Knowledge for Change?

Lessons from co-developing a research agenda on survivor engagement

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Introduction and context

'Survivor engagement', understood as the involvement of people with lived experience in policy and programming, has seemingly moved to the centre of efforts to address modern slavery and human trafficking, but how can it really shift the way that these issues are tackled? As practice in this area is underdeveloped, the production of knowledge is likely to be crucial in this, changing approaches and responses through the development of new concepts, interpretations, tools and instruments that can be embedded in policy and practice.

This report presents a summary of new findings and reflections from an ongoing and collaborative initiative to develop a research agenda through the lens of survivor engagement. It builds on a project that explored promising practices of lived experience engagement in modern slavery policy and programming and which took place in 2022.[1] Researchers at the University of Liverpool, with funding from Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO), built an international network of researchers and consultants to explore effective methods and practices involving persons with lived experience in modern slavery policy and programming. Recognising the collaborative research's significance, the network secured additional funding from the Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (Modern Slavery PEC) to expand their study between March and July 2023. This expansion enabled a deeper exploration of engagement with first-hand experience and expertise in policy and programme systems.

The rest of this report includes reflections on

1. Co-developing a research agenda,

2. Project methods and design,

3. Summaries of research findings,

4. Lessons drawn, and

5. Conclusions.

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1. Wendy Asquith, Allen Kiconco, and Alex Balch, *A review of current promising practices in the engagement of people with lived experience to address modern slavery and human trafficking* (London: Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre, 2022). Available at: https://modernslaverypec.org/resources/best-practice-engagement-lived-experience.

Co-developing a research agenda on survivor engagement

In the ongoing battle against exploitation and the injustices which surround it, researchers and organisations are actively developing and pursuing distinct research agendas. A venue for formulating research agendas has been attempted via conferences like "Equity in Evidence: fusing lived experience and community knowledge into research to end human trafficking."[2] Organised by Freedom Fund, in collaboration with Global Fund to End Modern Slavery, and Modern Slavery PEC, ninety-three anti-trafficking experts worldwide, including those who have personally experienced modern slavery, researchers, policymakers, donors, and other members of the international movement to combat modern slavery, gathered for this conference. The event sought to address gaps in the funding, design, implementation, and dissemination of current research, which frequently lacks the participation of or alignment with the interests of those with lived experience, communities affected by slavery, and local research experts. A "global agenda" was discussed throughout several of the panel talks, along with its potential benefits and drawbacks.

A research agenda plays a pivotal role by outlining essential components of a research project, including research questions, objectives, methodology, timeline, and budget. A well-structured research agenda can be understood as a guiding roadmap that defines the scope and parameters by which we move forward in addressing a particular problem or issue. A successful research agenda will help generate focused and coherent research aligned with overarching goals. Typically established before research initiation, the agenda provides a model for steering research activities at each stage.

The core focus of the 2023 collaboration, summarised here, was to co-develop research that would help to formulate principles for equitable research and policies to engage with lived expertise to address and combat modern slavery. In this pursuit, the research involved a collaboration between the previous 2022 global network of six researchers and consultants and a leadership team based in Liverpool and Kampala. Together we co-designed a comprehensive research agenda as a research team, ensuring cohesion and progress within action plans. This agenda functioned as a strategic roadmap, outlining prioritised tasks contributing to the central research idea of survivor engagement.
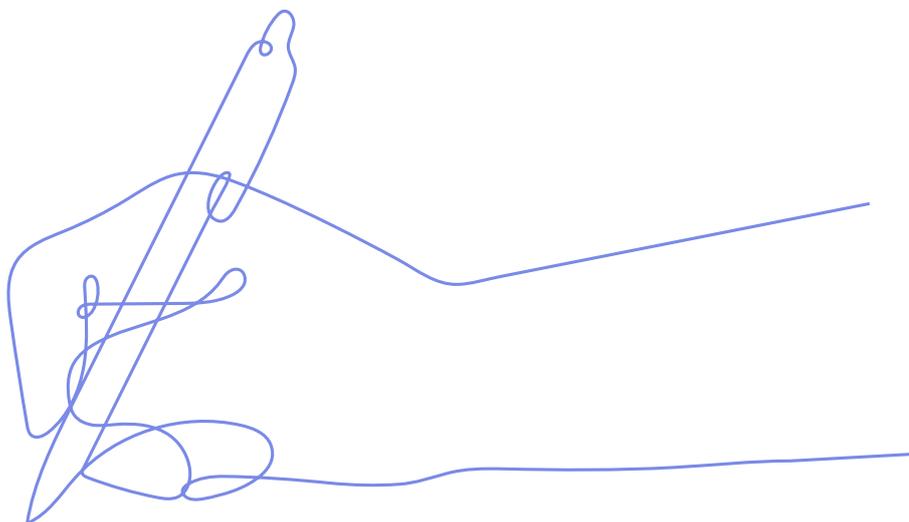
Initially, the project leadership aimed to find a common theme or set of themes connecting the six regional projects, but instead, the co-production of the work itself became the main focus, and the results raised a wide range of questions challenging policy systems to better engage with lived experiences. Our experience highlights the importance of an organic project narrative, avoiding forced alignment with a predetermined agenda.

