

Engagement of lived experience in international policy and programming in human trafficking and modern slavery: reflections from Europe.*

*Regional report for the project *Promising practices in the engagement of people with lived experience to address modern slavery and human trafficking*

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Introduction and context

People with lived experiences of modern slavery have invaluable insights into how different forms of exploitation manifest and impact individuals and communities. However, lived experience, knowledge, and perspectives are often notably absent from programming and policy development. Too often, people with lived experience are asked to narrate a testimony of their stories of exploitation and trauma, providing a face to the issue and appealing to the public. This means that programmes and policies are created without the input of people with direct lived experience, the primary beneficiaries and target audience of these programmes and policies.

More recently, there has been increasing recognition and call for policy and programme development to include and, more importantly, effectively engage this population and vulnerable communities. However, there is still a less developed and embedded approach to this engagement, in which people with lived experience play a central, mainstream and consistent role in programming and policy-making.

The research project, led by the University of Liverpool in collaboration with the Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (the Modern Slavery PEC), assessed the nature and effectiveness of engagement and empowerment mechanisms regarding people with lived experience in international policy and programming on modern slavery. This report contributes to this critical work from the European context, where four experts and professionals were engaged in consultation interviews on the subject of involvement, engagement and inclusion of people with lived experience in policy and programming. The report is divided into two parts. The first looks at the debate surrounding the meanings and usage of some terms at the centre of this work, including modern slavery, victim, survivor and effective engagement of people with lived experience. The

second part discusses four good practice of effective engagement that stood out in the interviews, namely, viewing survivors as more than their lived experience, attaching a value to survivor engagement, engaging survivors as partners, and shifting from engagement to mainstreaming as a pathway to inclusion and equity. But before explaining and discussing the findings, a note on methods and study participants is in order.

Methods and participants

The findings in this report are based on semi-structured consultation interviews with four experts and professionals who have worked in Europe or have experience of engagement of lived experience in European contexts. These were experienced in policy, programming, management, research, advocacy, leadership and storytelling. The participants' roles varied from NGO directors to Intergovernmental Organisation executives. Two interviewees described themselves as persons with lived experience and occupied different roles in their communities and during their careers including Executive Directors of NGOs in Europe, US and Asia.

The study received ethical clearance from the University of Liverpool, which aided in the development of strong project protocols and policies concerning safeguarding, confidentiality, data collection, and storage. All the participants gave expressed permission to use their correct details in data dissemination, including their organisations. But to protect their identities, their names and specific places have been anonymised.

The interview guide included nine general questions to guide discussions on definitions and terminologies, meaningful/effective engagement (good practice), evaluating success/effectiveness of survivor engagement, barriers to engagement, and safeguarding. The report draws on the four interviewees' perspectives and reflections to provide evidence for the claims and arguments made, using quotations to illustrate the broader set of life stories, knowledge and experience. The interview guide and other research instruments used in this study were co-created with a bigger team consisting of six Consultants that included people with lived experience and a survivor-led NGO. The team of academics, consultants and international experts who collaborated on the project, enabled the creation of a space for consultation with stakeholders in the field of anti-modern slavery and anti-human trafficking.

The study used a thematic analysis approach to analyse and bring order to the data because the researchers wanted to create a framework that would capture key themes and processes related to the research objectives and questions. This entailed grouping the participants' accounts into similarities (or themes), and these themes made sense of what they said, deriving meaning from it. Keeping the research objectives in mind, rigorous and systematic reading and coding of the interview transcripts was performed, allowing significant (repeated) themes in the discussions to emerge. Coded segments of interview text allowed for the identification of themes important to the participants. Identifying and documenting relationships between these themes enabled the researchers to explore similarities and differences across participants and regions.

Key findings

i. Variance in the definitions and usage of modern slavery, victim and survivor

According to the four experts and professionals that participated in this study, modern slavery is a commonly used term in many European contexts. There is value in using it in programming and policy development. The participants understood the notion of modern slavery as 'an umbrella term covering a whole range of human rights violations.'¹ However, they saw it as interconnected and

¹ Executive Officer, Intergovernmental Organisation.

interwoven with other forms of societal oppression and injustices. Participant two articulated this point in the following words.

