



**WOW** // Work and  
Opportunities  
for Women

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# Modern Slavery and Women's Economic Empowerment

## Discussion Document

How increasing the economic empowerment of women in your value chain can reduce the risk of modern slavery

**ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT:** This document has been prepared by Gerry Boyle and Lauren Shields as part of the DFID Work and Opportunities programme.

July 2018



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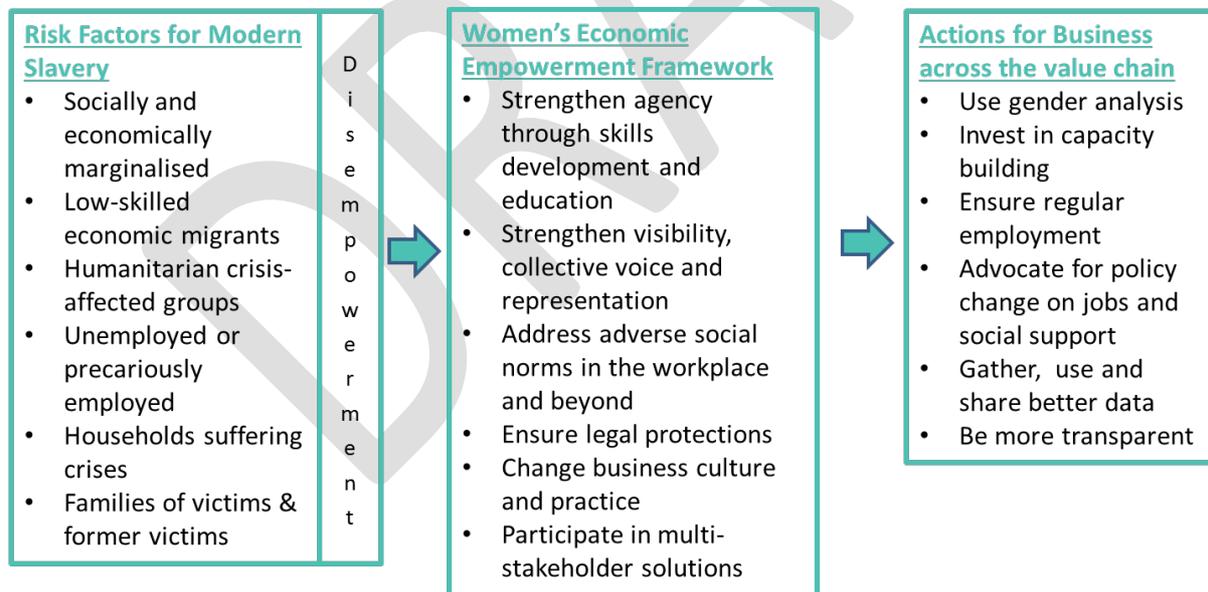
# 1. Executive Summary

At any given time, some 16 million people around the world are victims of forced labour exploitation in the private sector (not including sexual exploitation), affecting nearly 9.5 million women. Nearly half of victims are in sectors of particular concern to international business: the construction sector (18 per cent), manufacturing (including garments) (15 per cent), and agriculture and fishing (11 per cent) sectors.

An analysis by DFID of the key risk factors for Modern Slavery highlights why there is such a prevalence of women as victims of forced labour exploitation: marginalisation, concentration in informal and precarious work, and lack of education and skills – all contributing to the disempowerment which marks women out as being more likely to suffer modern slavery.

The DFID Work and Opportunities for Women programme is set up to address the disempowerment which exposes women to modern slavery, but through the prism of women’s economic empowerment, and in particular dignified, equal, and economically empowering work for women in global value chains. WOW supports the identification of where women are in global value chains, what they are doing, and what is their status. Further, we are developing ten corporate partnerships to economically empower 300,000 women and provide learnings to broader business on what works.

Many of the drivers of modern slavery and the obstacles preventing the economic empowerment of women are the same. This report suggests that by using the lens of women’s economic empowerment business will be better able to identify necessary actions across their entire value chain to reduce the risk of modern slavery and at the same time create positive impact for women.



To achieve progress, business should take the following actions to embed **progressive practices and policies**:

1. **Use a gender analysis across the value chain** to understand risks as a crucial part of comprehensive human rights due diligence
2. **Invest in capacity building** throughout the value chain

3. **Ensure regular employment** and a move away from casual, outsourced, and temporary employment.
4. **Ensure freedom of association and collective bargaining**
5. **Advocate for change in government policy** that ensures a well-regulated job market and adequate levels of social support.
6. **Gather, use and share better data** on the roles women play and supply chains as well as the labour conditions they face.
7. **Share information on your supply chain, due diligence, targets and progress**

WOW will be supporting this agenda over the next few years by increasing visibility around women workers in global value chains, improving outcomes for women in informal work, addressing social norms and improving women's voice, and access to decision-making. We therefore are inviting companies tackling modern slavery and improving women's economic empowerment to contact us and see how we can best work together.

