

# Engagement of lived experience in international policy and programming in human trafficking and modern slavery: reflections from East, Central and Southern Africa.\*

\*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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## Executive summary

How does meaningful and effective survivor engagement in international development policy and programming on modern slavery and human trafficking resonate with survivors, survivor leaders, and survivor-led organizations within the continent of Africa? The seeming disconnect between the definitions of "survivor engagement" and "modern slavery" and the absence of safeguarding protocols, colonization in donor funding, and power imbalances between the Global South and Global North are major challenges. Nevertheless, good practice in the form of survivor centred (also known as survivor-informed) approaches, can help to promote survivors' recovery and meet their needs. This includes, rewarding and compensating survivors, which allows them to gain back their economic power and improve mental and self-esteem. Engaging survivors as experts can be a means of recognizing them and gives a ray of hope. On the other hand, engaging survivors may also expose them to potential harm hence the need to constantly monitor and scrutinize involvement in policy and programming.

## Introduction

### i. Background and objectives of study

In March this year, I was engaged as a Regional Consultant-Africa by the University of Liverpool based on my professional expertise in protection and promotion of human rights in Africa specifically the rights of women and girls trafficked for sex and marriage, child and forced labour. I conducted semi-structured interviews with experts/professionals, which investigated the nature and effectiveness of survivor engagement mechanisms in international policy and programming on modern slavery and human trafficking with the following objectives:-

- a. To gather evidence on existing promising practice and learning in relation to survivor involvement in modern slavery international policy and programming.
- b. To explore different understandings and perspectives of stakeholders in survivor involvement in modern slavery international policy and programming.

- c. To explain the benefits of different types and levels of survivor engagement in relation to users/beneficiaries and different aspects of modern slavery international policy and programming and translate these into evidence-based recommendations for policymakers.

The study was commissioned in response to the findings and recommendations of the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) review into The UK's approach to tackling modern slavery through the aid programme (2020).

## Research methodology

### i. Description of participants

The interviews targeted survivors and survivor leaders in the African Continent comprising Uganda, Tanzania, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and Cameroon. Requests for interviews resulted in positive responses and six individual participants: three males and three females between the ages of 35 and 54. Two participants were in policy design and formulation in government and intergovernmental organizations at the time of the study. One participant was in policy implementation, and three participants in programme design and implementation in NGOs.

The demographics of respondents painted a picture of professionals with multiple roles and responsibilities, including directors, managers and heads of departments. The most common area of exploitation their work covered included:-

- Worst forms of child labour including recruitment and use of child soldiers,
- Child labour (children working with their parents in gold mines<sup>1</sup> and rice and cocoa plantations in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Cameroon, respectively).
- Trafficking of men and women into prostitution, marriage, forced labour and bonded slavery.

### ii. Accessing, recruiting and negotiating participation

The participants were from my own network and were thus experts I had previously interacted with within many forums. They had worked in many areas of human trafficking and modern slavery in contexts in Africa. Most participants were rather glad to be interviewed and identified as such. However, two requested anonymity to protect them from potential harm. They were equally eager to discuss, hear and learn more about modern slavery and human trafficking as one participant asked, "What is modern about slavery?"<sup>2</sup> And "... is fighting a war a form of labour?"

### iii. Interviewing

Overall, the interview process happened smoothly. However, one participant expressed anger throughout the process, about the West exercising much control in most issues affecting Africa such as leadership in survivor-led organizations. This included the formulation of definitions and terminologies without proper participation and involvement of those affected. This was rather a challenge for me to navigate as the participant posed questions I could not answer, yet they demanded answers. Likewise, I was questioned as to why the West imposed travel restrictions on some survivors of modern slavery. According to this participant, this is a barrier to effective and meaningful survivor engagement (we return to this issue in the findings section).

Overall, the semi-structured interview method enabled the participants to engage well with the objectives of the study. They appreciated the method, which made some of them (two) realize that

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<sup>1</sup> Zimbabwe and South Africa are rich in natural resources mostly gold

<sup>2</sup> Director, NGO

they are themselves survivors and can use that to the advantage of developing policy and programming for fellow survivors' benefit.