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2. Check Modern Slavery PEC website with the report and all the blogs https://modernslaverypec.org/resources/equity-in-evidence-conference-final-report

Our experiences underscore the importance of a flexible, evolving research agenda in collaborative initiatives to investigate issues related to meaningful engagement with people with lived experience. A co-designed and adaptive approach is crucial, as a research agenda should not be static but responsive as the study progresses.
A rigid agenda could impede the exploration of nuanced complexities in international collaborations and engagement with modern slavery lived experience investigations.

A crucial aspect emphasised is the active involvement of all team members in developing the research agenda. This inclusivity ensures shared ownership, legitimacy, and real-world applicability and impact of research outcomes. Engaging all contributors aligns research with the needs and interests of persons with lived experience, fostering inclusivity and shared responsibility in addressing survivor engagement and modern slavery more broadly.

Overall, our collaborative experience suggests that the evolving nature of survivor engagement presents a significant hurdle for a unified global research agenda.

Project methods and design

The 2023 collaborative project aimed at strengthening the pre-existing international research network and to promote fairness, inclusivity, and equity in modern slavery research. The network, composed of professionals and experts from Kenya, Uganda, the US, India, France, and the UK, worked collaboratively, leveraging our unique perspectives and knowledge to produce original and insightful outputs.

Building upon the successful 2022 project, the current initiative allowed this diverse network to delve into contextually relevant issues and develop inclusive methodologies for equitable collaboration with lived experience experts in modern slavery research.

One of the key findings from the 2022 project highlighted a growing number of toolkits, concepts, and guidelines on the ethical inclusion of individuals with lived experience. However, translating these principles into practical applications and context-specific guidance remained challenging. Thus, the Regional Consultants were assigned to develop context-specific research projects in collaboration with Liverpool researchers to address this gap.

Recognising the tight project timeframe, the team suggested conducting targeted studies focusing on specific problems, sectors, or audiences. The project started by providing a list of potential research project ideas for the consultants to choose from and execute. These ideas included reflecting on the 2022 project's findings, creating accessible outputs, and collaborating on work strands to deepen regional data collection and develop context-specific toolkits and training programs.

The project design was handed over to the Regional Consultants, allowing them to lead and develop their small projects based on the broader research theme of survivor engagement in programming and policy. They each formulated intriguing research questions that targeted pressing issues related survivor engagement.
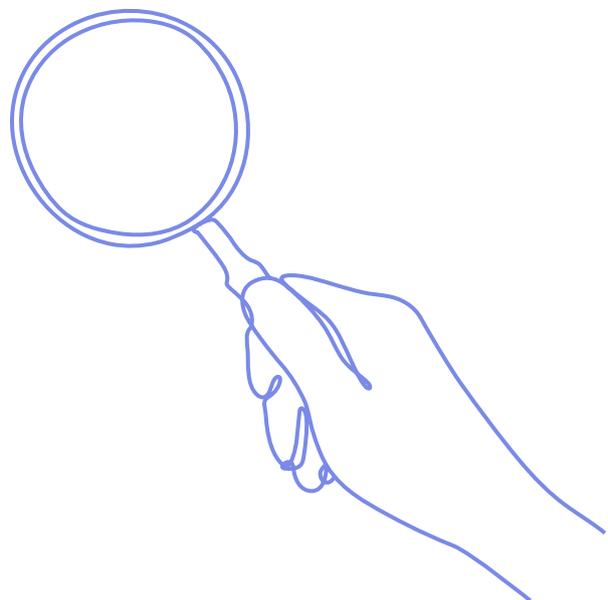
As the consultants delved into their research topics, they carefully selected innovative methods for data collection, considering the relevant political, social, and economic factors in their unique contexts. While the broader project followed the proposed qualitative methodology, the researchers explored more context-appropriate approaches, including interviews, focus groups, literature review and observation methods.