To contact the WOW programme to understand more about our work and how we can support businesses to make a difference, email Gerry Boyle of the WOW team at: [boyle@careinternational.org](mailto:boyle@careinternational.org)

## 2. Introduction

Many businesses are today much more aware of the scourge of modern slavery and the possibility of its existence in their supply chains. The UK's pioneering Modern Slavery Act of 2015 has certainly led to much greater awareness within the UK, and subsequent legislation including the French Corporate Vigilance law and the planned Australian Modern Slavery law, have led to much wider international appreciation of the issue. Further, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes a global commitment (Goals 5.2 and 8.7) to ending forced labour, modern slavery, and human trafficking<sup>1</sup>.

No business can be confident of standards in its value chain unless it has taken extensive steps to analyse, understand and ameliorate the position of women. However, to date the general thrust has been to focus on identifying the risk of modern slavery in the value chain, and among some more progressive companies, attempts to tackle specific high risk areas.

This only goes so far in tackling modern slavery and also of reducing the risk of it in supply chains. To really tackle modern slavery, business has to play a stronger and more systemic role in removing the key factors which drive modern slavery.

Women are at particular risk of falling foul of Modern Slavery due to their marginalisation and the poverty and social norms which drives them into high risk situations. Women's economic empowerment provides a valuable focus for companies to analyse and address the factors that drive modern slavery, with an aim to reduction and eventual eradication.

This document

- Explores the role WEE can play in reducing the risk of modern slavery
- Identifies lessons learned from WEE interventions which can be applied in future work to prevent modern slavery in global supply chains
- Makes recommendations on how businesses can apply these lessons to their work in empowering women and fighting modern slavery

Our framework (Figure 1) uses a DFID-developed analysis of the risk factors, and we highlight the importance of disempowerment. We then take (and slightly adopt) the UN High level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment framework to allow us to identify actions that business should take across the value chain.

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance: [http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/dw4sd/themes/forced-labour/WCMS\\_558561/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/dw4sd/themes/forced-labour/WCMS_558561/lang--en/index.htm)

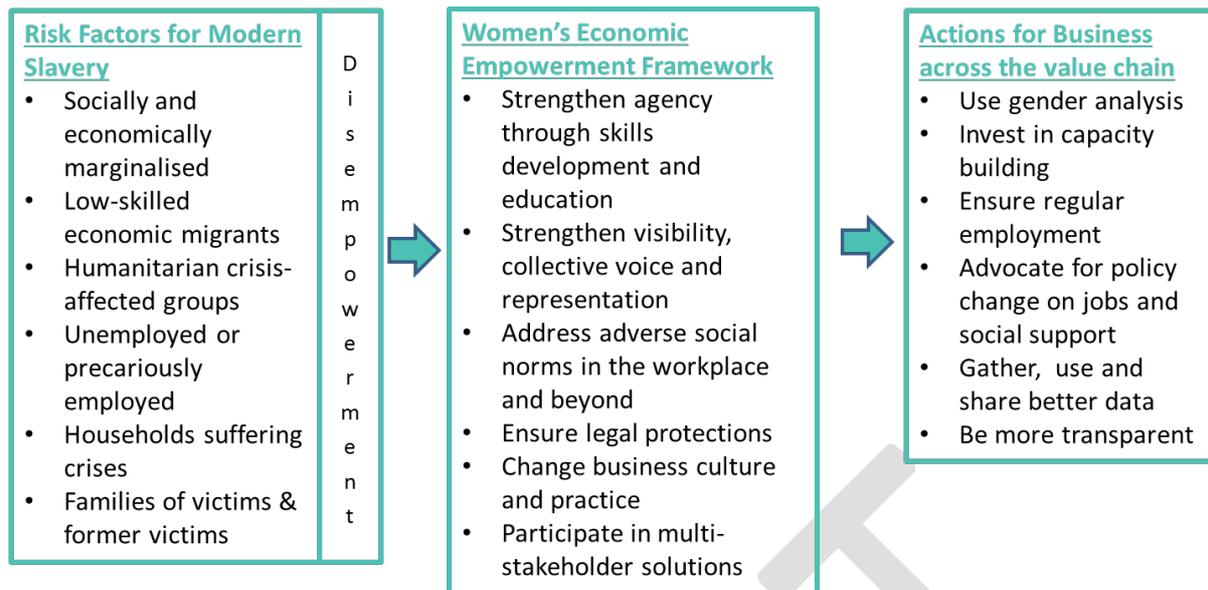


Figure 1: WOW Framework for Modern Slavery and WEE

Many companies are in the early stages of their understanding of the status of women in their value chains, and in formulating their response to modern slavery. We therefore hope that our suggested agenda for business will provoke a debate which will help to clarify for everyone how best to achieve results in these important developments.