It was reported that in the legal sector, where legal terms, definitions and understandings are privileged, modern slavery is not formally used in legal processes. As participant one asserted, 'even though you have the Modern Slavery Bill in the UK, it does not legally define modern slavery.'² Participant four echoed from a policy perspective, stating that 'although in the UK context, modern slavery is most used, again, if you look at the policy, there is confusion about what is modern slavery.'³

The terms victim and survivor were sometimes used interchangeably in the interviews to refer to persons who have lived through traumatic experiences of modern slavery. However, interviewees understood a victim as someone upon whom an act of exploitation is committed or someone in a state of exploitation and has no real say in the matter. And they described the term as passive. On the other hand, they understood 'survivor' as a more active term to refer to persons who were exploited at one point in time and have persevered and outlived (survived) their exploitation and trauma. Participant one specifically defined a survivor as someone who 'has been through the victimhood but has come out of it, has been through a period of recovery and rehabilitation and is some time away from it.'⁴ Such examples would propose that the term 'victim' is fixed, while 'survivor' is more flexible, with room to negotiate processes and experiences. Participant two offered this clarification:

*'The term survivor is phenomenal and has strength because of this active element that the word victim doesn't have. The 'victim' is a passive person in a situation with no control and agency. In contrast, a survivor is somebody acting. The term survivor incorporates an active element, the activity of overcoming the state of victimhood.'*⁵

This participant from a legal background elaborated on their experience using these terms and reported that 'survivor' is not commonly used because it is not legal or legally defined. They reported that 'survivor is not a term we meet in our documents. I have heard people saying, 'no, we should not be using it because it is unclear what it means''.⁶ On the other hand, 'victim' is a preferred and commonly used term because 'there is a legal definition of a victim of a crime..., [and] we use victim because this is the language of our legal documents.'⁷

The 'language' framework was also used to explain how terms vary according to context, suggesting a variance and limitation in how they are used in contexts of Europe. Besides variance according to sectors, interviews also put forward an understanding that the definition and usage of terminology vary according to language. For example, according to participant two, modern slavery is an effective 'communication tool' in English to convey information to the public, compared to the human trafficking language. In the same way, the usage of 'survivor' varies across European contexts, sectors and possibly across different forms of exploitation and individuals. Problems of translation compound this. Consider this experience:

*'The challenge is that the word survivor is hardly well translated into many other languages. For example, in Latin-based languages, like Italian or French, the word survivor tends to be translated into a passive word. That form does not carry the same empowerment message as the English form [...]. Some survivors from Italy, France, and Spain like the notion of 'survivor' more in English than in their language. And the challenge is even higher in other languages like Russian, where the term doesn't exist and is always translated through a very artificial construction that doesn't quite work.'*⁸

² Executive Officer, Intergovernmental Organisation.

³ Founder and Executive Director, NGO.

⁴ Executive Officer, Intergovernmental Organisation

⁵ Executive Program Officer, Intergovernmental Organisation

⁶ Executive Officer, Intergovernmental Organisation

⁷ Executive Officer, Intergovernmental Organisation

⁸ Executive Program Officer, Intergovernmental Organisation

Consultations with the four experts and professionals in this study recommend that it is paramount to define and explain/unpack the usage of the chosen term. Their experience indicates that the terms or notions of victim, survivor and modern slavery often cannot fully describe the complexity of an experience. They are generally used for important communication by individuals or organisations. It was recommended that the best way to be informed of what terms to use during engagements and include people with lived experience is to ask about their preferences. 'In my research, I say that I am working with people who identify as survivors of human trafficking and tend not to think, 'do I fit the legal definition?''⁹

This research project was initially designed and commissioned using the term 'survivor' to refer to people with lived experiences of modern slavery. However, these variances and confusion arising from the data suggested that privileging the term 'survivor' could skew the data in many ways. The term is, however, used in this report because the participants with lived experience described themselves as survivors.

*'Like myself, I have identified as a survivor of slavery, particularly because my understanding of slavery goes beyond our understanding of slavery. There is a whole thing about, like, well, you are, and you cannot be a survivor of slavery if you are not black. So, that aligns politically with former survivors and abolitionists like Frederick Douglass, like Haitian revolutionaries. For me, that is, explaining my own lived experience and political identity.'*¹⁰

While the debate of where, how and when to use these notions continues in modern slavery, it is clear from these interviews that the terms are used differently by different people and sectors for different reasons, purposes and politics. Participant four remarked, 'I think one of the important things is recognising that language and terminology are political. Therefore, the terms we use in different settings are chosen for their value and usefulness in achieving a certain goal.'¹¹ These terms have emotional and legal connections and implications, and sensitivity is needed in choosing and using the appropriate term for the context.

ii. Effective survivor engagement?