The flexibility in research methods proved valuable, encouraging creative thinking, and generating richer data for research, policy, and programming systems. Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the project, ensuring the research was conducted responsibly and respectfully.

Throughout the project, close communication with Modern Slavery PEC Policy, Partnerships, and Communications colleagues ensured alignment with ongoing initiatives and avoided duplication of work. This facilitated input into the creation of informative and accessible outputs.

The network culminated its efforts in June 2023, gathering for a week of in-person events in the UK. These events provided opportunities for mutual learning and engagement with UK-based policymakers, funders, and researchers, focusing on the fair and equitable engagement of lived experience experts in exploitation research, programming, and policy. The collaboration created fresh perspectives and valuable insights, paving the way for more informed and effective anti-slavery efforts worldwide.
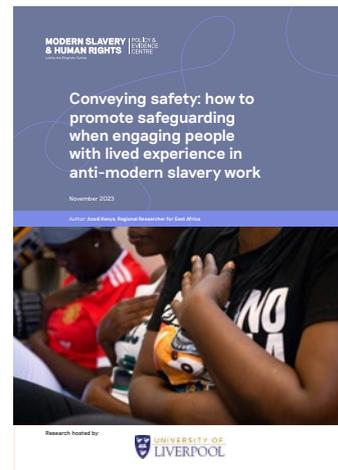
Before reflecting on this collaboration, it is important to summarise the six regional studies conducted. These studies have shed light on terminologies, new phenomena of modern slavery, strategies of survivor engagement, ethical storytelling, and legal instruments in modern slavery. By summarising insights from various regions, these studies contribute to our understanding of survivor engagement and empowerment, policy-making, and modern slavery dynamics. These summaries form a foundation for further reflection and analysis of the research's impact and implications.

Engagement with lived experience: summaries of research findings

1. Conveying safety: how to promote safeguarding in anti-modern slavery work
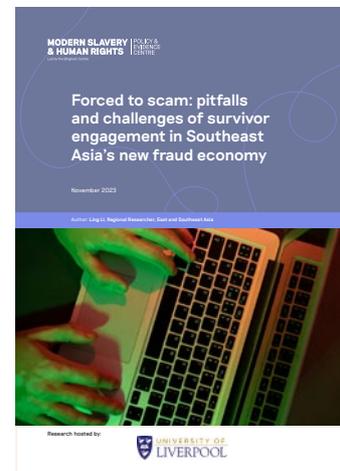
This study for East Africa explored safeguarding protocols and contextualisation issues in Kenya. The team collaborated with people of lived experience (survivors) in two focus groups to identify and discuss safeguarding elements and interviewed four safeguarding professionals in Kenya. Based on these consultations, the team developed a report, a safeguarding toolkit, and a reflective note on their collaborative research. This study found that an inclusive approach combining empathy and caution prioritises survivor autonomy and involves them as collaborators, not just subjects. Developing organisational safeguarding policies and a sensitive culture creates a secure environment for sharing narratives and engaging meaningfully. Clear communication about boundaries, consent, confidentiality, and available support establishes trust. Tailored resources and trauma-informed strategies ensure emotional well-being. Regular check-ins and exit strategies further safeguard people with lived experience in engagements. Vigilance against re-traumatisation must guide every step and practice of safeguarding. By fostering a culture of safety, anti-slavery work can genuinely empower survivors, offering a platform for their voices and agency while upholding their dignity and emotional welfare.