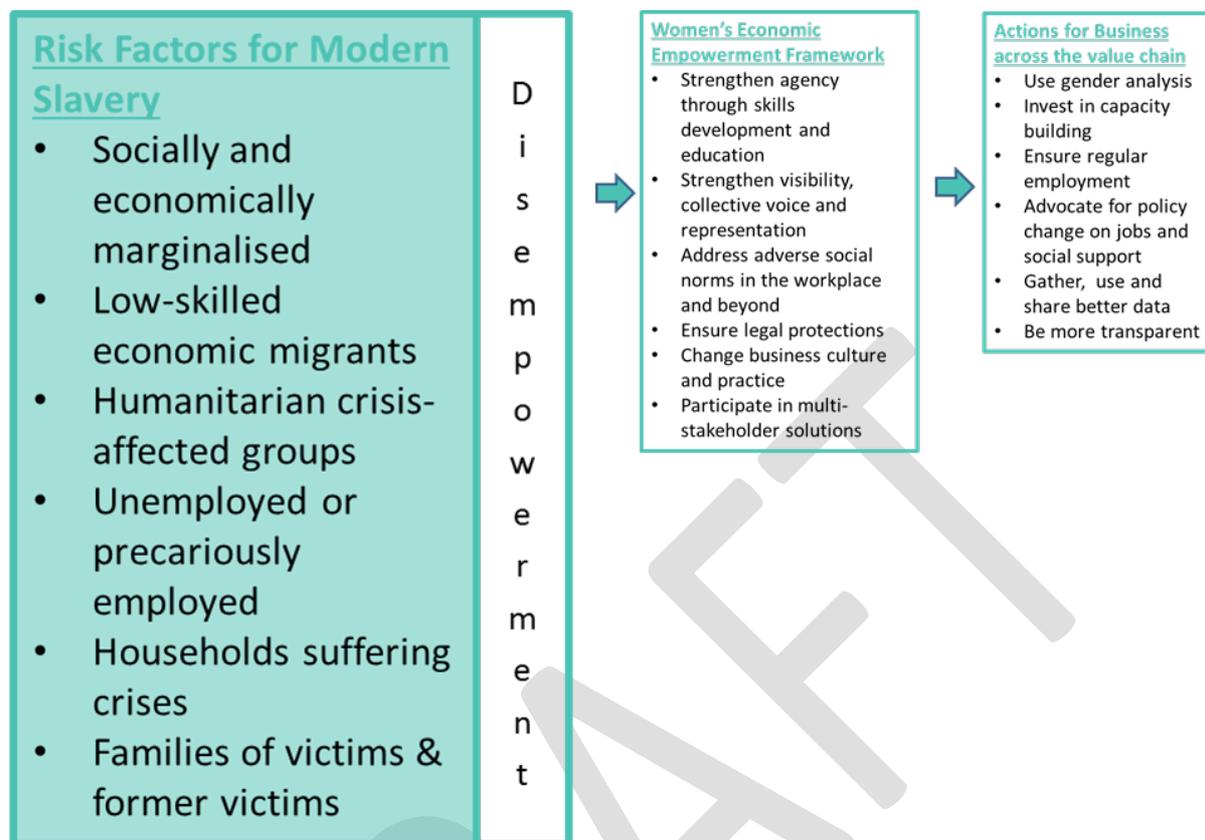
## Work and Opportunities for Women (WOW)

Work and Opportunities for Women (WOW) is an innovative programme funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). WOW is being delivered by an alliance of global experts at the cutting edge of women's economic empowerment research, program design, and delivery—including PwC, BSR, CARE International, the University of Manchester, and Social Development Direct.

WOW aims to enhance the economic empowerment of 300,000 women working in global value chains by 2022. Business, as the engine of the global economy, has an important role to play in achieving this goal. The WOW consortium will establish **10 business partnerships/initiatives** that will enable dignified, equal, and economically empowering work for women. We will also support civil society organisations to tackle a small number of key issues affecting women's opportunities in global value chains.

We will be publishing and disseminating **research and guidance for companies, civil society and governments** based on our programme findings and broader knowledge and experience. This report is the first in a series of documents aimed at improving understanding of women's economic empowerment and catalysing action to address the key issues which hold back women around the world.

### 3. Women and the Risk of Modern Slavery



The UK's Modern Slavery Act defines modern slavery as "holding a person in slavery or servitude or requiring a person to perform forced or compulsory labour" as defined by Article 4 of the Human Rights Convention.<sup>2</sup> Modern Slavery takes many different forms, including forced labour, debt bondage, human trafficking, forced sexual exploitation, descent-based slavery, child slavery and forced and early child marriage.

