

# SURVIVORS AND ORGANIZATIONS WORKING TOGETHER AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING: INSIGHTS FROM EAST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Awareness Against Human Trafficking (HAART) is a Kenyan non-governmental organization dedicated to fighting trafficking in persons. HAART was established on the backdrop of the growing crisis of trafficking in persons that has seen Kenya become the central hub for trafficking in East Africa. Founded in 2010, HAART works exclusively to eradicate trafficking in persons and has acquired extensive knowledge about the multidimensional nature of cross-border and internal trafficking in persons in East Africa. Since then, HAART has identified and assisted more than 1,000 victims of trafficking, held hundreds of grassroots workshops reaching more than 100,000 people and continues to fight human trafficking through a multidisciplinary approach.

Free the Slaves (FTS) was founded in 2000 and has since committed itself to the mission of ending modern slavery. Through its work, FTS has assisted individuals in situations of slavery to regain their freedom, has helped officials bring slaveholders to justice, and has supported survivors to rebuild their lives. To advance its mission further, FTS has developed a multi-dimensional strategy that rests on four main pillars: policy and advocacy, to advocate for the reform of laws and regulations; engagement of local communities, to provide training and resources to vulnerable communities; movement building, to encourage knowledge-sharing and collective action; and continuous learning, to produce research that enhances understanding and guides responses.

### Research and authoring team

Dr. Marta Furlan, Dr. Dorothee Hasskamp, Wanja Kimani, Dr. Radoslaw Malinowski, Dr. Fatuma Mohamed, Jackline Mwendu, Brenda Odhiambo, Shivan Pavin Alungnat, Lianet Rosado.

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A photograph of four diverse women smiling and looking towards the camera. They are dressed in professional attire. A large, semi-transparent blue geometric shape, resembling a stylized 'A' or a large triangle, is overlaid on the image. The text 'Executive Summary' is centered within this blue shape in a white, bold, sans-serif font. The background shows a blurred office or meeting room setting with a sign that partially reads 'SANITIZE HERE' and 'HP' visible.

# Executive Summary

# Introduction

People who have been directly affected by a certain issue are the ones who best know its root causes, consequences, implications, and dynamics. They are also the ones who best know what the solutions to that issue may be, what affected individuals and communities need, what kind of support would be helpful, whether a program is ultimately beneficial, and how responses might be improved (Ash, C., Otiende, S., 2023). Thus, people who have been directly affected by human trafficking know better than anyone else how trafficking and exploitation happen and what devastating impact they have on individuals, families, and communities. At the same time, they know better than anyone else what affected individuals truly need, how to translate evidence into impactful programs, and what initiatives at the individual and community levels could contribute to eradicating this grave violation of human rights. (Ibid)

In virtue of their unique knowledge through lived experience, survivors should be at the heart of approaches to combat human trafficking. However, in the anti-trafficking movement, engaging survivors is a practice that still suffers from a series of major limitations (*Walk Free, 2022*). Studies show that survivors are often still treated as helpless victims in search of assistance, as needy recipients of services, as lucky beneficiaries of the anti-slavery movement's largesse, and as trauma-bearing individuals who are exclusively defined by their trauma.

This tendency to limit survivors' engagement stems from several assumptions that have typically dominated the anti-trafficking movement. These include the assumption that people with lived experience can only be approached through the lenses of their trauma, that people with lived experience need to tell their stories in order to usefully participate in the anti-slavery movement, that people with lived experience do not have (and cannot learn) skills to engage in leadership activities, that there are enough people with lived experience working in the movement already, and that having people who work with impacted populations is as good and as meaningful as having people with lived experience. (Ash, C., Otiende, S., 2023)

Building on these considerations, this research project aims to provide organizations in the anti-trafficking space with recommendations on practices of inclusive survivor engagement that may be standardized through an organization's policy. To do so, this research explores the survivor engagement practices of key counter trafficking organizations, investigates the survivors' own assessment of their participation in the anti-trafficking movement, and proceeds to offer a series of actionable recommendations on how inclusive engagement of survivors can become more standardized (and ultimately more beneficial).

Embracing the consideration that processes of research, discovery, and discussion need to be context-based (*Ash C., et al., 2023*), this research project focuses specifically on Eastern and Central Africa - a region that is a source, route of transit, and destination for trafficked men, women, and children.