The participants understood survivor engagement as working or doing programmes and policies with survivors or programmes and policies led by survivors. Effective survivor engagement involves listening to what survivors think and envision: 'effective survivor engagement follows the leadership of survivors.'¹² Survivor engagement is not dictating how, where and when survivors should engage with other stakeholders. The ultimate goal of effective engagement is not tokenism, exploitation and extraction but to gain collaborators and partners.

There is a consensus in the interviews that effective survivor engagement has value in progressing and advancing programming and policy-making, making it 'a useful tool in modern slavery toolbox'.¹³ However, going by these consultations, survivor engagement is in the early stages in many European contexts. Thus, 'its newer in the [ant-slavery] work, having survivors engaged as steering community members or a separate advisory board that reviews materials, methods, analysis, etc.'¹⁴ It was suggested that a few countries are making considerable progress, actively leading the call to engage survivors in policy and programming. According to one professional in an intergovernmental organisation, 'survivors need to be properly acknowledged and invited to participate in forums where other actors discuss trafficking models and every other issue.'¹⁵ In the same breath, the participant reported that most European countries engage with 'victims quite quickly and are out of this [country] system. The contact with them [victims] is lost.' This contraction sums up how some experts and professionals may intentionally or unintentionally exclude people with lived experience. This implies

⁹ Founder and Executive Director, NGO.

¹⁰ Founder and Executive Director, NGO.

¹¹ Founder and Executive Director, NGO.

¹² Founder and Executive Director, NGO.

¹³ Executive Program Officer, Intergovernmental Organisation

¹⁴ Founder and Executive Director, NGO.

¹⁵ Executive Officer, Intergovernmental Organisation

that survivor engagement is not an event or destination but a process that never starts in some contexts due to the victim's movement through government or border systems. In this case, it is difficult to imagine how survivor engagement would develop and manifest in contexts of home, transit and destination countries with systems designed to engage only with victims and asylum seekers in a particular national context.

Participants three and four pointed to the lack of knowledge and understanding of what survivor engagement involves and looks like in practice: 'Right now, survivor engagement is conflated with survivor inclusion, like just asking for our voices. It is not inclusion, just like any diversity, equity and inclusion. It is not, 'here is a group of people; let us include a few of us[survivors].'¹⁶ To this participant, an expert on human trafficking,

*'Survivor engagement needs to be about the transformation of human trafficking. I am talking about changing why we [survivors] were excluded in the first place. Or survivors building what we want over here and then non-survivors taking our lead. Effective survivor engagement follows the leadership of survivors.'*¹⁷

According to participant three, an NGO executive director, effective engagement is respectfully and meaningfully incorporating survivors' input. This involves government agencies, law enforcement agencies, businesses, non-profits, and service providers listening carefully to survivor recommendations and incorporating their input in designing and implementing policies and programs.

*'They (e.g. organisations) want input but do not understand what they are doing. 'Oh, let's put survivors on a round table, but we will not specifically talk to them.' I have experienced this myself [laughs]. [This organisation] invited me to become an advisor. My name was there. They promised to pay me if I came for the meeting. When I came for the meeting, they did not ask me any questions. They discussed it by themselves. They did not say, [Jane, pseudonym], 'do you have any questions? 'Do you have any input'? No, that is not effective for me. You are just using my name there. Your work will not be effective because you design it yourself, and I am just a name.'*¹⁸

Overall, effective survivor engagement includes other stakeholders and allies checking their power/privilege and recognising that, while they have something to add to the conversation, there might be a unique lived experience/perspective they cannot fully appreciate or even understand. And 'It is their [allies] job to seek to understand it rather only the survivor's job to articulate it in a way that others can understand.'¹⁹

Good practice of effective survivor engagement

The consultations suggest that effective engagement of survivors and survivor-led organisations in designing, implementing and evaluating programmes and policies is essential because it ensures that the interventions efficiently work for survivors and non-survivors. These meetings with experts and professionals in this study offer a range of good practices and guidelines on how to go about achieving effective survivor engagement. However, four stood out in the interviews, as discussed below.

i. Viewing survivors as more than their lived experience

The participants' reflections put forward an understanding that there is heavy reliance on personal stories of modern slavery. Sometimes, these stories are used to isolate survivors, making them feel alienated by other stakeholders. This does not suggest that survivors do not understand the benefit

¹⁶ Founder and Executive Director, NGO.