While business has a role to play in combating all forms of modern slavery, in this document we are concentrating **on forced and bonded labour and trafficking**, as these are the forms of modern slavery most likely to be present within the company value chains which are the focus of the Work and Opportunities for Women programme.

#### Women and Modern Slavery

70% of the 40.3 million people in modern slavery are women and girls. When broken down into different forms of modern slavery, females are overrepresented in forced labour (59%), forced marriage (84%), and forced sexual exploitation (99%). At any given time, some 16 million people around the world are victims of **forced and bonded labour and trafficking** in the private sector, affecting nearly 9.5 million women.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> UK Modern Slavery Act

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.alliance87.org/2017ge/modernslavery#!section=2>

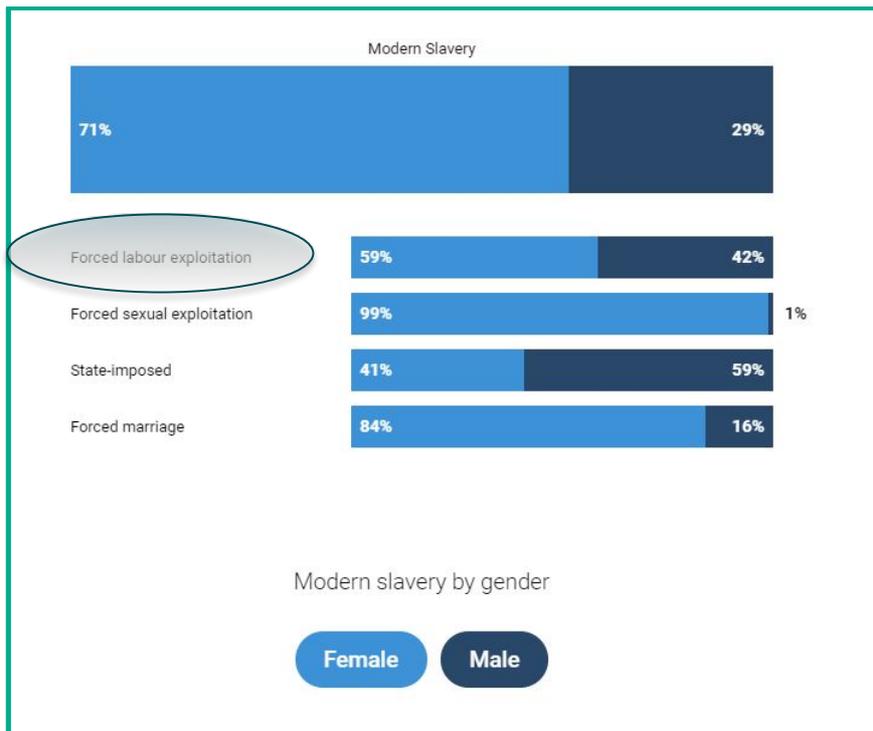


Figure 2: Modern Slavery by Gender

Taken from <http://www.alliance87.org/2017ge/modernslavery#!section=2>

Further, it is estimated that nearly half of victims are in sectors of particular concern to international business: the construction sector (18 per cent), manufacturing (including garments) (15 per cent), and agriculture and fishing (11 per cent) sectors<sup>4</sup>. WOW has a particular focus on manufacturing (garments) and agriculture.

Whilst there are high risk geographies, value chains and industries, modern slavery occurs almost everywhere – developed and developing countries; stable states and fragile states; across all continents<sup>5</sup>.

There are many incentives for supply chain actors to exploit modern slavery: , the Consumer Goods Forum estimates that illicit revenues from forced labour stand at \$150 billion a year.<sup>6</sup>

What can be done to tackle the issue? Companies cannot rely on governments in supply countries. There is a dearth of anti-modern slavery legislation, and even with the UK’s world-leading legislation, there are serious concerns about its effectiveness<sup>7</sup>. Even more importantly, research suggests that legislation banning forms of modern slavery – such as trafficking and child labour - can be counterproductive and that more stress should be put on improving labour and working conditions.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Global Estimates of Modern Slavery, International Labour Organization and Walk Free Foundation, Geneva, 2017

[http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms\\_575479.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_575479.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Consumer Goods Forum, “Business Actions Against Forced Labour” <https://www.theconsumergoodsforum.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/The-Consumer-Goods-Forum-Social-Sustainability-Business-Actions-Against-Forced-Labour-Booklet.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.theconsumergoodsforum.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/The-Consumer-Goods-Forum-Social-Sustainability-Business-Actions-Against-Forced-Labour-Booklet.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> See for instance: <https://www.corporateaccountabilitynetwork.net/editorials/2017/5/8/how-strong-a-model-is-the-uk-modern-slavery-act>

<sup>8</sup> Idris, I. (2017) “Interventions to combat modern slavery” K4D helpdesk report 255, Brighton, UK, Institute of Development Studies

The solution to modern slavery therefore relies heavily on business stepping up to play a major role. However, improving labour and working conditions is complex – even without applying a systematic gender lens. We therefore need to look in more detail at what drives modern slavery, what can be done to address those root causes and what are some of the obstacles in the way of business doing so.