# Methodology

The research adopted a mixed method approach combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. Specifically, the following methods of data collection were employed:

**I** - Review and analysis of secondary sources detailing survivor engagement practices in the anti-trafficking movement;

**II** - Semi-structured interviews with 18 survivors from Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Uganda and South Sudan;

**III** - Online survey questionnaire distributed to 20 representatives of anti-trafficking organizations from East and Central Africa;

**IV** – A one-day validation workshop with survivors who participated in the research.

From a methodological perspective, a distinctive contribution of this research was the active, multifaceted, and continuous participation of people with lived experience. On the one hand, survivors contributed as researchers. They underwent training in qualitative research skills and participated in conducting the interviews, analyzing the data, identifying key findings, and developing recommendations. On the other hand, survivors contributed as respondents, sharing their personal experiences, insights, and perceptions regarding survivor engagement practices.

# Findings

As the research looked into the engagement of survivors with anti-trafficking organizations, it emerged that in most cases, organizations did not initiate the activism of those survivors whom they engaged with. Almost all interviewees were engaged in social work or human rights activities prior to joining their respective anti-trafficking organization. Some were active against human trafficking in their individual capacity, some were active in other social justice activities, others had been socially engaged even before their trafficking experience. As most interviewees were already taking action in their own way, there seem to be less ways to engage with survivors who are not yet experienced social justice advocates.

For those that entered the movement, the first activity they took against human trafficking was individually sharing their personal lived experience as a warning to others. Over time, some survivor advocates proceeded to include further activities. While most survivor advocates revealed that sharing their experiences is an important part of their engagement, some admit that it is hard for other survivors to speak about their stories. While there is growing awareness within the movement that survivors should not be limited to sharing their experiences (Ash, C., Otiende, S., 2023), there is also a need for creating different entry options, which do not seem to currently exist.

*“For most [organizations] it is only about telling our stories and not about empowerment and capacity building.” (VM)*

Beyond entry options, attention needs also to be devoted to retaining within the movement those survivors who are willing to engage. Here, the lack of finances is reported as the biggest barrier to engagement. Almost all interviewees mentioned financial worries as an important issue in their lives and as a barrier to (more and deeper) engagement. Some respondents also referred to other survivors who did not become, or remain, active due to a lack of financial means.



*“When I was called for an engagement, I couldn’t make it because I did not have transportation to come.” (IP17)*

As for financial hopes coming with the engagement, some survivor advocates would like to have a paid position in the movement. These, however, require professional and formal education that they do not yet possess – e.g., as human rights lawyer, social workers, counselors, or project managers. Although several interviewees were hoping for a job in the movement, hardly anyone ever applied for a position in a counter-trafficking organization. In the validation meeting, there was an extended discussion on the lack of employment opportunities for survivors in the movement:

*“Organizations need to increase capacity building and inclusive employment opportunities. See at the inclusivity of your whole system. Not only give opportunities for survivors to apply, but employ them and then build their capacities that are needed. Set up a budget for survivor engagement as you employ more survivors. Also make your inclusivity not only about one survivor. Don’t tokenize.” (VM)*

It is also noteworthy that many interviewees testify their enthusiasm for learning. Interviewees show high appreciation for formal capacity building through workshops, but also for the learning opportunities and social benefits that arise from networking, traveling to different communities, and engaging in new interactions. Interviewees indicated the need for more funding and scholarships for education and qualification opportunities. This comes from a desire - and a need - to get the professional education and degree in the field of one’s choice, so as to be more active in the movement and to qualify for certain specific positions.

*“I have attended their trainings. They have helped me a lot, not only for benefitting the organization, but also me as a leader in the society.” (IP9)*

Participants also agreed on the importance of survivors learning from other survivors, survivor networks, and support for those interactions. Meeting other survivors is one of the most powerful means to uphold commitment and motivation. Whenever the encounters with other survivors are mentioned, it is without any exception in a positive, often enthusiastic way. What emerged clearly from our interviews was that survivor networks play a leading role in encouraging survivors to become active in the movement and supporting survivor advocates to remain active therein.

*“It feels good to know that I am not the only person in the country who faced this problem.” (IP 11)*

Interviewees also suggested that organizations should offer counseling and psychosocial support and give room to survivors to express themselves as a part of creating a secure and safe environment. As it emerged from the interviews, in fact, it can be very hard for survivors to balance the need for self-care with the drive to help others who are going through a situation similar to one’s own experience. It is not clear if all organizations offer support through psychological specialists that are able to accompany survivor advocates who are dealing with the resonances and challenges that come with their work. In the validation meeting, survivor advocates and leaders elaborated on the need for continuous access to mental health support as they are active in the movement.

