

Promising practices in the engagement of people with lived experience to address modern slavery and human trafficking

Research Summary

October 2022

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Research by:

Contributors:

Throughout this project efforts were made (through recruitment, equitable remuneration, peer-support and safeguarding) to facilitate and encourage those with lived experience of modern slavery and human trafficking to be fully involved in co-developing and co-producing the research, while not requiring disclosure. This enabled a research team to be put together that included a rich and diverse mix of expertise including individuals with lived experience.

We would like to thank the team of Regional Consultants who worked on this project with us:

Ling Li (Independent Consultant)

Benedetta Wasonga (Director Gender, Justice and Human Rights at the Centre for Equality Diversity and Inclusion (CEDI))

Chris Ash, (Survivor Leadership Program Manager, Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking)

Dr Sutirtha Sahariah (Independent Consultant)

The Azadi Kenya team including Caroline Adhiambo (Research and Learning Advisor), Emma Christensen (Learning and Development Officer), Sharon Lucky Jonyo (Consultant), and W (Consultant)

We would also like to thank the many stakeholders in regions across the globe who were willing to talk with us, share their expertise and thoughtfully engage with our research questions. Please refer to the full report to see all acknowledgements.

This is a summary of the report: *A Review of Promising Practices in the Engagement of People with Lived Experience to Address Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking*. The full report can be accessed on the Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (the Modern Slavery PEC) website at www.modernslaverypec.org/resources/best-practice-engagement-lived-experience.

This research was funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and conducted by the University of Liverpool, as a consortium partner of the Modern Slavery PEC. It took place between February-June 2022.

Key findings

- 1. High-quality and meaningful engagement of people with lived experience of modern slavery improves policies and programmes designed to tackle this global challenge and its root causes, as well benefitting affected individuals, communities and ally-colleagues.**
- 2. Significant regional variance in the meaning, understanding and political context for use of the terms 'survivor', 'survivor engagement' and 'modern slavery' indicates that blanket deployment of such terms can alienate and even endanger some affected communities, with potential to cause harms and result in ineffective policies and programmes.**
- 3. We identified a typology of 14 promising practices in engagement of people with lived experience. Most of these practices centre on engagement in programme development, implementation and evaluation, with less evidence of engagement in policy design.**
- 4. Best practices of engaging people with lived experience are underpinned by three key principles: being non-tokenistic, being trauma-informed and preventing harm**

Background

This research addressed growing interest from UK domestic and international facing policymakers in ethical, equitable and effective practices of survivor engagement. It focused on gathering evidence of the best ways to engage with and involve those with lived experience of modern slavery and human trafficking in international policy and programming to address these challenges. It was commissioned by the UK FCDO following 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](#). The study had three main objectives: to examine evidence of existing promising practice; to explore the understandings and perspectives of varied stakeholders, and; to explain the benefits of meaningful survivor engagement and make policy recommendations.

As our research demonstrated that the terms 'survivor' and 'survivor engagement' were not universally understood, could cause alienation among stakeholders in some regions and do not currently capture the experiences of many based either on gender identity or form of exploitation experienced we have decided to use the broader and more inclusive term 'people with lived experience' throughout this document. We have, however, retained the use of the term 'survivor' within all quoted material and where this reflects the terminology used during the commissioning and data collection phases of this project.

Methodology

The findings of this study have been drawn from data gathered through three streams of work. 1) A rapid (four month) desk-based evidence review that identified and analysed 27 relevant peer-reviewed studies, theoretical papers or project evaluations. 2) 34 interviews and five focus group discussions with a broad range of professionals engaged in anti-slavery/trafficking work including NGO, IGO, government and union executives, Programme and Project Managers, Survivor Advocates, Consultants, Lawyers, Trainers, Clinicians and Activists. These experts – many of whom have lived experience of modern slavery and human trafficking – were based across a range of global regions including East and West Africa, Middle East and North Africa (MENA), North America, Europe, South, East and South-East Asia. 3) Material shared through wider engagement including a global call for evidence by 20 key stakeholders in the UK and other international contexts.