#### **Modern Slavery in Brazil's Garment Industry**

- Brazil has the fourth largest apparel industry in the world which employs nearly 1.5 million workers directly and 8 million workers indirectly, 75% of whom are women. Small factories and sewing shops dominate production, largely targeting the domestic market: 60 percent of Brazilian textile manufacturers employ fewer than five people. The informal sector represents an estimated 20 percent of production and is poorly regulated. The fragmentation and informality of the industry makes it opaque and leads to significant and recurrent human and labour rights violations, including forced labour.
- Migrant women are disproportionately at risk of becoming victims of forced labour in the informal sector. An estimated 300,000-380,000 Bolivian migrants, mostly women, work in the informal apparel garment sector and most of them work in conditions analogous to slavery. Workers are brought to Brazil illegally by human traffickers, who retain their identification documents and place them in sewing shops without contracts or legal protections. The shops do not adhere to minimum wage requirements, established working hours, or use of contracts.
- The women working in the informal sector are typically young indigenous women, coming from rural settings, with low education levels and little or no Spanish or Portuguese language. These workers are marginalized in Brazil and lack legal status, which means they have few options to change their position or earn a livelihood elsewhere. In some cases, women workers earn enough to escape forced labour and establish their own sewing shop, only to use forced labour practices to employ other migrant women workers.

From <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/latin-america-investigates/2016/12/brazil-slaves-fashion-161229063654192.html> ; <http://texbrasil.com.br/en/press/brazilian-textile-and-apparel-sector-in-2015/> IBGE, Central Business register, 2015 Interview Centro de Apoio e Pastoral do Migrante June 18

## Women, vulnerability and the risk of Modern Slavery

DFID have developed a conceptual framework to help improve understanding of the key drivers of modern slavery:<sup>9</sup>

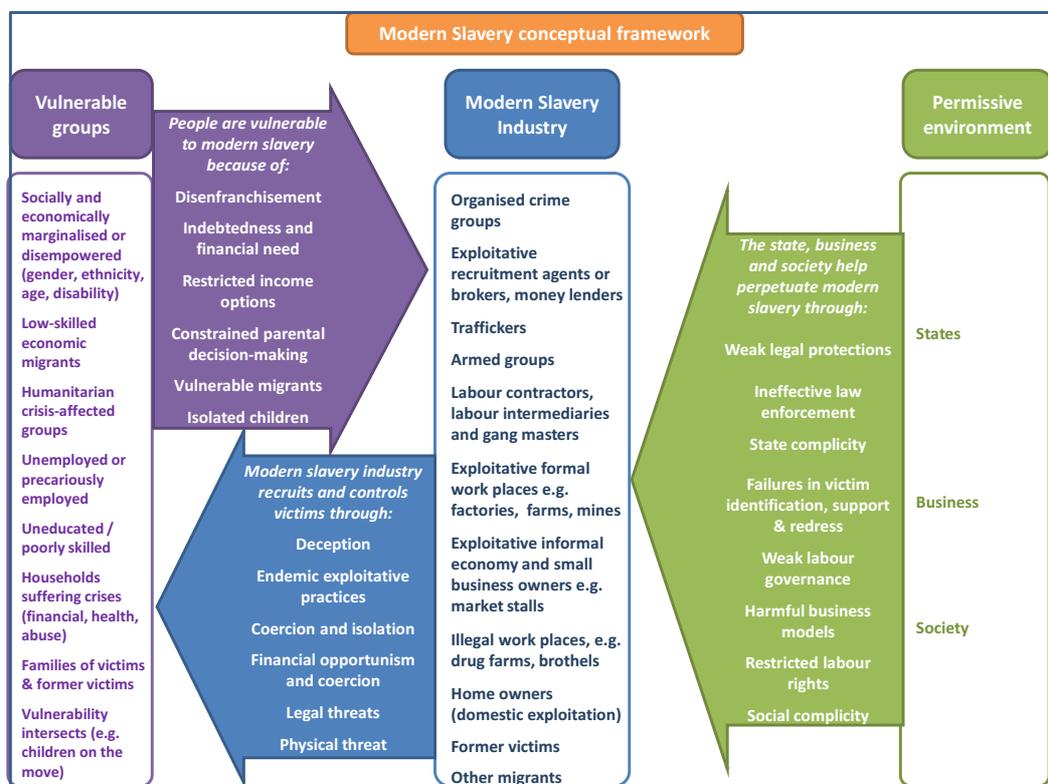


Figure 3: DFID Modern Slavery Conceptual Framework

The prevalence of women and girls as victims of modern slavery follows from the prevalence of women and girls in many of these vulnerable groups, as highlighted by DFID research<sup>10</sup> and the work of the UN High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment<sup>11</sup>:

### 1. Socially and economically marginalised or disempowered (gender, ethnicity, age, disability)

Whilst a range of factors lead to marginalisation and disempowerment, it is clear that gender is a particularly strong factor: of over 750 million people still living in extreme poverty, girls and women are disproportionately affected. Access to services, for example secondary and higher education, remains highly unequal. Global indicators mask significant regional disparities, particularly in fragile and conflict affected states. Improvements in laws to promote gender equality often do not translate into change on the ground, where deep-rooted discrimination persists; and we are witnessing reversals in women's rights in some cases.

<sup>9</sup> DFID: How do we currently understand Leave No One Behind in the context of modern slavery? Morag Patrick, Migration and Modern Slavery Department

<sup>10</sup> DFID Strategic Vision for Gender Equality

<sup>11</sup> UN High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment – Full Report

## 2. Low-skilled economic migrants

Marginalisation and lack of opportunity is a major pressure to migrate in a desperate search for any income, and may thus immediately push women into the hands of traffickers. The migrant moving to a new environment may then face language barriers, risky and dangerous work and housing conditions, violence and harassment, and may be unable or unwilling to access health and social services because of government restrictions and discriminatory attitudes and behaviours of staff. They may also face loneliness and depression. All of these vulnerabilities are heightened if a migrant is illegal or unauthorised.<sup>12</sup> Within a precarious legal situation, they are vulnerable to abuse by employers.

### Modern slavery within the tea industry in Bangladesh

There are over 100,000 tea workers spread over 160-plus tea gardens in Bangladesh, with the total population (including family members) reaching over 400,000

- **Working conditions** - working conditions of tea workers are extremely poor, characterised by long hours, low pay, inadequate accommodation, and very limited education and healthcare facilities.
- **Lack of roots in Bangladesh** - The tea industry in Bangladesh was established by the British in the 1800s. The overwhelming majority of tea garden workers in the country are descendants of immigrants brought in by the British from India. This means they have no place other than the tea gardens to go to in Bangladesh.
- **Marginalisation** - Tea garden workers are socially and economically excluded in Bangladesh, and thus have negligible opportunities to find alternative work. Socially, they live and work in the tea gardens and have hardly any interaction with the mainstream population, who also look down on them because they are typically low caste Hindus.
- **The payment system** in the tea gardens (particularly for leaf pickers) promotes modern slavery: workers have to reach daily targets (typically 23 kg) and have their wages cut if they fall short – many thus work longer hours or rope in family members (e.g. children) to ensure they meet the target.
- **Weak enforcement of labour legislation** - Tea garden workers are covered by labour legislation, notably the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006, which provides significant rights. However, tea workers have fewer rights than workers in other sectors with regard to casual and earned leave. The bigger issue is lack of enforcement of labour rights.
- **Ineffectual union representation** - Tea garden workers used to be represented by a number of unions but these were rendered ineffective by in-fighting. There is now just one major union for tea workers, but this is hampered by lack of capacity, resources and union leaders being 'bought off' by tea garden owners.
- **Not a political priority** - Political parties have shown negligible interest in the plight of tea garden workers. The Awami League's 2008 election manifesto had one mention of tea workers' rights, but when in power the party did very little over the next few years to help them. Other parties did not mention them in their manifestoes.
- **Limited support** – A number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are operating some schools and health facilities in tea gardens, but on the whole there have been few initiatives or programmes to support tea workers.

Source: Idris, I. (2018). *Modern slavery within the tea industry in Bangladesh*. K4D Helpdesk Report. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://insights.careinternational.org.uk/media/k2/attachments/EMPHASIS-Vulnerabilities-of-movement.pdf>

### 3. Humanitarian crisis-affected groups

The Freedom Fund has pointed out that “Violent conflict greatly increases the vulnerability of civilian populations to human trafficking and slavery. Refugees and other migrants displaced by conflict are particularly vulnerable to this extreme form of exploitation”<sup>13</sup>. Research by the International Organisation for Migration identifies that “Migrants who reported war, conflict or natural disasters as the main reason for leaving their places of origin are predicted to be more vulnerable to exploitation and human trafficking on the journey than migrants who left for other reasons.”<sup>14</sup>

Slavery can run rampant where the rule of law has collapsed in war-zones or indeed in fragile and conflict-affected states where there is a lack of state capacity to legislate for, and then implement, effective steps to tackle those subordinating others into slavery conditions.