¹⁷ Founder and Executive Director, NGO.

¹⁸ Founder and Executive Director, NGO.

¹⁹ Founder and Executive Director, NGO.

of sharing their stories, such as raising awareness. However, their stories and trauma are not the only primary issue or topics they can contribute to anti-slavery conversations. They could talk and contribute to policy change, design intervention service programs, lead programs, or manage organisations.

*'We keep using survivors at the front line. They [other stakeholders] keep using them, exploiting them, using their story, without understanding the trauma, without understanding that this person needs to continue their life after telling that story.'*²⁰

*'Requiring people to go into graphic details about their trauma and narrowing their contribution to that. So we don't even allow people to say anything else, but we only want to hear what happened to you. That is harmful because it says, 'that is the only thing you see me as, and you are narrowing my identity, but also what I have to share.'*²¹

When other stakeholders hear survivors' stories, they often separate themselves from the survivors, and the experience often leads to actions that dehumanise survivors. This kind of engagement leaves survivors in a dilemma, either to be heard in limited and sometimes extractive and harmful ways or to be excluded from critical dialogues that directly affect their lives. Thus, 'good survivor engagement recognises that we [survivors] are more than survivors of trauma and more than survivors of human trafficking. We are survivors of racism, sexism, of all these other things.'²²

Consultations show that survivors' lived experiences should be acknowledged, appreciated and respected since they have the potential to redirect the approach to partnerships with survivors with authenticity. However, people in policy and programming need to look beyond the story and trauma and take the time to listen and learn about what survivors (as partners) bring to the table. Survivors should be engaged in influential roles, for example, direct service professionals, executive officers, board members, trainers and community educators, policy advocates, contractors and consultants, etc. Indeed, 'one key element [of survivor engagement] is that survivors are in decision-making positions. Survivors should not only be limited to survivor leadership roles'.²³

Overall, survivors are weary of being tasked to narrate their stories and trauma, and other important aspects of their identities are ignored or overlooked. Participants argued that transparency is key in survivor engagement, starting with recruitment processes.

*'We have changed our recruitment process to make people feel safe and comfortable applying. We are very values-based, and I think that enables survivors to have trust. Our level of transparency addresses the fact that survivors will have trust issues, not just from their trauma but also because we recognise that other organisations have done a lot of harm. So we're trying to be transparent.'*²⁴

When survivors are restricted to narrating their personal stories and trauma or to survivor leadership roles, their experiences, expertise and insights are wasted. 'Imagine a women's movement with no women or very few women. That's what it is like in our current anti-trafficking sector.'²⁵ The practice has implications in the anti-slavery field, particularly because survivor stories are not enough to steer and sustain the sector. Yet, 'if we supported the survivor leaders to reach a point where they can be the researchers, the politicians, et cetera, we would have a more informed direction.'²⁶

Survivors should be engaged in critical roles with real power where their voice and expertise can influence decision-making. However, to happen, people in policy and programming must be strategic in engaging survivors, knowing what qualifications would best suit the needed roles. Consider this experience.

²⁰ Founder and Executive Director, NGO.

²¹ Founder and Executive Director, NGO.

²² Founder and Executive Director, NGO.

²³ Founder and Executive Director, NGO.

²⁴ Founder and Executive Director, NGO.

²⁵ Founder and Executive Director, NGO.

²⁶ Founder and Executive Director, NGO.

*'So our staff and board are the majority survivors, as written into our bylaws. You have to have survivors in decision-making positions. That means I [survivor] and other team members get to direct both funding and programming just by putting people in those positions.'*²⁷

ii. Attaching a value to survivor engagement

Organisations, particularly community-based, are shouldering more work on survivor engagement, working hard to fill the vacuum left by government agencies. Indeed, a significant part of anti-slavery work challenges governments to change the ways they govern and to eliminate the negative consequences of policies that sometimes facilitate the conditions for exploitation. Notably, they challenge governments' reluctance to see the value of survivor engagement in formulating and implementing programs and policies. That means survivor engagement should be a central principle of the government's approach to establishing effective anti-slavery strategies that address prevention, prosecution, and protection.