Findings

1. High-quality and meaningful engagement of people with lived experience improves policies and programmes, as well benefitting affected individuals, communities and ally-colleagues

There is an increasing desire from stakeholders across the anti-human trafficking sector in many regions of the globe for engagement of people with lived experience to increase inclusivity of their organisations and work. In some cases, this is driven by new regulatory standards or criteria for funding set out by donors. Yet there remains a need to identify in more concrete terms the benefits of this engagement to improve the efficacy and accountability of such interventions. Our research found evidence and claims for a range of clear and specific benefits that can be organised into three categories:

a. Improvements to programming, organisational policy and practice

The research evidenced significant benefits where organisations included people with lived experience as employed colleagues or paid consultants embedded within project teams over a sustained period (i.e. high-quality engagement). These included improved efficacy of prevention initiatives, rehabilitation interventions, data collection mechanisms, outcomes for service-users and confidence in organisational policy and practice. Lived experience-led projects and programmes demonstrated significantly improved relationships with trafficked individuals and affected communities: having greater credibility, higher engagement levels and self-referral rates. Projects and programmes designed

and delivered in partnership with grassroots, survivor-led or lived experience-engaged networks and coalitions were also shown to have greater sustainability and an ability to address many root causes of exploitation.

b. Benefits for people with lived experience and affected communities

The strongest available evidence of benefits was for people with lived experience themselves and affected communities, where forms of engagement were high quality and meaningful. Including people with lived experience as contracted peer-researchers (people with lived experience of issues being studied who take part in directing and conducting research), peer-providers (people who draw on lived experience to deliver support services), consultants and advocates was associated with a broad range of benefits. These included improved confidence and sense of empowerment, financial stability, professional development, reduced vulnerability and reduced risk of further exploitation. Where engagement was undertaken via grassroots, lived experience-led networks the benefits derived had a broader reach. Greater knowledge and in-depth understanding of exploitation, harms and rights among affected communities as well as a sense of collective empowerment was demonstrated. Together these benefits were linked with a collective ability to better address structural inequalities and hold authorities and law enforcement to account.

c. Benefits for ally-colleagues

Stakeholders interviewed for this study also cited particular benefits of engaging people with lived experience for ally-colleagues ('non-survivor' professionals who work alongside people with lived experience). Most consistently discussed here was the scope for significantly improved awareness and understanding of the experiences and service-needs of people with lived experience. Linked to this was discussion of improved ally-colleague professional conduct and practice when working with people who have lived experience as well as increased valuing of lived experience expertise beyond the tokenistic sharing of personal trauma.

"[Survivor engagement] has led to another level of partnership. When people work as partners (survivors and other stakeholders) it leads to another level of empowerment. The essence of healing is different. There is a transformation in "I am" (identity), "I can" (competence), "I have" (resources) both for survivors and the organisation working as their allies. There is an interdependence."

(Director/Activist, NGO, South Asia).

2. Significant regional variance in the meaning, understanding and political context for use of the terms 'survivor', 'survivor engagement' and 'modern slavery' indicates that blanket deployment of such terms can alienate and even endanger some affected communities, with potential to cause harms and result in ineffective policies and programmes.

Evidence collected for this study showed that some stakeholders across a range of sectors and regions were not familiar with the term 'survivor engagement', while others indicated using it only internally with particular stakeholders (such as donors/funders) during the planning phases of a project in the field of anti-slavery work.

Where the term 'survivor' is in use, our study showed that its application is highly gendered and associated with those who have experienced particular forms of exploitation: i.e. women and girls who have experienced sexual exploitation, forced marriage and other forms of gender-based violence. The term does not seem to have the same widespread usage or resonance among boys, men, those identifying as gender non-binary and those from LGBTQI+ communities who have experienced exploitation or among organisations working with these groups. In addition, stakeholders indicated that 'survivor' had limited resonance among individuals and communities experiencing forms of labour exploitation, and its usage by those with lived experience of other forms of exploitation often gathered under SDG 8.7., such as child soldiery and forced begging, is also unproven.

The term 'modern slavery' was also highlighted as alienating in some contexts, and often perceived as a foreign terminology. Stakeholders explained that the term was sometimes avoided for political or cultural reasons, with concerns that it could alienate affected populations, cause stigma or even place people with lived experience in danger.