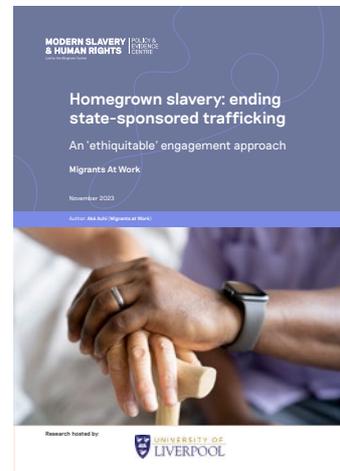## 2. Forced to scam: pitfalls and challenges of survivor engagement in Southeast Asia's new fraud economy

This study on Southeast Asia examined a case study of online scamming to understand how civil society engages with survivors in addressing the plight of victims of modern slavery in the scamming compounds of Southeast Asia. The study involved eight professionals from different sectors that focus on combating online scamming, including three survivor leaders. This research highlights the challenges civil society organisations (CSOs) face when engaging with survivors of human trafficking within the online scam industry. As survivors' stories gain visibility, pressure mounts on governments to recognise them as victims of modern slavery, which necessitates the implementation of effective victim identification systems. The study findings suggest that irrespective of origin, people can fall prey to trafficking and are often coerced into criminal activities due to victimisation.

To prevent re-traumatisation, CSOs should prioritise survivors' settlement and recovery before involving them in anti-trafficking efforts. Survivor leaders' selection should consider this, with training programs fostering expertise and confidence. Successful survivor engagement relies on CSOs equipped with tools to incentivise participation and survivor leaders exhibiting comprehensive understanding. A collaborative relationship among authorities, CSOs, and survivors is pivotal for developing a comprehensive approach to addressing this new and rapidly expanding phenomenon. Authorities should aid identification and reintegration, while CSOs invest in survivors' recovery, bolstering long-term well-being and empowerment.

3. Homegrown slavery: ending state-sponsored trafficking. An 'ethiquitable' engagement approach

This study for Europe/UK focused on understanding the experiences of exploitation among persons who have directly experienced the challenges of trafficking in the context of work interpreting and applying the existing legal instruments. By delving into their perspectives and insights, the study endeavoured to unravel and interpret the intricate interplay between the practical implementation of legal provisions and the real-world experiences of migrant workers who face trafficking-related challenges within the UK's immigration and employment care sector. The methodology adopted for this insightful investigation comprised a multifaceted approach, including an in-depth desk review of the existing legal instruments that pertain to trafficking, immigration, and employment laws. This foundational step served as the bedrock for understanding the legal landscape and the tools available for combating trafficking. The study incorporated semi-structured interviews with six professionals and focus groups to capture the nuanced narratives and perspectives of individuals with lived experiences. Their insights become integral in gauging the legal framework's effectiveness, limitations, and potential gaps.
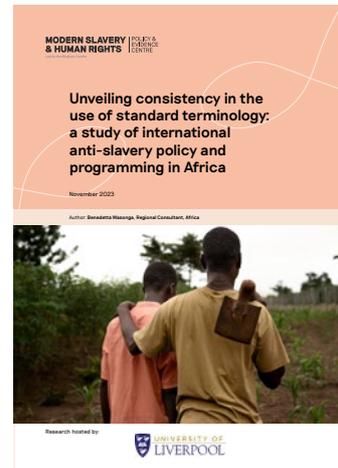
The study's key findings included redefining Trafficking in Persons as 'Trafficking in Person in Work (TIPIW)' due to sponsored employer visas facilitating exploitation. Homegrown slavery was shown to manifest in various forms, with survivor organisations intervening due to lacking expertise in mainstream entities. However, Self-Organised Lived Experience (SOLEX) organisations and advocates face exclusion and exploitation within the anti-trafficking framework. Although conclusive evidence of survivors addressing homegrown slavery was lacking, promising solutions emerged in the study. These aligned with the 'Homegrown' concept and proposed engagement platforms for policymakers and businesses. Sectoral reforms and a human rights-based approach were suggested to empower SOLEX organisations, countering state-sponsored trafficking locally. The report offers recommendations to diverse stakeholders, advocating survivor inclusion, regulatory reforms, and human rights principles to transform anti-trafficking efforts. By leveraging survivor expertise, the report emphasises the potential to revolutionise homegrown slavery combat and drive lasting change.