However, when survivors and their voices are included and engaged in programs and policies in national and international organisations and agencies, they are often undervalued through a widespread assumption that they should volunteer their time and expertise. They are relied on to point out what might work to prevent and identify potential victims of modern slavery early. However, often they receive these many requests for their involvement without compensation. They are unpaid or underpaid for their contributions or sometimes required to pay out of pocket to facilitate their engagement, putting them at risk of harm and re-exploitation. Participants three and four reflected:

*'I have seen survivors go to conferences and not have money to get home because they have not been paid.'*²⁸

*'I used to speak to crowds, proudly telling my story; calling people to support the organisation, which made millions. But how much did they give me after I spoke, got flashbacks and took time to recover? Zero! Do you understand that?'*²⁹

It is clear that survivor engagement allows organisations to serve clients better and develop programs and policies. As primary stakeholders in modern slavery, survivors offer invaluable insight and expertise, which should be appropriately compensated. The participants argued that meaningful/effective survivor engagement requires support and investment of resources so as to compensate and reimburse expenses as done for any other professional and expert: 'we have to value the expertise with the number [money]'³⁰ While there are occasional legal or logistical difficulties to compensation or reimbursement, these challenges should be approached as not impossible.

*'I do not like to call these people survivors because the global [anti-trafficking] movement has only given them the label of 'survivor'. You are just surviving. They forget they are experts. They are subject experts and subject matter. Do we value them for only 25 dollars? Do we value them by only giving them water and food?'*³¹

*'Then there is the issue of gift cards [sarcastic laugh]. This still happens to me. They still give me gift cards. You give gift cards to survivors. So what should they do with the gift card? Do they want to buy something specific in a store on Amazon? All they need is to pay for food. [...]. Many survivor leaders and activists do not have stable jobs and no money. So involvement should give them proper value. Do not give them a gift!'*³²

²⁷ Founder and Executive Director, NGO.

²⁸ Founder and Executive Director, NGO.

²⁹ Founder and Executive Director, NGO.

³⁰ Founder and Executive Director, NGO.

³¹ Founder and Executive Director, NGO.

³² Founder and Executive Director, NGO.

Participants, particularly those with lived experience, called for transparency when discussing issues of compensation for payment and participation. These issues should be covered and comprehensively discussed up front, giving survivors sufficient room and time to decide if to proceed with participation or not. '[Advisory Council] pay a stipend and per diem. That's critical.'³³ Survivors should not be placed in precarious positions where they must figure out their compensations post-participation.

Participants recommended organisations move from compensating to hiring survivors for their engagement. 'There are now many organisations that hire survivors and treat them as employees.'³⁴ Similarly, 'we are trying to move from survivor engagement to hiring.'³⁵ Participant two offered a case study on effectively engaging survivors as professionals and experts that is worth sharing here.

Case study 1: Survivor engagement in gender sensitive policy formation/recommendation

We recently [2021] published findings from a study on gender-sensitive approaches to combating trafficking. This was the first purely policy study where we engaged with survivors throughout the publication's content. We engaged survivors in three pillars:

First, we shared the publication with a number of survivors, looking at a wide array of survivors who could give us different perspectives on their experience and expertise on the subject of study. Then all their inputs were well incorporated into the final version of the study.

Secondly, we made sure to have those survivors in our publication launch to provide their expertise and perspective in engaging in policymaking for international organisations. We had an event fully organised by the survivors. We instead owned the event, paid for it, and hosted and organised it because it was our event. But we hired a survivor to organise it, from conceptualisation to inviting speakers to moderating the panels. This was a site event in our annual conference.