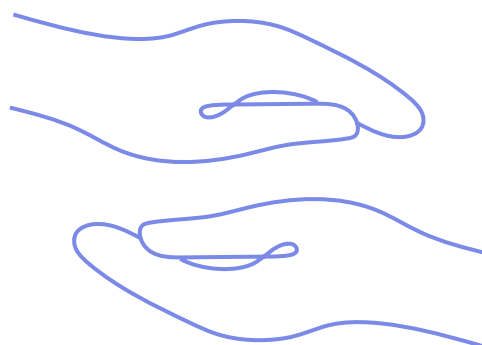
'We do not use the term "modern slavery" in our daily work, ... we even try to avoid us[ing] the word "child labour" and use the phrase "underage workers" ... because otherwise, it will give the factory managers too much pressure ...[to] use a term that can criminalise their behaviours ... for the parents [it] is the same, if we use child labour directly, it sounds like we are blaming them being irresponsible. Therefore, we also will not use words like "victims, survivors", we try to help them move on ... We tend to talk only about how to ensure the education rights for children.'

(Case Management Officer, Consulting Company, South, East and South-East Asia)

3. We identified a typology of 14 promising practices in engagement of people with lived experience. Most of these practices centre on engagement in programme development, implementation and evaluation, with less evidence of engagement in policy design.

Our systematic assessment of the available evidence and our discussions with expert stakeholders across varied global regions identified a typology of 14 different areas of practice that represent promising approaches to engagement of people with lived experience in policy and programmes to address modern slavery. Across all areas of work, where such engagement has taken place from the beginning of policy or programme design and delivery, has been continuous, and has embedded people with lived experience within organisations or project teams outcomes have been of a higher quality for all stakeholders involved. We have organised our typology of 14 promising practices into three categories:

1. **Policy design and partnerships:** While there is evidence of increasing promising practice in partnership-working with lived experience-led networks and coalitions, there are less good practice examples on policy design specifically, reflecting the limited range of activity to include people with lived experience in this area of work. Examples of promising practice in these areas identified by this study include: informing strategy and policy of intergovernmental organisations and national governments by people with lived experience in South Asia and Europe and; NGO leadership programmes and employment pathway schemes for people with lived experience, as well as supporting formation of lived experience-led networks and organisations.
2. **Programme development and implementation:** Most examples of promising practice that we identified relate to this area of work. Our full report offers case studies from a broad spread of contexts worldwide, that relate to involvement of people with lived experience in awareness-raising initiatives, funding decisions, developing research priorities, leading service delivery and informing law enforcement. However, the quality of these interventions can be uneven. In particular, many stakeholders warned of pitfalls when it comes to public



awareness-raising campaigns and initiatives that centre on public speaking engagements for people with lived experience. Good practice can be achieved in these latter areas but to do so, special attention needs to be paid to the negative experiences that people with lived experience have had previously when engaging in such work and co-development of new initiatives with these stakeholders is key to mitigate such harms.

- 3. Monitoring and Evaluation:** A significant proportion of promising practice examples relate to programme monitoring and evaluation. Case studies outlined in our full report include: involvement of people with lived experience in the conceptualisation of evaluative concepts, criteria and measures for national prevention initiatives and global prevalence studies, as well as lived experience-led evaluation of government projects and programmes. These examples indicate a growing recognition that people with lived experience have much more to offer monitoring and evaluation practices beyond providing service-user feedback.

4. Best practices of engaging people with lived experience are underpinned by three key principles: being non-tokenistic, being trauma-informed and preventing harm.

There are a growing number of toolkits, concepts and guidelines outlining key principles for ethical and meaningful engagement of people with lived experience, but less is available about the translation of these into practice. There are also notable gaps, for example regarding involvement of people with lived experience in policy design. In this study we have reflected with expert stakeholders and professionals (including those with lived experience) about how current practice relates to the range of principles currently being advocated. This approach indicated consensus among stakeholders across varied global regions that the following three key principles or essential conditions underly and inform ethical and meaningful practices of lived experience engagement.

