



# FAITH AND FREEDOM

The role of local faith actors in  
anti-modern slavery and human trafficking

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A scoping study

Executive Summary

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**Published by:**

The Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities, 2019

<https://jliflc.com>

**Cover Photo:**

Jamyang Foundation/Olivier Adam.

Young nuns recite texts during puja, and are being kept safe from trafficking through education, training in ethics, meditation, and other programming.

**Acknowledgements:**

Funding: Anglican Alliance and the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities.

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**JOINT LEARNING INITIATIVE** on  
**FAITH & LOCAL COMMUNITIES**



# FOREWORD

It is challenging to serve survivors of modern slavery and human trafficking, and prevent people from becoming victims of it. Many of us do not hear about the people of faith, and their organisations, that work diligently responding to these issues. Policy stakeholders and funders may not know the extent of their work.

This report highlights women and men of faith who respond to modern slavery and human trafficking in communities in the Global South. While some large organisations are also highlighted in this report, it is the work of local faith actors that is emphasised.

All people and organisations working on anti-modern slavery and human trafficking issues are critical to the movement against it. And it is the local faith actors and their communities—churches and pastors, mosques and imams, pagodas and monks, and all people of faith responding to these issues—that we especially must not forget as being critical actors in this area. They are in every community, connected with it, and have the ability to respond to the needs around them. They have an energy and commitment to going the extra mile.

This report—commissioned by the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities—highlights some of their vast and crucial work, such as an organisation in the Philippines that uses puppets to spread messages in churches about human trafficking, and Catholic sisters in India that, because of their persistence with brick kiln owners, obtained permission to regularly visit and support the families enslaved inside them.

In our respective positions, we have understood the importance of encouraging and supporting people of faith responding to modern slavery and human trafficking. We hope that this report will not only inform readers, but will lead to increased support for people of faith and their organisations serving in these important ways. Our hope is that their work may be expanded and increasingly valued for the remarkable impact they are contributing.



**Rt Revd Alastair Redfern**  
Vice-Chair, Anglican Alliance

And



**Colonel Dr Janet Munn**  
Director, International Social Justice Commission  
Chair, International Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Response Council  
The Salvation Army



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Photo: The Arise Foundation. Children are kept safe from trafficking and modern slavery through an interfaith educational initiative, organised by Catholic sisters, that takes place in the carpark of a Sikh gurdwara.

This scoping study explores the programmes and initiatives of local faith actors (which can include formal and informal religious leaders, worship communities, faith networks, and local and national faith-based organisations) in their response to modern slavery and human trafficking in the Global South. It brings together evidence from a review of over 200 pieces of grey and academic literature and 14 interviews with practitioners. It is the most wide-ranging presentation, to date, of on-the-ground work of local faith actors (LFAs) responding to modern slavery and human trafficking in the Global South.

This report highlights many initiatives of LFAs, including those related to preventing modern slavery and human trafficking (often through education and awareness), as well as the wide array of services they provide related to protecting and caring for survivors. The report also explores the ways in which LFAs support prosecution processes, and how some engage in policy-related work with governmental agencies and policy stakeholders.

The data presented in this report was explored through a seven-part framework<sup>1</sup>, used in the field by faith-based practitioners responding to modern slavery and human trafficking. A summary of the research findings, including gaps that were identified for future exploration, are highlighted below.

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<sup>1</sup> As discussed later in the report, the seven components of the framework are: Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, Policy, Partnership, Participation, and Prayer.

## Summary of Research Findings

### 1. PREVENTION

LFAs seek to prevent modern slavery and human trafficking through a variety of programmes, interventions, and strategies. This is often done through education, utilising community structures such as religious buildings and the wide influence religious communities often have.

- **Identifying Initiatives as Projects to Prevent Trafficking**  
Among the complexities of the dialogue surrounding anti-modern slavery and human trafficking prevention work are questions relating to what this type of work actually entails and how it is categorised. Identifying, or fully understanding, the impact of this work can be difficult. In some cases, projects implemented by LFAs may not be classified as 'anti-modern slavery and human trafficking', even though they do have an impact on preventing modern slavery and human trafficking.
- **Prevention Initiatives of LFAs and Challenges of Obtaining Funding**  
Obtaining funding can be challenging for many LFAs who provide services for trafficked people, as they may not have the bureaucratic structures to satisfy Northern donors. Thus, more widely classifying programming as Prevention may increase the likelihood of funding being appropriated to it. With accurate classification, funders can value the work and role of LFAs, and commit to working with them and their structures.
- **Educating Religious Leaders about Preventing Human Trafficking**  
Among the diverse types of prevention initiatives conducted by LFAs are workshops on topics related to human trafficking for religious leaders. It was reported that there is a need for educating religious leaders about preventing human trafficking, as many religious leaders are not equipped with knowledge about this topic, or do not have skills in raising awareness about it. One example of education provided to religious leaders includes meetings and consultations hosted by the Anglican Alliance and The Salvation Army Philippines to raise awareness of human trafficking. There is a need for religious leaders to be educated on these matters so they may distribute this knowledge to their communities. Furthermore, in Nepal, Islamic Relief envisions, for an upcoming project, to engage Hindu and Islamic leaders in several ways, such as in forums, in the media, and through door-to-door awareness campaigns. They see religious leaders as being people of positive influence who will help their communities take human trafficking and modern slavery seriously.
- **Community Awareness as Prevention**  
LFAs aim to prevent trafficking through community awareness programming. Community awareness programming includes discussing human trafficking within churches and local communities through workshops and meetings. LFAs use existing community structures for creating awareness, and these are regularly utilised in the delivery of awareness campaigns. For instance, The Salvation Army, Kenya East works regularly in slums doing prevention work, and access was easier in one slum because of the presence of the local Salvation Army church.