#### iv. Analysis

To analyze the data, I read the six interview transcripts. I segmented them into various repetitive themes in three or more interviews, followed by annotating the transcripts. This helped in highlighting emerging themes that were common across the six transcripts. I then conceptualized and segmented the data before analyzing the segments and writing down the results.

## Findings

### i. Foreign terminologies that do not resonate with the local context

The definitions and terms of modern slavery, human trafficking and survivor engagement seemed alien to almost all the participants. The organizations with whom the participants worked did not use this terminology. I understood that definitions have their place and serve different purposes. However, what emerged from the interviews was a tension between international and local definitions and systems. For example, although the terms modern slavery or recruitment of children in wars are internationally recognized terms, these are now always the same as legal definitions necessary within the criminal justice system. Law enforcers will use the term child labour in defining recruitment of children in wars, while community-based advocates will use other terms such as exploitation of children. One participant believed that modern slavery is not 'modern' as the West portrays it. Instead, these are forms of exploitation that have been happening for many years, indeed centuries: "When you say modern slavery, and yet the definition are things that have been happening for many years since time immemorial, then I get confused why they are modern?"<sup>3</sup> Another participant posed the question, 'Is war a form of labour'?<sup>4</sup>

I identified a similar debate on the usage of the terms 'victim' and 'survivor'. The term 'victim' was commonly used in the interviews and not 'survivor'. Which term is better to use, survivor or victim? Experts in human trafficking and modern slavery continue to grapple with this question. Although both terms are appropriate, depending on who uses them and for what purpose, they do not mean the same thing. The term 'victim' typically refers to someone who recently experienced exploitation and trauma and is used when describing a crime. The term survivor refers to an individual going through a recovery process. Some people identify as victims while others as survivors, and they do this for different reasons. The message from the interviewees was that the best way to resolve the confusion that comes with the usage of these terms is to respectfully ask for people's preferences. One participant stated that: "The inclusion of survivors [...], has been slow because of the lack of knowledge by the survivors who preferred to be called victims for sympathy".<sup>5</sup> Another used the term "victim" in most of her conversation: "I also work with them as people who have lived the traumatic experience, to design projects, look for funding and implement them so that the victims involved may live a dignified life in society. My work revolves around gender equality and ending gender-based violence and economic empowerment for the victims."<sup>6</sup> Equally, "I would suggest the term victims of human trafficking and engaging victims in policymaking and programming. The problem is whether the targeted goal can be achieved so that it can change the life of the victim".<sup>7</sup> I also observed that the participants with lived experience were not familiar with the term 'survivor', which is possibly why they did not identify as such. However, they agreed that the concept of survivorship brings a valuable perspectives to ending modern slavery and trafficking. Therefore, having such people on board

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<sup>3</sup> Director, NGO.

<sup>4</sup> Head, Intergovernmental Organization. Ending recruitment and use of child soldiers appears in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under 8.7 alongside trafficking, modern slavery and forced labour. SDG 8 is for 'Decent Work'

<sup>5</sup> Director, NGO.

<sup>6</sup> Director, NGO.

<sup>7</sup> Director, Government.

would be an asset at the strategic organizational level, including programme design and policy formulation.

This brings us to 'survivor engagement', a concept that was not clearly articulated in the participants' operations despite engaging survivors and the interviewees being survivors themselves. One participant's experience is informative: "I am using my experience to define policies and programmes and working towards including former child soldiers in peace and security processes; however, my recruitment was not based on my lived experience but rather my education, qualification and expertise."<sup>8</sup> According to this participant, the terms modern slavery and human trafficking are Western terminologies and do not reflect Africans' needs and requirements in the local contexts.

## ii. Proposed terms and definitions

Interviews suggest that survivor engagement, human trafficking and modern slavery are important features in almost all the organizations, albeit described by different definitions and terminologies. Interviewees found definitions and terms quite ambiguous, and they proposed terms that they deemed suitable or closer to the actual real-time occurrences. It would be argued that these definitions have been formulated for societies in which traditional customary rules<sup>9</sup> have dissolved, and liberal principles based on the rule of law has taken root. Experience shows that terms and definitions enable us to have a common understanding of a word or subject; they allow us to all be on the same page when discussing or reading about an issue. However, there appeared to be differences in understanding the terms modern slavery and survivor engagement with the participants using terms they commonly used instead of the given one. In this case, they proposed 'survivor mentorship' and 'survivor empowerment'.