- 1. Being non-tokenistic:** Tokenism means actors and organisations claiming engagement without real opportunities for people with lived experience to offer input, challenge, make decisions and transform practice. To avoid this, it is crucial to make sure there is clarity on purpose and how the time and resource of people with lived experience will inform a particular practice, policy or programme, as well as ensuring feedback loops are in place to enable sharing of views on any engagement's impact. Engagement should always lead towards tangible and meaningful change, and the time and resource of people with lived experience should be fully and equitably valued through fair pay, recruitment practices and opportunities for professional development.

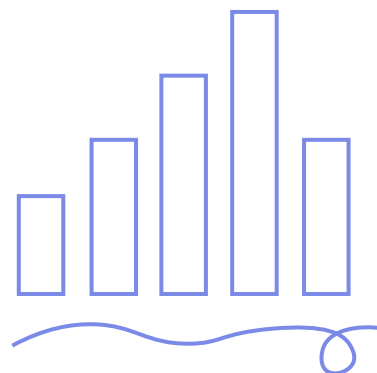
2. **Being trauma-informed:** Developed out of practice first devised in healthcare settings, trauma-informed approaches pivot around six guiding principles that aim to recognise, minimise and counter the triggers and subsequent harms often encountered by individuals who have experienced trauma.



Source: Center for Preparedness and Response

Creating a trauma-informed organisational context for people with lived experience of exploitation to work within can enable triggers to be managed effectively, harms to be avoided or minimised and can enable ally-colleagues to be better equipped to understand this and manage their own triggers.

3. **Preventing harm:** Data collected for this study demonstrated that the concept of 'safeguarding' – widely used in the UK – is unfamiliar in many other contexts worldwide. However, there was consensus among the stakeholders we interviewed that taking measures to prevent and respond to harm is paramount for any kind of involvement, engagement and inclusion of people with lived experience, but these should be proportionate and take context into account. Stakeholders pointed to the risks that systems and processes to protect can become politicised and mis-used, creating barriers to participation and empowerment. Harm prevention measures should be co-developed and produced with local stakeholders and affected communities, including people who have lived experience, in order to ensure their relevance and proportionality.



Recommendations

For the UK Government

In all aspects of work where engagement of people with lived experience is undertaken by UK Government and its external delivery partners:

- **Take measures to ensure that initiatives are non-tokenistic, trauma-informed and prevent harm** in line with our findings around widespread consensus on the importance, resonance, and recognition of these three key principles among varied stakeholders across a range of sectors and global regions.
- **As a priority, pursue partnerships with lived experience-led or survivor-led organisations, networks and coalitions.** Our research shows that such partnership working, when done in an equitable and inclusive way: improves outcomes for all stakeholders, increases credibility of projects, heightens engagement levels from affected communities, enhances sustainability of projects and improves projects' ability to understand and address many root causes of exploitation.
- **Undertake a process of identifying context-specific, non-exclusionary terminologies with local stakeholders (including those with lived experience) to avoid alienation or harm.** Our study showed that the term 'survivor' is highly gendered and associated with those who have experienced particular forms of exploitation, with limited resonance among other groups. The terms 'modern slavery', 'victim' and even 'survivor' are sometimes avoided for political or cultural reasons in some contexts, with concerns that they could alienate, cause stigma for or even endanger people with lived experience
- **We recommend a high-quality, multi-level approach to inclusion of people with lived experience.** By multi-level, we mean that engagement should take place at every level of government activity that relates to international modern slavery policy and programming. By high-quality, we mean long term, across the policymaking or programming cycle where people with lived experience are embedded within project teams and where engagement has a specific purpose and very clear focus.
- **Take measures to make opportunities open, inclusive and accessible to a diversity of people with lived experience without requiring disclosure of lived experience identity.** Historically, recruitment of people with lived experience has been concentrated around public-speaking and awareness-raising activities with, at times, damaging consequences. All job adverts in the area of policy and programming on modern slavery should be open and inclusive of people with lived experience without requiring disclosure, which our research shows is currently linked to some discriminatory practices in the workplace.