*“I wish survivors could get free counseling, because I feel like I usually need it. [...] And now that I am trafficked and I am back, it does not mean that I am fine” (IP1)*

Beyond the need for further psychological support, all interviewees attest their organization to be a safe and respectful environment. Most security risks that were shared in the interviews resulted from interactions with community members and upset families of deceased victims that a survivor advocate was

close to. However, during the validation meeting participants clarified that the risks posed by traffickers as well as governmental repression were prominent among their security concerns. They also drew attention to the dangers of perpetrators who pose as victims. In order to deal with those threats, policies (e.g., on ethical storytelling and risk assessments for survivors) were recommended as organizational responses.

*“Educate survivors on how to share their stories, and also about the risks e.g. on what they say about the government. Make sure people are aware of the risks when they go out.” (VM)*

For their part, the great majority of organizations that participated in the survey attested engaging survivors beyond the provision of direct services. However, the majority of representatives still referred to other services provided as a form of engagement, indicating that for these organizations, engagement is synonymous with service reception.

The majority of organizations hire survivors as volunteers, community mobilizers, and interns. Other positions include: staff, advisors, consultants, fellows, field researchers, paralegals, panelists, performing artists, moderators, and trainers. However, these are less prevalent. The least common capacities in which survivors have worked with organizations include board members, taskforce members, ambassadors, and event master of ceremonies.

Organizations have been engaging survivors in these positions anywhere from 1 to 22 years, irrespective of the role. However, it appears that hiring survivors as interns, volunteers, and community mobilizers has been an established practice for almost a decade, while hiring survivors as ambassadors, panelists, and paralegals has started to gain traction only in recent years. This seems to be a positive indication that organizations in the region have been re-thinking and re-shaping their engagement with survivors over time.

One of the motivations guiding survivor engagement is the perception that survivors are “role models” to those who are still trapped in forms of trafficking. They are perceived to have the power and influence to encourage others to engage in behaviors that reduce their vulnerability to exploitation. In the words of one organization:

*“The survivors help us in community mobilization and awareness creation. Some have carried out training sessions after assigning them. Their input carries more weight due to the live shared experience.”*

The organizations’ decision to engage survivors as advocates or leaders is the outcome of a complex and nuanced process that is not necessarily linear over time. Sometimes, survivors initiate contact with an organization regarding a potential collaboration and interest in a specific role. Organizations may provide those survivors with training and capacity building to excel in leadership as trainers, activists, community mobilizers, or other roles. Some organizations establish predetermined roles that they would like survivors to fill. Organizations may also connect with a survivor whom they met previously and whom they believe could succeed as advocate or leader.

When asked how they commonly compensate survivors, the majority of organizations answered that they compensate survivors through stipends. Only 5 organizations provide them with salaries. The remaining organizations provide alternative forms of payment such as an honorarium, a grant, in-kind goods, or a service such as skills development. One organization indicated that they do not provide any compensation.

The majority of organizations lack procedures guiding survivor engagement. Some of the organizations with procedures explained that these stem from internal policies or specific terms and conditions that are devised for each scenario. Two

organizations expressed having an “open door” policy whereby survivors with an interest in partnering with the organization in any capacity are welcome to do so. Another expressed that, although not enshrined in a formal organizational policy, collaborations within networks or partnerships are a practice used to strengthen engagement with survivors and other stakeholders.

Survivors are engaged primarily in entry level positions, followed by junior management level, external consultant, senior management level, and oversight positions. Asked whether they take into account if an applicant is a survivor of human trafficking, 10 respondents indicated that their organization does not take this into account in the hiring process. Among those who make these considerations, they require survivors to have lived experience of modern slavery, possess basic education, or be healthy (mental and physical health). Throughout the hiring process, some organizations shared adopting an inclusive and equal opportunity approach and ensuring that survivors’ privacy is protected and that they are not harmed.

The organizations surveyed have an interest in establishing policies and codes of conduct to guide survivor engagement. They would also like to see survivors take diverse leadership positions within their organizations and share their expertise at external speaking arrangements. Organizations would like engagement to go beyond the provision of services and move towards inclusion as established staff. They envision some survivors influencing national and global policies through their voice. Ultimately, organizations would like to see survivors become empowered leaders that contribute to the movement as advocates and ambassadors:

*“We would like survivors to be all resilient, able to share their own stories, talk about them in public, help other survivors, actively participate in advocacy, research, and even file complaints against perpetrators, etc.”*