4. Unveiling consistency in the use of standard terminologies: a study of international anti-slavery policy and programming in Africa

This study explored the use of standardised terminologies, concepts, and definitions in addressing modern slavery in Africa, as per the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8.7. Through stakeholder consultations, including key informant interviews and a focus group with six professionals, the study examined the impact of these terminologies on survivor involvement and the effectiveness of policies and programs related to SDG 8.7. The findings urge policymakers, NGOs, donor funders, and international bodies to re-evaluate and potentially adopt new terminologies in collaboration with affected communities and people with lived experiences.

The study found that "modern slavery" is often used symbolically, creating ambiguity. While some terms like human trafficking, slavery, and forced labour are legally defined, "modern slavery" is not in international law. Inadequate, non-standardised terminologies hinder efforts to combat exploitation, necessitating harmonising definitions for effective national and regional cooperation. The findings emphasise the importance of integrating people with lived experiences and insights in defining and unpacking some of these, often seen as universal terms and concepts. Collaborative development of survivor-centric definitions and guidelines aligned with international standards is crucial. Survivor engagement throughout policy and program stages is stressed, as definitions and decisions should be evidence-based and survivor-informed. Without proper definitions guided by those with lived experiences, the core aspect of survivor engagement can be lost, impacting policy and programmatic effectiveness. The study advocates for a comprehensive, survivor-centred approach to combat modern slavery, ensuring meaningful change at all levels of intervention.
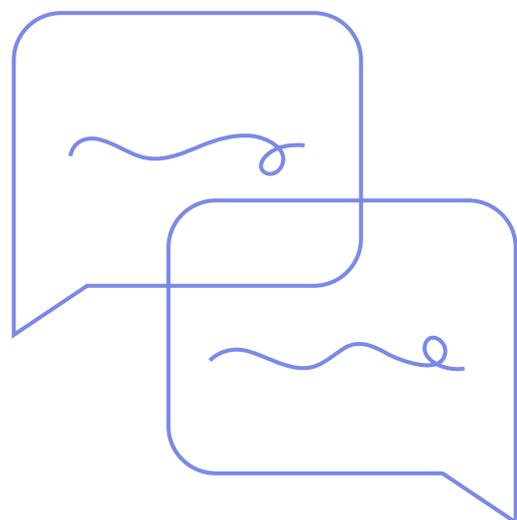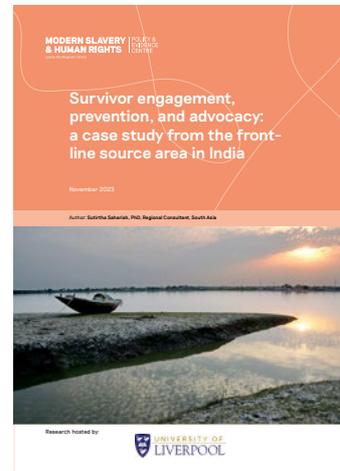
5. Whose story, whose benefit? Returning (to) the power of authentic narrative

This study from America/USA focused on ethical storytelling models to empower individuals with lived experiences. The project seeks to harness personal narratives for empowerment, community well-being, and structural change. It employed a methodology involving ethical storytelling model reviews and semi-structured interviews with five professionals. Findings reveal the significance of storytelling in shaping social change, advocacy, learning, connection, and community care. The anti-trafficking sector has often relied on survivor stories to influence policies, programs, and public perception. However, this study identifies potential harm caused by existing approaches. Engaging existing ethical frameworks and professional interviews, the study suggests promising practices for survivor-driven storytelling. Existing models emphasise trauma-informed, culturally responsive narratives, prioritising marginalised experiences and fostering wellness. Yet, lacking practical guidance, these concepts often lack meaningful implementation. Interviews in this study confirm misalignment between expected content, survivors' preferences, and effective communication methods. Stakeholders are urged to mitigate external power dynamics shaping narratives. Recommendations include opt-in storyteller selection, survivor collective mentorship, authentic storytelling skill-building, and economic support to reduce unwanted storytelling due to financial pressure. The study underscores the importance of empowering survivors, ensuring their stories are authentically represented, and fostering meaningful change through ethical storytelling practices.