### 4. Unemployed or precariously employed

Globally, only one in two women aged 15 and over is in paid employment compared with about three in four men. Indeed, about 700 million fewer women than men of working age were in paid employment in 2016— 1.27 billion women against 2 billion men.<sup>15</sup> And women are much more likely to work informally: for instance, in India, around 95 percent of women in paid work, work informally.<sup>16</sup>

In India, research by Anti-Slavery International suggests that over 10 million people are working in brick kilns. Debt bondage is endemic in the industry, with workers given an advance at the start of the work season and a sustenance allowance on a weekly/fortnightly basis, but then only receiving the final settlement of their wages at the end of the work season; which is approximately 8-10 months long. Workers are hired as a family unit with wages paid exclusively to the male head of household, and women, despite having a large presence in the workplace, are not registered as employees and have no access to their rights and entitlements under the labour law. The worst forms of child labour are also endemic, with ASI's report revealing that 65-80% of children aged 5-14 were found to be working 7-9 hours per day and not attending school.

Source: “*Slavery in India's Brick Kilns & the Payment System: way forward in the fight for fair wages, decent work and eradication of slavery*” <https://www.antislavery.org/report-slavery-india-brick-kilns/>

The UN High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment has pointed out that 21 countries still average fewer than five years of girls' schooling, and only 8 low-income countries have achieved gender parity in secondary enrolment. Further, in most countries larger shares of female than male youth are “not in employment, education or training” (NEET). In 108 countries, about 30 per cent of

<sup>13</sup> “Modern slavery and trafficking in conflict: The UN's response” The Freedom Fund, 2016

<sup>14</sup> “Migrant Vulnerability to Human Trafficking and Exploitation: Evidence from the Central and Eastern Mediterranean Migration Routes” International Organisation for Migration, 2017 [https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our\\_work/DMM/MAD/Migrant-Vulnerability-to-Human-Trafficking-Exploitation\\_ExecSummary.pdf](https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/DMM/MAD/Migrant-Vulnerability-to-Human-Trafficking-Exploitation_ExecSummary.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> UN High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment – Full Report

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

young women are counted as NEET, compared with 10 percent for young men. In South Asia, 54 percent of young women are NEET against only 5 percent of men.<sup>17</sup>

#### **6. Households suffering crises (financial, health, abuse)**

People living in poverty are very vulnerable to shocks which can place them in extreme distress, leading them to take desperate measures which then open them to the risk of trafficking. In effect, these crises are exacerbating the pressures that already exist on the poor and marginalised and therefore addressing the overall drivers of trafficking will also support those who are tipped into the most vulnerable and marginalised groups by household crises.

#### **7. Families of victims & former victims**

It is unsurprising that those closest to the people suffering modern slavery are subject to very similar risks and a compounding effect from the disempowerment wrought on the victims of modern slavery. The need to look closely at those around the victims to reduce their risks is clear, as is the need to ensure that those “rescued” from Modern Slavery are given pathways to secure economic well-being which will overcome the risk factors which have previously led to their being victims.