Thirdly, we relied on survivors to design and run some training based on the publication. We have extensive capacity building and training programs to target specifically anti-trafficking practices across our partners, including police forces, social workers, labour inspectorate, NGOs, prosecutors, etc. So what we do is hire survivors to help us develop the scenario, follow the training and make sure that the survivor is instructing the anti-trafficking practitioner, saying, 'that is not how you do this. You might want to shift and look a little bit like this.' The goal here is to move 180 degrees away from tokenistic engagement with survivors and to include them in a way that has the inside of our trends and, in fact, highlights their very expertise. This allows their expertise to direct our activities.

iii. Engaging survivors as partners: Professionalisation, accreditation and recognition

The participants also highlighted issues related to professionalisation, appropriate accreditation and recognition as core elements of effective survivor engagement in programming and policy. While it is not good practice to assume that all survivors do not have an education or to talk down to them,

³³ Founder and Executive Director, NGO.

³⁴ Founder and Executive Director, NGO.

³⁵ Executive Program Officer, Intergovernmental Organisation

effective engagement is to be mindful of where survivors are at the point of engagement/hiring in terms of context, language, vocabulary, etc. Participant four reflected on their experience this way: 'ask a survivor how they want to be introduced. Imagine, despite my PhD, I have been in rooms where they are like, 'Hey, here's [Rose, pseudonym], a survivor of human trafficking (sarcastic laugh).'³⁶

Like other professionals and experts, survivors desire to operate in a perspective where terms of engagement align with and recognise their expertise. It was reported in the interviews that some survivors take extra measures to demand recognition as experts, including intentionally downplaying their attachment to the notion of survivor.

*'I introduce myself like this. My name is [Jane, pseudonym]. I am the Founder and CEO of [NGO]. I am also the Chair of [Advisory Council]. I am a survivor. You notice that survivor is the last and bottom of all my roles because I do not want people to see me as only a survivor ... because it reduces my expertise. So the value of people listening to me is different when I say I am CEO. People see me on a different level and give me more value.'*³⁷

Such examples suggest that some survivors have resorted to proactively settling the tone of engagement. This might depend on their personalities and, more importantly, their access to some spaces. So the experience might depend on identities and positionalities. Indeed, as one interviewee remarked: 'I describe myself depending on who I am talking to'.³⁸ Survivors at the entry point (e.g. as beneficiaries) would not be in a position to demand recognition like their counterparts who have made progress in the field and have access to certain venues.

It was recommended that organisations not minimise all the expertise into one single role of 'survivor or survivor leader'. Instead, survivors should be rightfully recognised for their engagement by giving them professional titles, especially if they are not connected to the organisation: 'You may need to know that, if possible, people can utilise the experiences for their CV in building up work experiences after trafficking because that is a huge gap.'³⁹

iv. Shifting from engagement to mainstreaming as a pathway to inclusion and equity.

Interviews propose that effective survivor engagement implies meaningfully involving survivors in the entire process of design, delivery/implementation, and evaluation of programming and policy. Often, survivors are involved in the programme delivery and are not consulted or engaged in the designing and evaluation phases, leaving the circle of engagement incomplete. Participants viewed effective survivor engagement as having great potential and value to mainstream or engage survivors. Participant two reported:

*'We are increasingly trying to move away from survivor engagement and into full mainstream survivor engagement in a way that allows our products, policy, and training to be embedded into what we try to carry in themselves, the same message that we ultimately want to pass.'*⁴⁰

The practice has the potential to move beyond mainstreaming to equity, including acknowledging and professionalising the survivors' experiences, expertise and knowledge at all levels of engagement. This involves 'creating employment where we then pay for their expertise. [...] in a way that recognises their expertise and then pays for their expertise. Then that expertise can be recognised with a contract, so they are more protected. This improves terms of engagement to equity.'⁴¹

³⁶ Founder and Executive Director, NGO.

³⁷ Founder and Executive Director, NGO.

³⁸ Founder and Executive Director, NGO.

³⁹ Founder and Executive Director, NGO.

⁴⁰ Executive Program Officer, Intergovernmental Organisation

⁴¹ Executive Program Officer, Intergovernmental Organisation

Interviews also propose that mainstreaming survivor engagement has the potential to address power imbalances between survivors and other stakeholders in the anti-slavery field. Participants viewed power imbalance as a significant barrier to effective survivor engagement.