6. Survivor engagement, prevention, and advocacy: a case study from the front-line source area in India

This study investigated the complex realm of survivor engagement by employing a case study approach focused on a community-based organisation (CBO) in India. The central objective was scrutinising the CBO's strategies, mechanisms, and outcomes concerning survivor engagement within its overall structure, leadership, and programmatic endeavours. With a meticulous approach, the study interviewed diverse members of the organisation, shedding light on their perspectives and roles in survivor engagement. Furthermore, the study included observation methods and focus group discussions featuring survivor leaders affiliated with the organisation. This dynamic interaction captured survivor leaders' authentic voices, experiences, and insights, contributing a unique dimension to exploring survivor engagement.

The findings show the multifaceted concept of survivor engagement and its profound ramifications within the local organisational landscape. The study unravels the complexity of survivor engagement's dynamics, and the ripple effects it generates within the fabric of local organisations. The study's findings lay the groundwork for a deeper comprehension of survivor engagement's essence and tangible influence, fostering a more nuanced perspective on how local organisations can meaningfully engage survivors to catalyse effective advocacy initiatives.

Lessons

1. Enhancing flexibility in the survivor engagement research agenda

The project was underpinned by the principle of co-development. We thus had a simple goal: to facilitate and support research into the areas deemed most significant by local researchers and consultants, empowering them to steer the conversation and research direction accordingly. Collaborating closely with these local experts in project design and data collection, they introduced a mix of research methods and approaches that naturally expanded upon and sometimes deviated from the project original plan. The co-production approach meant accommodating and incorporating the dynamic and changing nature of the research, and it demonstrated the importance of being flexible and adaptable in research endeavours in order to enable and recognise the invaluable insights that local expertise brings.

To foster inclusivity and diversity, the project collaborated with consultants from outside academia who had yet to undertake extensive research. This allowed them to enhance their data collection and analysis skills, contributing to capacity building within the research community. Moreover, through their involvement in the 2022 Liverpool project, the consultants profoundly understood the multifaceted dimensions of survivor engagement in their contexts. Thus, composition of the research team was a key strength, as it comprised individuals from diverse backgrounds and at different career stages, with many team members being survivors of modern slavery themselves. The firsthand experiences provided invaluable insights into designing respective projects on survivor involvement and engagement in modern slavery policy and programming.
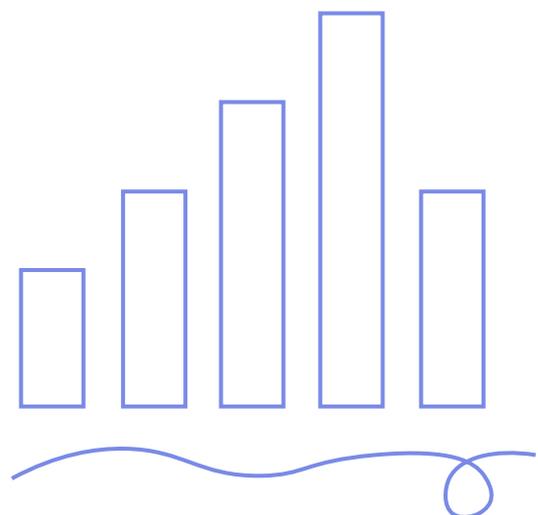
Thus, the 2023 project allowed the regional consultants to bring forward and advance their distinct personal research agendas to the forefront. They embraced the flexibility in the research approach as a constructive collaboration of perspectives, with each consultant contributing their unique viewpoint to the collective investigation. It was our understanding that the regional consultants viewed their respective projects as a commitment to advancing their agendas and establishing new pathways in their work. Broadly, the project leadership welcomed this fresh perspective to the study as the different teams discussed and negotiated for the appropriate research methods to use. Similarly, teams adopted diverse practices to disseminate their findings effectively. For instance, one team offered to translate their report into the local language, making them accessible to a broader audience. Additionally, teams carefully tailored professional reports highlighted above to specific sectors and audiences, including policymakers, to ensure that outcomes were used in decision-making processes.

Taking this flexible and co-designing approach to the study meant the collaboration delved into the core of the issues with an empathetic lens and adapted strategies that aligned with the unique challenges of different regions, demographics, and cultural complexities. Overall, the project expanded beyond its initial scope, encompassing various relevant aspects of survivor engagement, and covering more aspects of modern slavery.

Studies often begin with a well-defined research plan, but as they unfold, numerous factors and multiple contributors can influence the direction and scope of the study. Different teams may prioritise distinct aspects and employ diverse methodologies for acquiring knowledge. Our experience suggests that this evolution should be embraced as a natural part of the research process, which can lead to more comprehensive and nuanced findings.