### a. Survivor mentorship

There has to be a starting point from when one was a victim to when they are regarded as a survivor through mentoring programmes, which aim to support people from victim to survivor. This led to terminologies such as Survivor Mentorship Programmes emerging in the interviews. Indeed, "These are all forms of modern slavery my organization is working tirelessly on to break the vicious circle of entrapment through our Survivor-Mentorship programme."<sup>10</sup> Similarly, "Effective survivor mentorship supports victims to stand by themselves having got ways for their sustainable livelihood"<sup>11</sup>. Participants recommended a need to formulate definitions and conceptualization of terminologies in the anti-slavery work diversely and inclusively. Indeed, "There is always a misconception about the terms because of the definition given by individuals who write in different paradigms. These terms confuse ordinary people whom we work with as they are not straightforward in their meaning. Maybe to improve that, we need to develop a list of definitions that have been promoted and then cope with the best that we can rephrase to the layman's level)."<sup>12</sup>

### b. Empowerment

A key outcome from the focus group discussion was recognition of the importance of survivor empowerment in which survivors are empowered to create an independent and sustainable source of income as evidenced in the quote below:

*"I have never heard this terminology [survivor engagement] before but probably they align with empowerment. I think that terminology captures and I see most of people doing so they always say like empowerment, survivor empowerment. So how they empower them I think is through engaging or how to mentor them. So, the big terminology is empowerment and that is what we use."*

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<sup>8</sup> Head, Intergovernmental organization.

<sup>9</sup> A long-established, consistent pattern of use, incorporating beliefs and customs which have been transmitted from generation to generation.

<sup>10</sup> Director, NGO.

<sup>11</sup> Director, Government.

<sup>12</sup> Manager, UN Agency

It is key that projects are aligned to this goal of empowerment, offering key life skills programmes to support survivors and their families towards a long term, systematic and innovative solution.

### iii. Good practice standards in survivor engagement in modern slavery policy and programming

Three good practices were identified in the interviews, including a survivor centred approach, rewarding/compensation, and engaging survivors as professionals/experts. These are discussed in the following section.

#### a. Survivor-centred approach

A survivor centred approach was the first good practice identified in the interviews. One of the participants defined the survivor-centred approach as seeking to empower survivors by prioritizing their rights, needs, and wishes. According to the participants, the approach puts the needs of the survivors as a priority in defining programs and projects. The approach helps to promote the survivors' recovery, their ability to identify and express their needs and wishes, and to strengthen meaningful input from a diverse community of survivors at all stages of the program or project, including development, implementation, and evaluation. Consider this experience:

*"Throughout the process, the best our team did was to adopt a survivor-centred approach to international collaboration and input from survivors to ensure that the project accurately represents the needs, interests and perceptions of the target victim populations so as to build trust and develop healthy relationships with the survivors for the program to be a success. I work with girls and women who were once victims of the many issues I have mentioned, but I have never engaged them as 'survivors' but as people whose experiences may help prompt the government to look and act on the issue. I also work with them as people who have lived the traumatic experience to design projects, look for funding and implement them so that those victims may live a dignified life in society."<sup>13</sup>*

#### b. Rewarding and compensation

Providing appropriate compensation to victims/survivors was the second good practice highlighted in the interviews. This means helping survivors lead lives that are more satisfying, meeting basic needs, recognizing their worth, and boosting their ego and self-esteem as they engage in policy making and programme design. The participants believed that engaging survivors based on their expertise is its own kind of reward: recognizing their knowledge from the academic point of view. Thus, "survivor's expertise can be rewarded by giving them recruitment in relevant fields, allowing them to express their opinions in policymaking, program design and implementation."<sup>14</sup> Equally, "our team ensures they [survivors] are all paid as experts in this field because they lived the experiences, and they now serve as guides to the needs and expectations so that a clear and defined policy comes out."<sup>15</sup>

#### c. Engaging survivors as experts

Professionalising survivor engagement is the third good practice emerging in the interviews. Participants argued that survivors should be seen as more than their lived experiences. Therefore, it can be empowering to recognise their capacity and engage them in various roles, including developing survivor-centred ground rules, involving survivors in communications within an organisation, and making significant contributions to policy making. One participant reflected: "I am of the opinion and having learnt from you that survivor's expertise can be rewarded by giving them recruitment in relevant fields, allowing them to air their voices in policymaking, program design and

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<sup>13</sup> Director, NGO.