# Recommendations to organizations

## Organizational culture and structures

- Be safe and respectful. Keep trust and confidentiality.
- Embrace change. Dedicate resources for more inclusion and intersectionality.
- Set a budget for survivor engagement.
- Make time for inclusion and capacity building.
- Listen, ask, and actively include survivors, survivor advocates, and leaders.
- Consider setting regular occasions for listening, feedback, and exchange
- Ensure that survivors and employees are trained on relevant issues, e.g. ethical storytelling and security. Bear in mind that a trauma informed organizational culture benefits everyone in the organization.
- Acknowledge and give room to the distinctive value of lived experience, however do not expect or limit survivors to sharing their personal experience.
- Offer areas of engagement that do not require sharing one's trafficking story
- Create multiple opportunities of access into the movement for survivors, also for those without prior engagement in social justice work.
- Inclusion, intersectionality, and the notion of security benefit from practical measures. Take in account individual needs (e.g. accommodation, translation, childcare, etc.) to enable full participation.

- Assess the inclusivity of the whole organizational system.
- Keep mental health services for survivors accessible at all stages.
- Avoid tokenism. Make sure you interact not only with individual survivor leaders and advocates, but with a community of survivors. Look for diverse perspectives.
- On all occasions, consider whether a new opportunity can be given to survivors, and whether elements of survivor-to-survivor interactions can be included and supported.
- Set up policies and guidelines for relevant areas of survivor engagement, such as protection and security, ethical storytelling, employment and remuneration guidelines, and others.



## **Survivor networks**

- Support survivor networks.
- Create survivor networking opportunities and secure a budget for them.
- Support survivors in realizing their own initiatives.



## Finance and employment

- Remunerate survivor advocates and leaders adequately and sustainably for their engagement. Travel allowances are only the bare minimum. Consider this when budgeting for projects and proposals. Create avenues for negotiating remuneration.
- Aim to have a significant number of survivors, survivor advocates, and survivor leaders in the organization. Beyond ensuring that an adequate number of survivors is part of the organization, meaningful inclusion also requires mechanisms of power sharing and representation.
- Take affirmative action for more employment of survivor advocates in the counter trafficking movement. Actively encourage applications by survivors.
- As part of affirmative actions, reconsider job descriptions to reflect those qualifications that survivors possess. Create positions and job descriptions explicitly for survivor advocates or leaders.
- Employ survivors and train them on the job to handle the assignments.
- Ensure that affirmative action is accessible only to survivors of trafficking. Accept prior screenings by professional organizations or legal agencies. For applicants who did not undergo prior screening, set up a trauma-informed and efficient screening mechanism for affirmative action opportunities.
- Allow employees with lived experience to side-hustle, as long as it does not interfere with their commitment to their work as employees.
- Think about ways to include artistic talents and other skills into the movement.
- Be aware of economic disparities between employees and volunteers and reflect how inequalities can be addressed or mitigated.



- Give opportunities to survivors to engage with organizations in their professional capacities outside the core activities of the organization, e.g. in security, as suppliers, etc.
- Employ survivors as trainers for other survivors in their respective professional skills and in survivor advocacy and leadership.
- Offer intervision for survivors, peer-to-peer sessions and/or mentoring.

## Capacity building

- Train employees and survivors on ethical storytelling. This includes capacity building for survivors on sharing their experiences and raising awareness of the risks of visibility for survivor advocates and leaders. Set up guidelines and policies for ethical storytelling.
- Offer and share learning and capacity building opportunities. Those can also be opportunities by third-parties, networking, and travel opportunities.
- Offer mechanisms of training and professionalization like “shadowing” ( teaming up a survivor advocate leader and an organizational staff member). Budget for this in proposals.
- Employ survivors as trainers for other survivors.
- Offer training for peer-to-peer intervision and mentoring.
- Actively support the willingness of survivors to combine their personal experience with a professional qualification of their choice in order to get their preferred position in the movement. To this end, collect information on opportunities offered by third parties (scholarships, foundations, etc), and share them with interested survivors. Seek cooperations and encourage donors to invest in scholarships and higher education opportunities for survivors.



## Security

- Set up a safeguarding system, including a protection policy that benefits survivor advocates and leaders that the organization engages with.
- Take measures to uphold security in different areas, including on social media and in media engagement (cf. ethical storytelling), interactions with affected communities, and mitigate psychological consequences resulting from any interactions.
- Offer security training for survivor leaders and advocates.
- Make sure that survivor advocates and leaders are aware of the risks that are related to their counter-trafficking engagement.
- Take responsibility for security issues following survivors' engagement with the organization.