While maintaining a central research question is essential as a starting point, remaining open to emerging issues and ideas is equally important. These may arise organically during the research process and deviate from the original focus. Our study highlights the significance of maintaining flexibility in research agendas, allowing for exploring new insights, interpretations, and engagements. In the present collaboration research, co-designing the research design ensured that research questions and objectives aligned with the needs and realities of the local context, leading to more relevant and impactful outcomes.

A critical aspect of the success was establishing trust within the network. Through two years of close collaboration, the network has cultivated an environment where all participants feel comfortable contributing their ideas and perspectives. Encouraging broader participation from all participants, both within and outside academia, is essential in designing research projects that address complex and multifaceted issues like modern slavery survivor engagement. Embracing diverse perspectives fosters comprehensive and nuanced research outcomes, contributing to effective policies and programs that effectively address exploitation.

2. Embracing authenticity: allowing the project stories and findings to unfold organically

The project initially set out with the ambitious goal of identifying a common theme or argument that would link the six reports submitted by the researchers. However, to our surprise, no overarching argument/theme emerged from the regional studies. Instead, a collection of reports unfolded that each raised thought-provoking questions challenging the prevailing practices and approaches of engaging with lived experiences.

This experience was a valuable lesson, highlighting the significance of allowing the projects' stories to unfold naturally rather than rigidly trying to fit them into a preconceived agenda. Early in the research, it became evident that contributors should not feel pressured to conform to a specific narrative or engagement framework. The diverse and authentic perspectives presented in the reports highlighted earlier were the essence of the research. They hold extensive value in shedding light on the complexities and nuances of engaging with lived experiences in the context of modern slavery policy and programming.

Although initially needing more cohesive themes, we recognised the inherent strength in embracing the authenticity of each study's findings. Each study had its unique focus based on the experiences and insights of local experts and survivors involved in programming and policy processes. This organic diversity of perspectives allowed the researchers to understand better the multifaceted challenges and opportunities related to engaging with lived experiences.

The study leadership observed that attempting to impose a predetermined agenda on this dynamic and complex topic of modern slavery survivor engagement would have been counterproductive. The beauty of collaborative research lies in unpredictable results, which often bring unexpected insights and novel perspectives. By allowing the studies to develop organically, the project respected the autonomy of the researchers/consultants and recognised their invaluable contributions to the research.

Furthermore, the absence of a common theme highlights the need for policymakers and stakeholders to approach survivor engagement with a flexible and open mindset. It demonstrates that a one-size-fits-all approach is inadequate in addressing the diverse and unique challenges faced by survivors of modern slavery. Instead, policymakers should be receptive to the nuanced realities and varied experiences of survivors, allowing for tailored and context-specific strategies to be developed.

This experience has reaffirmed our commitment to promoting inclusive and authentic research that embraces the complexity of engaging with lived experiences. Moving forward, the network will continue to prioritise the empowerment of local researchers and consultants, encouraging them to explore their questions and ideas freely, working flexibly by predefined expectations.

3. Should we think of a global research agenda on survivor engagement?

A global research agenda is a strategic international framework for addressing critical challenges and opportunities beyond national boundaries.[3] There is an emerging view among stakeholders that developing a global research agenda on anti-slavery efforts could be a vital step toward enhancing the effectiveness of these initiatives. Such an agenda would need to ensure that people with lived experience have a stronger voice and position in shaping policies, programs, and interventions.

Collaboration among stakeholders, including researchers, survivors, NGOs, governments, and international organisations, would be required to develop this research agenda. While a global research agenda would promote collaboration and knowledge exchange across borders, the results and experience of our network suggest that a unified approach to survivor engagement may not be feasible. Developing a universal research agenda accommodating cultural, social, and political variations is challenging, because it must take into account the following:

1. **Challenges of Inclusivity and Representation:** Developing a universal research agenda for survivor engagement faces several challenges related to inclusivity and representation. Firstly, variations in legal definitions, cultural norms, and social structures across countries create a complex landscape that requires sensitivity and adaptability. Secondly, ensuring a diverse representation of survivor voices and expertise is crucial for comprehensive research, but it is difficult due to limited resources, language barriers, and the vulnerability of survivors. Additionally, navigating power dynamics and imbalances among stakeholders maintaining consistency in methodologies and data collection without bias, poses a considerable challenge. Researchers must also be cautious not to impose their own biases or assumptions on the work. Securing funding and coordinating efforts among stakeholders with different priorities further complicates addressing these challenges of inclusivity and representation.

