

12 July 2021

Sub-Committee on the Work of the Independent Commission for Aid Impact  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

Dear Sub Committee Members

Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence to the sub-committee on 30 June. During the session Christian Guy was asked how the government can gather better evidence on the drivers of modern slavery, but time did not allow me to respond. I do however have some suggestions and thought it would be helpful if I shared my observations.

- There are some examples of evidence gaps being identified, and research and pilot initiatives commissioned to address these. For example, the Stamping Out Trafficking in Nigeria programme (DFID; £10 million; 2019-21), commissioned research during its inception phase including on the political economy of Nigeria and on the drivers and enablers of unsafe migration.
- However, ICAI identified a lack of basic research to guide the design of modern slavery programmes and noted that “there is extremely limited evidence on effective interventions.”
- The departments acknowledged that there is a weak evidence base to decide which aspects of modern slavery to prioritise and which interventions to undertake. The Review notes that research is needed to identify causal factors and vulnerabilities that could be targeted by interventions. Nonetheless, the UK government has not developed a comprehensive approach to filling this gap. Several interviewees contrasted this with the What Works programme on violence against women and girls, a high-profile £25 million research and innovation programme launched in 2014 to guide UK programming.
- Alex Balch notes in his recent blog post that there have long been questions over the effectiveness and appropriateness of policies and programmes in this area, with many arguing for a more community-based approach grounded in social justice. Such an approach is focused on the needs of communities that experience exploitation, raising questions about new ways of doing anti-trafficking work and how affected communities should be involved in the process.
- James Cockayne has written about the need to join up development and sustainable investment in the [Developing Freedom report](#). This involves working with communities and survivors upstream from the local to the global level to understand what works and embed this within development interventions, where maximising

economic agency is seen as an explicit goal of partnership-led global development efforts.

### **Good practice involves understanding drivers, causes and vulnerability before rushing into programming**

- [Vulnerability to human trafficking: a study of Albania, Nigeria, Vietnam and the UK](#) (University of Bedfordshire and IOM): This project was funded by the Modern Slavery Innovation Fund (MSIF) and researched both 'vulnerability' to human trafficking from Albania, Vietnam and Nigeria and subsequent support needs of people from these countries in the UK. The study aimed to contribute towards building an evidence base across the four countries through primary research and country-specific written outputs.
- ICAI used this as an example of research funded by the MSIF and noted that it provided a deepened understanding of the process and drivers of trafficking and practical recommendations as to how trafficking can be addressed.
- The MSIF Independent End Term Review scored this A+ for both outcome measures (consolidating and sharing existing knowledge and contributing to the existing evidence base). The ethical approach contributed to the modern slavery response, as there are few guidelines on how to engage in research, particularly with individuals affected by modern slavery
- My office is supporting a [rapid research project](#) with the University of Nottingham's Rights Lab on understanding the evidence, data and literature available on re-trafficking as well as to hear from those in the sector about their experiences and the reality of re-trafficking in their work. Understanding how such a concept is defined in policy is essential to inform and evaluate policies and programming designed to prevent re-exploitation both upstream and in the UK.

### **Survivors need to be involved in the research and evidence gathering process**

- Research initiatives which embed survivor experiences within the design, implementation and evaluation are critical to ensure we understand the lived realities of modern slavery and human trafficking, particularly what works best and what does not.
- Participatory research co-produced with survivors is one approach to this. Survivors as experts in their own rights are involved in shaping research findings and recommendations, providing primary data through individuals' own words. For example, earlier this year Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX)<sup>[1]</sup> published findings from participatory research in the cleaning sector.
- Other examples of best practice in this space includes work by Survivor Alliance which supported the formation of a Research Advisory Board, led and staffed by paid survivor researchers, to inform a [University of Nottingham project](#) on developing a consensus on mental health recovery for modern slavery survivors.

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<sup>[1]</sup> FLEX (2021), 'If I could change anything about my work... Participatory research with cleaners in the UK': <https://www.labourexploitation.org/publications/if-i-could-change-anything-about-my-work%E2%80%9D-participatory-research-cleaners-uk>.

- A recent report by the Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group, 'Agents for Change',<sup>[2]</sup> outlined the benefits of co-production of research with survivors. Survivor Alliance peer-reviewed the briefing. This outlines the practical realities of making space for survivor-led research and evidence gathering.
- Survivors leading or contributing to research must be paid fairly for their contributions. In February, my office launched the recruitment process for a paid internship for a project officer to produce a survivor-informed research piece which can inform policy work undertaken by my office.

Yours sincerely,



**Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner**

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<sup>[2]</sup> ATMG (2021), 'Agents for Change': <https://www.antislavery.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Agents-For-Change-PDF.pdf>.