<sup>14</sup> Head, Intergovernmental Organization.

<sup>15</sup> Director, NGO.

implementation."<sup>16</sup> It was argued that survivors should be engaged based on their experiences as opposed to their level of education. This participant reflected as follows:

*"You know you cannot expect someone who has been fighting in the bush for over ten years to compete fairly with someone who was in the US or UK like you [Benedetta] now. The only life they know is gun, gun, gun and machete. All they understand is the language of killing and maiming; therefore, to compete with someone who in their entire life has been interacting with books and pens is the perfect example of hypocrisy and unfairness. It is a fallacy. It is a competition between a civilised person and a non-civilised one. [...]. So in succeeding in engaging survivors of war, we either overlook the fact that they were denied the chance to go to school or have their opinions."<sup>17</sup>*

Another participant concluded their remarks with the following words: "So in succeeding to engage survivors of war, it's either we overlook the fact that they were denied the chance to go to school or have their opinions heard in terms of their experiences in the war that will inform policies and program design".<sup>18</sup> Another had this to say on this issue; "Surely, this can only succeed if all those involved in developing policies partner with the survivors, communities, government, civil societies and NGO's as well as engaging experts whether they are survivors or not. Also, discrimination in the way we do things must be eliminated to promote good practice."<sup>19</sup> Indeed, some participants pushed to include survivors working within their organizations to be considered for the current study. One stated, "If an opportunity arises, please include some of my survivors. I work together within this data collection process. Let their voices be heard. Let them know that they are not only survivors but also useful in making policies that will help them and other people in a similar situation."<sup>20</sup> They argued that the opportunity to participate in such an international study would boost the victims/survivors self-esteem and allow them to have some pocket allowance.

#### iv. Barriers to effective and meaningful survivor engagement

Interviews show that there are several barriers to survivor engagement, and these vary according to context. This section discusses barriers that stood out in the interview data.

##### a. Diversity Equality and Inclusion (DEI) is a peremptory norm that underpins effective survivor engagement

Diversity and inclusion are two interrelated theories but are far from interchangeable. Diversity is about representation. Inclusion is about how well the contributions, presence and perspectives of different groups of people are valued and integrated into a certain setting. Failure to apply DEI norms undermines all efforts to effective survivor engagement. The interviews revealed that discrimination against survivor engagement was quite evident as the main challenge to successful survivor engagement. According to the participants, discrimination and biases affect survivors' engagement as. One participant expressed this problem/barrier this way:

*"Survivors of forced recruitment into war are discriminated upon. 'Criminalizing' former child soldiers. They would rather work for them and not with them. I will insist that it is unfair to discriminate against them based on their war status or even political status. Where will they go when governments decide to treat them as untrusted people? Is that fair? Also, most organizations keep off from engaging them. Once they find out that they were once child soldiers, they tend to discriminate against them and "perceive" them as criminals who must be kept away from society. Some member states even have a list of former child soldiers with their fingerprints in the government database. Based on their database, they are denied clearances by the police. This is what we are also trying to change."<sup>21</sup>*

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<sup>16</sup> Head, Intergovernmental Organization.

<sup>17</sup> Head, Intergovernmental Organization

<sup>18</sup> Head, Intergovernmental Organization

<sup>19</sup> Manager, UN Agency.

<sup>20</sup> Director, NGO

<sup>21</sup> Head, Intergovernmental Organization.