- **Put in place organisational policies and procedures to ensure fair and equitable remuneration for all work undertaken by people with lived experience.**

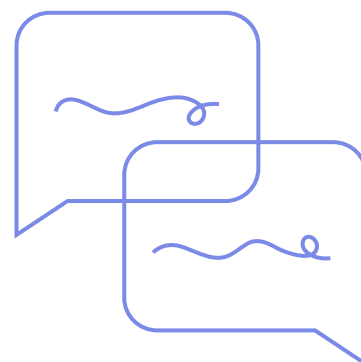
Frameworks developed by lived experience-led networks on the issue of remuneration emphasised the importance of equitable pay for all time and resource expended, as well as access to benefits such as childcare and the possibility of upfront or advance payments, hiring bonuses or access to expense budgets to prevent barriers to participation.

People with lived experience should be involved in UK Government policymaking through strategic-level decision-making, setting of objectives and policy priorities.

- The FCDO modern slavery policy team should work across Government to set up a mechanism or mechanisms to involve people with lived experience in UK Government modern slavery international policy and programming at a strategic level. A very clear purpose should be defined for this mechanism to ensure efficacy and avoid actual or perceived tokenistic engagement. Appropriate training and support should be put in place for all those involved in this mechanism in order to enable full and equitable participation.

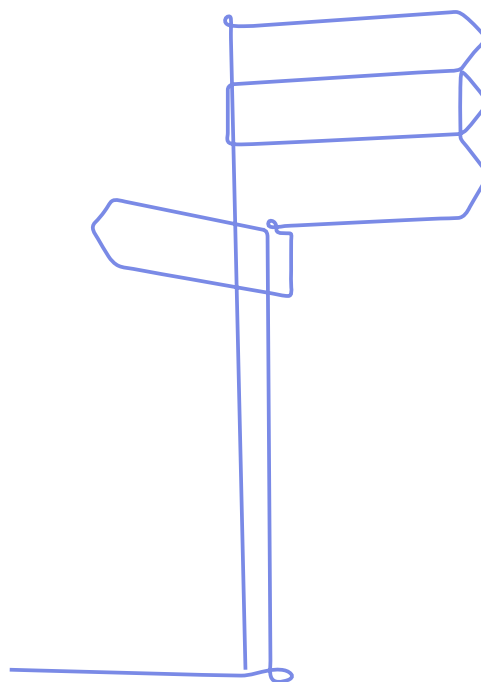
People with lived experience should be involved in all aspects of UK Government programme design and delivery.

- Teams involved in designing and delivering modern slavery programmes should consider opportunities for involvement of people with lived experience at every phase of design and delivery. This includes UK Ambassadors, High Commissioners, country officers and programme budget holders (e.g. the Home Office Modern Slavery Fund). Examples of opportunities for inclusion are: recruitment as embedded members of design and delivery teams; proposing interventions and drafting concept notes; feeding into evidence-based appraisal of delivery options; assessing applications from delivery partners; devising monitoring frameworks and; evaluation of programmes and their outcomes including definition of risk and success criteria. A fuller list of opportunities for involvement across the four programming phases identified in the FCDO Programme Operating Framework (Definition, Mobilisation, Delivery, Closure) can be found in our full report.



Areas for further research

- Explore how the findings of this review resonate in global regions either not covered, or not extensively covered in this phase of research including: the Caribbean, Central & South America, MENA, North & Central Asia, Central & Southern Africa, Europe and Oceania.
- Better evidence the outcomes and impacts of engaging people with lived experience. Currently there is evidence of a range of benefits (i.e. improved skill sets and employability of people with lived experience) but there is little in terms of concrete, measurable data on impacts in the longer-term.
- Gather and examine evidence on the varied models of strategic level engagement of people with lived experience through advisory boards and steering committees worldwide. There is accelerating practice in this area, but systematic reflection on what works in which context and what types of work such bodies are undertaking is scant.
- Address identified knowledge gaps regarding safe, effective, and appropriate terminologies used by and to refer to those with lived experience of labour exploitation, and those with male and non-binary gender identities who have experienced varied forms of exploitation. Exploration of risk related to misused terminologies in specific contexts and how local stakeholders recommend the effective mitigation of harms arising from this also requires greater attention.
- Gather evidence on how HR and recruitment processes have been, and could be, effectively adapted to be more inclusive of people with lived experience without forcing disclosure of lived experience or survivor identity.



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