*'Remember the event we organised that I told you about earlier [case study 1 above]. It was the first time we gave the keys of an event to a survivor, and we just got like, go for it. And I can tell you that it made many people uncomfortable, not necessarily because, 'God, what are we doing?' But like, okay, like 'we have surrendered our power. But because the event was such a success, that helped because the resistance to surrender to survivors was reduced. Like we are now rather enthusiastic, and we are all behind this idea.'*⁴²

Modern slavery is connected to power and exclusion from power, and successful approaches to combat it should therefore empower those most vulnerable to slavery. According to the participants, addressing and reducing power, hierarchy, and the gap between survivors and other actors in anti-slavery work is what they understand as mainstreaming survivor engagement. Survivors are not meaningfully engaged and included because they are not seen as powerful and valuable stakeholders. It was perceived that mainstreaming and normalising survivor engagement has the potential to address fears and power imbalances in the field gradually. Participant two reported:

*'We try to address it [power imbalances] differently, like by diversifying, but should more than diversify. I think the right word is 'mainstreaming'. So we have now developed an approach that is growing and growing and suggests that survivor engagement is not [just] one goal in a list of things we want to do.'*⁴³

Different survivors have different expertise and capabilities, which dictates their level of engagement, for example, as professionals/experts or as only beneficiaries. Survivors become tokenised when only one survivor is invited to participate all the time, placing them in a difficult position where they are expected to speak on behalf of all survivors. 'I have seen that having like one survivor and not many puts a lot of pressure that they are the only one out.'⁴⁴ Therefore, diversity is vital for effective survivor engagement.

*'Effective survivor engagement certainly includes a diverse group of survivors. So not creating a homogenous group just like any group of people, up-skills and supporting survivors, but does not see it as well. They are lacking in capacity. Let us just give them skills.'*⁴⁵

According to the interview consultations, it is key to conduct training and educate other stakeholders on the importance of tolerance and understanding differences in capabilities, which are both essential for steering modern slavery work: 'It is also about non-survivors being trained. Effective survivor engagement must improve real-world conditions for those survivors, not just future survivors.'⁴⁶ Similarly, 'before, when our office started pushing for survivor engagement, we had specific training on survivor engagement with survivors to ensure we were equipped.'⁴⁷

Ultimately, interviewees proposed that addressing power imbalances could create space for survivors, helping them to build a strong sense of identity and wellbeing. The approach would also help create space for learning, re-learning for all stakeholders, and fostering equitable participation.

*'I think how to overcome power imbalances is simply by normalising survivor engagement. Do you make sure that your policy paper does not have a typo? Yes. Then ask a similar question: do you ensure your policy paper is survivor informed? Yes. Like, at some point, this needs to become so normal. It should not be a question to debate.'*⁴⁸

⁴² Executive Program Officer, Intergovernmental Organisation

⁴³ Executive Program Officer, Intergovernmental Organisation

⁴⁴ Founder and Executive Director, NGO

⁴⁵ Founder and Executive Director, NGO

⁴⁶ Founder and Executive Director, NGO

⁴⁷ Executive Program Officer, Intergovernmental Organisation

⁴⁸ Executive Program Officer, Intergovernmental Organisation

*'Involvement of survivors needs to be continuous. I always say hire survivors, from beginning to end. I have been saying this for about ten years now. Survivors should start and complete the work and be involved from the beginning to the end.'*⁴⁹

Ultimately, effective or meaningful survivor engagement of people with lived experience requires questioning and rethinking the way things are done in the field of modern slavery, which involves listening and putting mechanisms in place for mainstream engagement, including decision-making processes.

Concluding remarks

Findings discussed in this report suggest that effective survivor engagement involves seeing survivors beyond narratives/stories of trauma (tokenistic engagement) and attaching a suitable value to their expertise and contribution. This process would involve people in policy and programming, seeing the broader and holistic skills, knowledge and expertise that survivors bring to the anti-slavery conversation. The significant benefit to inclusion and effective engagement would then help build on survivors' underutilised and essential knowledge, providing them with opportunities to inform and shape programmes and policies based on their lived experience. Such engagement would create avenues for ensuring survivors' needs are understood and effectively served, ultimately increasing the likelihood of achieving the intended purpose. The practice would have the potential to contribute to feelings of empowerment, social inclusion and connectedness, ultimately contributing to healing and recovery among the communities of survivors. However, survivor engagement, which is a process and not an event, cannot happen in a vacuum. There is a great need to recognise that the current system has been built on exclusion and the only way to address the problem is to stop centring exclusion while putting in place what is needed for inclusion and engagement to happen.

⁴⁹ Founder and Executive Director, NGO

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