- **Youth Awareness**

A related aspect of prevention work is education about human trafficking for youth. One example of this type of programming is from SheWORKS, in the Philippines. They use puppetry to share messages on modern slavery and the online sexual exploitation of children and child abuse, collaborating with churches and their schools to share these messages.

## **2. PROTECTION**

Protection includes a vast number of services provided to individuals after they have come out of a trafficking or modern slavery situation. These services include residential services, vocational training, and other programmes that relate to economic empowerment.

- **Example of Protection Services**

Catholic sisters respond in many ways to modern slavery and human trafficking. One example is their work in brick kilns in India. In these kilns, children work alongside their parents, as families are under generational debt bondage. The sisters have begun to provide education and support to these families in a limited number of kilns (See Case Study 2).

- **Building Relationships**

Protection can also include services that are focused on building relationships with people, and intervening in situations of human trafficking, when necessary. For instance, the Mission to Seafarers is an international organisation that serves the welfare needs of seafarers (people who work aboard ships), talking with seafarers, and looking out for trafficking situations.

## **3. PROSECUTION**

In some instances, LFAs work to facilitate prosecution, or they collaborate with law enforcement on matters related to the prosecution process. Yet only some LFAs are equipped to support prosecution, and fewer are involved in this type of work.

An example includes legally trained Catholic sisters who litigate cases of trafficking in India. Police in India also involve Catholic sisters when they conduct anti-trafficking raids, given that their testimony is taken as credible and trusted in court.

## **4. POLICY**

Local faith actors can inform policy in various ways, and some LFAs work with governmental agencies in order to enact policy change. Furthermore, engaging LFAs can be critical to sustaining systemic changes, as international NGOs may be expelled from a country, or a project may conclude, prompting the international NGOs to leave. However, local faith actors do not leave. Furthermore, church denominations themselves have a unique network that places them in an influential position in the policy space.

## **5. PARTNERSHIPS**

Partnership is a common feature of LFAs engaged in anti-trafficking projects. Partnerships among LFAs are valuable, given that they may reduce duplication of work, increase effectiveness, and allow the sharing of learning with others. For example, HAART Kenya

works with both Christians and Muslims as main partners, and this allows their (secular) organisation to mobilise people easily. LFAs can have a significant impact because of their large grassroots footprint and the trust people have in religious leaders.

- **Umbrella Networks**

Umbrella networks link like-minded organisations together for various benefits, such as knowledge sharing, engagement with others, and capacity building. For example, the Christian membership coalition in Cambodia, Chab Dai, connects partner organisations for these reasons.

- **Global Networks**

Partnerships also relate to global networks that religious communities maintain. A global religious network can facilitate engagement with other religious organisations and leaders on the issue of human trafficking.

- **Collaborative Partnerships**

Partnerships between large organisations based in the Global North and smaller LFAs in the Global South are common, highlighting the collaborative development and implementation of anti-trafficking programmes. Partnerships can benefit the delivery of specific programmes and the sharing of strategies. These types of partnerships are important for both the joint delivery of programmes and the sharing of knowledge. Engaging local actors on the ground, as partners, can extend an organisation's reach and effectiveness. For example, World Vision has partnered with local religious leaders, including Buddhist leaders, to implement programming through their Channels of Hope project, a project model that builds capacity in faith communities and leaders so they can address harmful practices, including human trafficking.

- **Partnerships as Mutually Beneficial**

Partnerships between larger organisations and LFAs can be mutually beneficial. Through effective partnerships, LFAs can advance learning about how best to tackle trafficking and gain further capacity. Partners of LFAs can benefit from learning as well, while gaining new engagement with communities, educating and raising awareness with religious actors and their constituents. Similarly, partnership examples include beneficial collaborations between churches in the Global North and South. Ideally, in such partnerships, there can be reciprocal benefit between Northern (wealthier) churches, and those in the Global South. While LFAs such as churches need resources, Northern churches can grow and learn from the churches of the Global South.