2. **Challenges of Sustainability and Adaptability:** Another set of challenges revolves around the sustainability and adaptability of survivor engagement research. Sustaining such research over the long term is difficult due to funding limitations and the risk of survivor burnout. The dynamic nature of the anti-slavery landscape, with evolving trends and emerging issues, demands a research agenda that remains flexible and adaptable. Balancing this flexibility while ensuring genuine and meaningful survivor engagement becomes a central challenge. Researchers and stakeholders must continuously address shifting priorities within the anti-slavery sector to ensure the research remains relevant and effective.

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3. See 'Equity in Evidence: fusing lived experience and community knowledge into research to end human trafficking'. Available at https://modernslaverypec.org/resources/equity-in-evidence-conference-final-report

3. **Logistical and Collaborative Challenges:** Developing a universal research agenda also involves addressing logistical and collaborative challenges. Designing methodologies that accurately capture survivor perspectives is complex, as researchers must overcome social desirability bias and fear of retribution. Additionally, survivor engagement can intersect with political and geopolitical dynamics, increasing the risk of researchers unintentionally imposing their cultural biases or assumptions. Creating a global research agenda requires collaboration among diverse stakeholders, which makes coordination, information sharing, and priority alignment logistically complex. Balancing the priorities of stakeholders with differing objectives and effectively navigating bureaucratic processes while establishing clear communication channels can be significant hurdles in the pursuit of comprehensive survivor engagement research.

Thus, addressing these challenges requires a solid commitment to survivor-centred principles, ethical practices, and ongoing stakeholder collaboration. However, these principles and practices are not yet fully understood and appreciated in the field of anti-slavery.

Concluding remarks

Our network and the knowledge we have produced provide important insights into the strategies and approaches necessary for the meaningful engagement of survivors in anti-slavery efforts and knowledge production. What sets this study apart is its focus on co-designing and executing a flexible research agenda that places local experts and survivors at the centre and forefront of the research process.

Central to our approach is recognising local researchers and survivors as experts in their own experiences and acknowledging their unique perspectives. By actively involving them in the design and implementation of the research, the study enhanced the potential for their voices, needs, and preferences to be considered and represented. This collaborative approach not only enhances the quality and authenticity of the research but also constitutes a research agenda that empowers local experts and survivors to play a pivotal role in shaping future policy and practice in this area.

Flexibility and responsiveness have emerged as core principles in developing a research agenda. Survivors' needs, priorities, and capacities can evolve, influenced by personal growth, changing circumstances, and shifting social dynamics. Therefore, the research agenda itself needed to be designed, re-designed, and co-designed to be adaptable and responsive to these changes. This flexibility allowed the study to remain attuned to survivors' evolving perspectives and to adjust its methodologies and priorities accordingly.

The co-design process was characterised by open and transparent communication among project participants. Through regular dialogue and collaboration, the study collectively identified key research themes, questions, and methodologies that resonated with survivor experiences and aspirations. This collaborative process enhanced the study's relevance and fostered a sense of ownership and agency among local experts and survivors, who felt valued as equal partners in the research endeavour.

The study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on survivor engagement by demonstrating a model that prioritises collaboration, flexibility, and survivor-centred principles. By co-designing and executing a research agenda with an international network of researchers and survivors as active participants, the study not only generated valuable insights into the anti-slavery landscape but also paved the way for more inclusive, effective, and ethical approaches to combating these atrocities globally.

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The Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (Modern Slavery PEC) was created by the investment of public funding to enhance understanding of modern slavery and transform the effectiveness of law and policies designed to address it. The Centre funds and co-creates high quality research with a focus on policy impact, and brings together academics, policymakers, businesses, civil society, survivors and the public on a scale not seen before in the UK to collaborate on solving this global challenge.

The Centre is a consortium of six academic organisations led by the Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law and is funded by the Art and Humanities Research Council on behalf of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

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