On issues linked to equality, participants argued that it was unfair to have survivors compete on the same level ground as non-survivors. According to the participants, the engagement of survivors under the age of eighteen was perceived as discriminatory in total disregard of the national laws. One participant believed that most of the survivors they worked with were children of forced labour and forced recruitment, whose voices should also be heard in program designing and policy formulation. These programmes should be aligned with the needs of the children: "We must not engage people under the age of eighteen in our activities as survivors but only as recipients. So how do you even engage survivors? There is no inclusivity, and it is discrimination based on age."<sup>22</sup>

Inclusion should also be gender, language and religious sensitive/considerate. Participants reflected that "The traditional value system, level of literacy and family discouragement and lack of security usually foster gender inequality and discrimination during survivor engagement."<sup>23</sup> Therefore, survivor engagement should be inclusive regardless of gender, language or region. Consider this experience:

*"Making sure that the activities we conduct from designing to implementation stage focus mostly on survivors by survivors whether boys or girls but mostly we focus on women and girls, but we cannot leave out boys because they are the majority that fights in the war. We also do not discriminate based on actors, whether from the French or English side, victims or not. Survivor engagement should be inclusive if we are to achieve a meaningful engagement of victims of human trafficking. [...]. Programs should include men and women, boys and girls. Also, those perceived as different political regions are left out. It should be diverse and inclusive."*<sup>24</sup>

#### b. Power dynamics in respect of programs control and global traveling

The interviews revealed that power dynamics is a significant concern. The global North is more powerful than the global south, thereby imposing funding requirements that do not align but affect and are detrimental to survivor engagement. Indeed, "The power imbalance is the major problem. Most of the decisions are made by countries with money to sponsor the programme, yet the exploited countries have less input and can be side-lined. This is because they cannot finance the projects. I am hoping that your research project will bring a change in this kind of practice."<sup>25</sup>

Another participant in the sample raised specific concerns about why the West often impose travel restrictions on survivors of war. They were particularly displeased as to why Western countries perceive victims or survivors of modern slavery and human trafficking, especially survivors of war, as criminals, having them on the criminal database and using such information to discriminate against them in issuing travel visas. They posed this question to me: "Be true to yourself, Benedetta. Do you think the country you are working for right now, the UK, or even the US or any Western Country, would issue visas to people perceived to have fought in the war regardless of the circumstances? "[...]. Based on the database they [West] keep, they [survivors] are denied clearances by the police, denied visas to travel."<sup>26</sup> According to them, it may not be possible to fully engage survivors if there is bias on terms to engage them. I understood the participant as saying that such concerns need to be explored further if we are to achieve meaningful survivor engagement. Otherwise, "they become a neglected lot in society."<sup>27</sup>

#### c. Discriminatory application of donor-funding

Donors have a responsibility to streamline funding in order to ensure the support they provide is relevant and aligns with the needs of the recipients or beneficiaries. However, as seen in the interviews, the lack of this is a barrier:

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<sup>22</sup> Director, NGO).

<sup>23</sup> Director, NGO.

<sup>24</sup> Director, NGO.

<sup>25</sup> Manager UNICEF.

<sup>26</sup> Head, Intergovernmental Organization.

<sup>27</sup> Head, Intergovernmental Organization.

*"Although it is a challenge to justify to the donors because they work on certain thematic areas which sometimes do not fall in our category of the work"<sup>28</sup>*

*"Those who fund the projects sometimes give out funding rules that do not align to the needs of survivors, but we have to agree to it just to receive the funds"<sup>29</sup>*

In one of the interviews, it was apparent that organizations seek funds for their selfish reasons, which do not aim at benefiting survivors. *"When an organization focuses on survivor engagement, for the sake of resources and funds, other organizations may be involved either governmental or NGO's. The problem is whether the targeted goal can be achieved so that it can change the life of the victim. Mostly the impact is not significant as training and other supports are not done with follow-ups."*<sup>30</sup> Commonly when organizations receive donor funds for programmes to empower survivors, they only align their programs towards training yet lack monitoring on the impact of the training such as offering economic empowerment programmes.

