, dignity and acceptance in close-knit rural communities.

B. Strategies to achieve wider impact:

FTS has learned that the most viable solutions to slavery are created within the communities in which slavery is being experienced. Outsiders have an important role in sharing ideas, protection, and resources, but the actual solutions have to be convincing and owned by the people trying to leave slavery or trying to rid their communities of trafficking. Yet, this reliance on local communities poses a series of crucial questions and challenges because trafficking and slavery are such widespread problems. How can we possibly initiate these processes on a broad enough scale to be significant? What strategies need to be in place to achieve wider impact – to achieve a 'tipping point' in a larger area than can realistically be covered under the leadership of one local organization? We have identified four steps that can help us move from local solutions towards affecting the context of slavery across a region:

1. Grassroots initiatives need to be **taken to scale** as much as possible. Organizations should be selected on the basis of their interest in incubating possible solutions and then expanding their reach. Careful judgments need to be made about how large the operations of an organization can be, and how fast it can grow, while still sustaining the grassroots connections and transformative spirit that engendered its original successes. In our experience there are several priorities for capacity-building in the context of expansion:

- program planning and financial management that are carefully tied to measurable goals
- identifying and analyzing problems in a way that separates challenges from personalities and that strengthens teams of staff rather than fostering dependence on leaders;

- knowledge of legal tools and advocacy methods;
- the ability to analyze and organize against gender oppression and other harmful ideologies and belief systems (such as caste);
- documenting and measuring achievements and thinking critically about outcomes;
- demanding equality and self-determination in an organization's relationships with its funding agencies.

2. Support for community-based programs must be predicated on a plan of **replication and multiplication** of the underlying principles of the activities. This is one reason why FTS gives priority to documentation, evaluation and shared problem-solving. In this way, we support partners in articulating their own approaches, and it prepares us to communicate their ideas to a wider audience.

We also promote exposure visits between local groups and we promote their methods through helping them host visits by journalists. We encourage support for their work through our website, e-updates, and public meetings, as well as through publications such as *Ending Slavery*, by Dr. Bales which tells the stories of successful approaches at many different levels.

3. The **creation of government accountability** (for law enforcement and for providing preventive and rehabilitation services) needs to be intrinsic to the methods used by local groups. These anti-slavery movements need to be oriented towards changing the culture and purpose of government in favor of human rights. Such changes will tend to increase the effects of a local project beyond its area of operation. A community-based organization can identify patterns of government cooperation that have been crucial to achieving release and rehabilitation in their own area and can work with others to prescribe policies, laws and procedures for government on a state-wide basis.

4. If **networks of local partner organizations** can be formed, they can serve as a collective mind at work in the process of ending slavery in that area, articulating the changes that are needed and guiding each other into new areas of activity. For example, the FTS South Asia Network of all our partners in Nepal and northern India is now beginning to send submissions to governmental committees with recommendations for legislation. They are making referrals to each other where they feel that an individual survivor needs the specialized help of another partner. Through this network, partners are also going out as trainers for each others' work, since they have complementary strengths.



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