- **Partnerships with Government**

Partnerships that connect organisations with government entities and leaders are important. One example from the literature is an interfaith forum on human trafficking, hosted in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, in 2017 and 2018, organised by Caritas Cambodia and partner organisations. The forum brought high-ranking government officials, NGOs, leaders of different faiths and the media together to discuss trafficking and foster partnership (Caritas Cambodia, 2018). The *Khmer Times* reported that about 2,000 Buddhists, Catholics, Protestants and Muslims attended the event in 2018. At the end of the forum, representatives from the four religions prayed together for the prevention of human trafficking in Cambodia (Sovuthy, 2018).

## 6. PARTICIPATION

Participation relates to encouraging an active response from LFAs on issues of human trafficking and modern slavery, including inspiring the action of individuals who are part of faith communities (e.g. church members).

- **Encouragement of Participation through Ecumenical Declarations**

While participation at the local level relates to the work of LFAs in their local contexts, participation has also been encouraged at the global leadership level. Religious leaders have convened around the world and signed statements related to human trafficking. For example, the Joint Declaration of Religious Leaders Against Modern Slavery, pledging an end to modern slavery and human trafficking by 2020, was signed in December 2014 by several religious leaders, including the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, Pope Francis, and representatives signing for Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh and Mohamed Ahmed el-Tayeb, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar (Global Freedom Network, 2016). In subsequent years, dozens of other religious leaders from around the world have added their signatures to this joint declaration.

- **Participation at the Local Level**

Engaging LFAs is important to help them maximise their ability to work on issues related to anti-modern slavery and human trafficking. An interviewee from the International Justice Mission discussed their strategy for increasing the participation of the church in issues related to anti-trafficking and justice, stating that getting local churches interested in trafficking issues comes about through journeying with them, and making them aware of issues in which they can make a difference.

## 7. PRAYER

Prayer is an important aspect of the work of LFAs, including in the delivery of their services. Prayer can also be understood as a rehabilitative tool for survivors of trafficking, as indicated by the Survivors' Prayer Gatherings in the Philippines – a prayer and singing event for trafficking survivors of several organisations.

Whilst religious actors believe that the act of prayer has a spiritual force in and of itself, events focused on prayer are a way of bringing people together to think about human trafficking and raise awareness of this issue. For example, The Salvation Army schedules an annual Day of Prayer for Victims of Human Trafficking, bringing together the global Salvation Army churches to pray about this issue and the people affected by it. Prayer can serve as a means of unifying communities against the exploitation of human trafficking, working as a common language through which to raise awareness globally.

Similar to The Salvation Army's Day of Prayer for Victims of Human Trafficking, another important initiative on the calendars of many churches is Freedom Sunday, a day that emphasises the participation of people of faith in awareness of, and action against, human trafficking. In 2018, over 18,000 churches participated in the Freedom Sunday organised by the International Justice Mission. Their event is based on the idea that churches joining for prayer draw their hearts into the problem for which they are praying. Bringing churches together through Freedom Sunday can facilitate a collaborative, participatory response to human trafficking, helping to create a powerful sense of a global faith-based movement against human trafficking, while also being an educational and awareness-raising mechanism.



## Summary of Research Gaps

Gaps remain in the extant knowledge of LFAs responding to modern slavery and human trafficking. These include:

- Information on non-Christian LFAs conducting anti-modern slavery and human trafficking programming.
- Information on LFAs conducting anti-modern slavery and human trafficking programming in Latin America (including the Caribbean), the Pacific Islands, Central Asia, China, the Middle East, and Northern Africa.
- Information on sustainable models for anti-modern slavery and human trafficking projects. In this case, 'sustainable' refers to the funding that supports programming, whether that be for survivors or wider prevention efforts.
- Information on where and why faith-based anti-modern slavery and human trafficking projects may have failed.
- Information about the work of LFAs related to prosecution.
- Information about the contractual relationships / partnership modalities between international NGOs (or Northern funders) and LFAs implementing projects.
- Information on the day-to-day work of LFAs providing anti-modern slavery and human trafficking programming.
- Information on differences in care, and approaches to service provision, between LFAs from different religions.
- Information on the actual impact of LFAs in their response to modern slavery and human trafficking.
- Information on the negative role of religion and LFAs on modern slavery and human trafficking.

## Key Recommendations (selected)<sup>2</sup>

Among the recommendations presented at the end of this report are:

- LFAs and FBOs should advocate to funders about the value of the front-line work of LFAs, emphasising that, although they may not have the organisational structures typically valued by mainstream funders, great value can come out of funding their work. This requires a commitment to working with the current structures of LFAs.
- LFAs and international FBOs should encourage LFAs to learn about needs in their communities related to modern slavery and human trafficking, assist them in thinking about how to engage with these needs, including theologically (i.e. within their own religious context), and support them in getting tangibly engaged responding to those needs.
- LFAs and international FBOs should make the work of LFAs clearer to policymakers and the media to ensure it is recognised and supported by policymakers and funders.
- LFAs should be more widely understood as sustainable partners for either new anti-trafficking programming, or as partners for existing initiatives, as engaging the local faith community is key to sustaining systemic changes and widening influence and impact.

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<sup>2</sup> See the end of the full report for all key recommendations.









Photo: A community awareness training session with the Salvation Army in Bangladesh