## v. Application of safeguarding protocols

### a. Survivor Protection

There was no clear outcome from the interviews in relation to safeguarding issues since most participants agreed that safeguarding protocols are lacking in their organizations, thereby exposing survivors to further harm. Consider these two experiences:

*"..uh, I may not have reliable information on that since we don't use or apply safeguarding issues. They happen as ethical issues, and some are criminalized, such as using a survivor's information without consent."<sup>31</sup>*

*"My country has accepted the international convention for protecting human rights. According to the country's constitution, the ratified conventions are part and parcel of the country's law. The Human Rights Commission plays a great role in pushing for the implementation of safeguarding protocols, but as to application, much is yet to be done. [...]. In this case, there are zero safeguarding protocols since the victims become headlines on social media, TV, and newspapers. Their identity is never hidden but exposed for everyone to see."<sup>32</sup>*

Exposing survivors to the media can be an excellent tool for increasing awareness about human trafficking and modern slavery cases. It is also important since it allows survivors to access support services and secure justice, and on a wider scale improvement in responses. However these examples suggest it can also pose challenges for some survivors, and hence must be taken with care considering the key principles of do no harm, take a survivor-centred approach, ensure non-discrimination and confidentiality, and protect data and information.

Having one's human rights violated can have painful, short, or long-term physical or psychological consequences. Human rights abuses and violations such as poverty, inequality, discrimination, and gender-based violence expose victims to vulnerability, affecting survivor engagement. "The issue of human rights violations has extremely damaging effects on the health, well-being, opportunities, and lives."<sup>33</sup> One interviewee was explicit in factoring in the rights of survivors in engaging them and making them aware of their rights. "Yeah, so according to our system, we define effective engagement as putting the rights and needs of the survivor at the forefront by ensuring that they are treated with dignity and respect... This involvement in policy making will empower survivors on their rights and help generate effective policy that allows them to respond to any form of exploitation they encounter."<sup>34</sup> Some of these vulnerability influences, such as illness, age, gender and poverty, are

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<sup>28</sup> Director, NGO

<sup>29</sup> Director, NGO.

<sup>30</sup> Director, Government

<sup>31</sup> Manager, UN Agency.

<sup>32</sup> Director, Government.

<sup>33</sup> Manager UN Agency.

<sup>34</sup> Director NGO.

pre-existing or inherent to the victim. Others, such as isolation, dependency and irregular legal status, are vulnerabilities that the exploiter could create in order to maximise control over the victim.

## vi. Measuring success of survivor engagement in programme design

I did not find any thematic similarities in measuring success amongst the sample of professionals that I interviewed. However, one participant proposed that the outcome of a successful survivor engagement programme could be understood as having a positive impact in areas of education, health, economy and legal protection within the country. "The survivor engagement can be measured by the result brought to the survivors in health, psychology, economic and education, safety and legal protection."<sup>35</sup> At the same time, another said that measuring success should be through formal measuring and evaluation. "I think the matrix of measuring the success of survivor engagement, according to us, would be through the application of survivor centered monitoring and evaluation tools."<sup>36</sup> Overall measuring and evaluation of the activities of survivor engagement and survivor involvement seemed to be lacking since the participants focus mainly on project design and implementation.

It is imperative to empower survivors to be self-sufficient and create effective materials to educate them about policies and practices to prevent trafficking. "Effective survivor engagement supports victims to stand by themselves ...for their sustainable livelihood...The one which is done by Freedom Fund is good, as they evaluate the engagement not to be cut in short, or the training and guidelines should not be for the sake of just giving the training but should help them to survive." (Director-Government). Survivor-focused training and literacy and entrepreneurship programs focusing on building survivors' capacity with opportunities to create employment to sustain themselves is a long term intervention to successful and meaningful intervention.

## Conclusion

It is my hope that the experiences, learning and reflections contained in this report will be useful to a wide range of policy makers both in the UK and other parts of the globe. The report demonstrates that more needs to be done to make sure that people with lived experience can contribute to the anti-modern-slavery and anti-trafficking movement and NGOs as equals, colleagues and experts. Not just as recipients of support and also at the heart of modern slavery policy, programming and advocacy. There is also a need for collaborative approaches and increased equality, diversity and inclusion of survivor voices as ways to improve anti-trafficking efforts. Funding also needs to be aligned to the needs and requirements of the survivors as opposed to the set rules and standards of the funders. Additionally, there remains a gap in ethical, meaningful, and structural engagement with survivors and limited actors developing guidance for good survivor engagement. Survivor engagement in anti-trafficking work also remains siloed from other social justice movements, such as workers' rights and gender-based violence movements.

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<sup>35</sup> Director, Government

<sup>36</sup> Director, NGO.



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