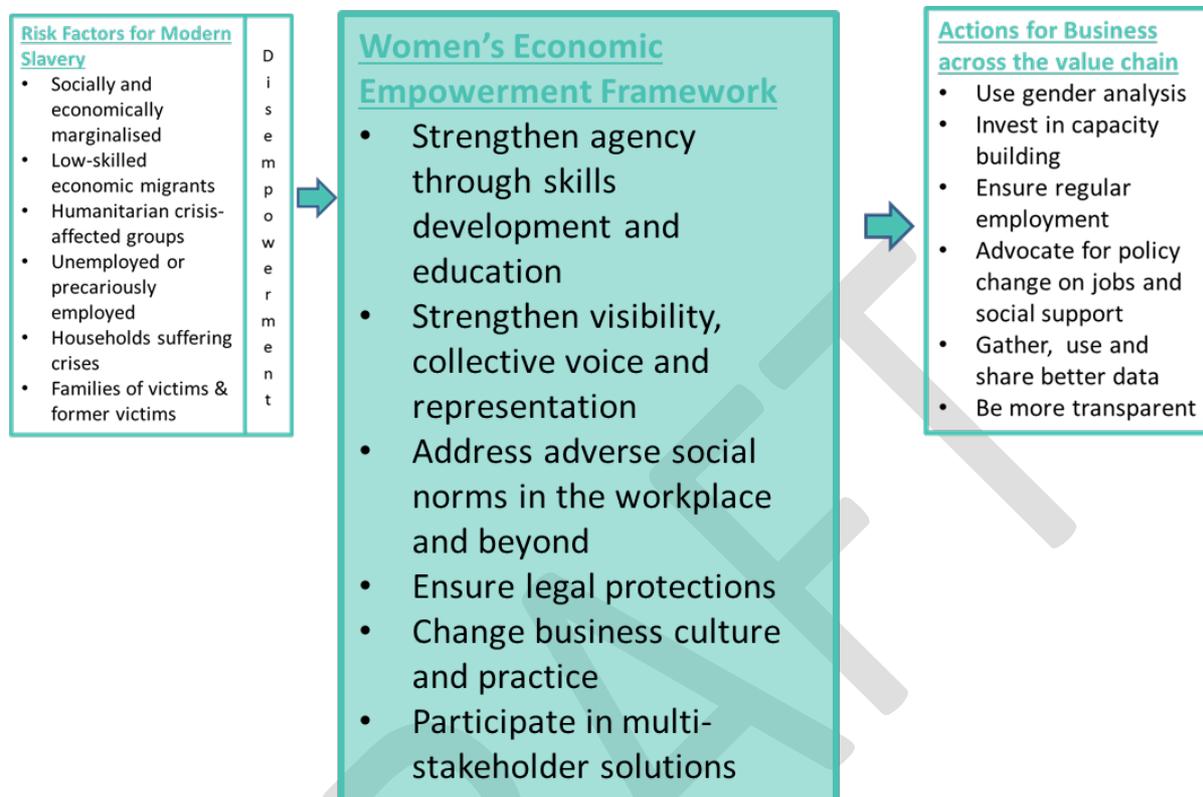
#### **8. Vulnerability intersects**

Finally, the most marginalised and at highest risk are those who are in more than one risk category, for instance uneducated women who are attempting to migrate. This compounding of factors can make tackling the root causes of modern slavery more challenging: for instance, the authorities and local communities have less interest in supporting efforts in tackling the issues in migrant communities, or in ethnic minorities. (See for instance, the Bangladesh tea industry case study above).

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid

## 4. How can our WEE experience support tackling Modern Slavery?



As we have seen, many of the systemic issues which underlie Modern Slavery also underlie women's exclusion from economic power and equity: social norms, marginalisation, informality, precarity, lack of visibility: disempowerment. We can therefore learn from the extensive work done to date on Women's Economic Empowerment to help companies tackle Modern Slavery.

### What do we mean by Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) in WOW?

Women's economic empowerment is *the process whereby all women strengthen their voice and capacity to make and act on economic choices; expand their opportunities to fulfil their potential; and gain recognition for their contribution, paid and unpaid, in households, at work, and wider society.*

### Using the UN High Level Panel's Women's Economic Empowerment Framework to tackle modern slavery

Many of the key drivers of modern slavery and those preventing the economic empowerment of women are the same. By drawing on learning from what works to economically empower women

workers, this report suggests that business can use this **framework** to progress in the fight against modern slavery:<sup>18</sup>

### 1. Strengthen agency through skills development and education

Initiatives should be rooted in strengthening the agency of vulnerable and high-risk populations, through building awareness, knowledge, skills and confidence. Building women's agency is particularly effective when rights-awareness training is combined with building essential life skills on communication, negotiation and decision-making. This approach means women not only have the knowledge and awareness of their rights at work, but also have the skills to challenge harmful gender norms that restrict their economic empowerment. Peer learning approaches and delivering training as part of peer support groups can also strengthen agency, by embedding skills within workplaces and communities and creating groups which can support each other with shared knowledge and skills.

#### Tesco: Preventing trafficking of women

Tesco, UNICEF and the Ethical Tea Partnership (ETP) partnership have been working to improve opportunities for tens of thousands of children in Indian tea communities and reduce their vulnerability to trafficking and abuse. The Assam programme targeted families in 350 communities linked to 100 tea estates. To date the programme has:

- Equipped more than 35,000 adolescent girls with the knowledge and life skills that will help them secure a better future and reduce their vulnerability to violence, abuse and exploitation
- Reached 30,000 community members to protect children from all types of violence, abuse and exploitation
- Influenced national, state and district governments to protect children and review policies affecting women and children living in tea communities.

Tesco have completed a mapping exercise of all their producer groups in each country of origin and ranked each tea garden on 6 parameters including responsible sourcing. The rating has been used to inform their supplier sourcing strategy to incentivise overall improvement, as well as identify key partners to develop partnerships.

Source: Tesco Modern Slavery Statement 2017/18

[https://www.tescopl.com/media/392433/modern\\_slavery\\_act.pdf](https://www.tescopl.com/media/392433/modern_slavery_act.pdf)

In women's economic empowerment, Gap's PACE program in garment supply chains seeks to enhance female workers' self-efficacy and work efficacy through training modules covering topics such as communication and problem-solving. A randomized control trial funded by DFID evaluating the impacts of the program found that participants demonstrated improved confidence and communication, and in turn sought greater technical skills upgrading.<sup>19</sup> A separate evaluation also found workers were three times more likely than non-participants to advance into more senior roles.<sup>20</sup> The study also found business benefits of the program in terms of productivity of workers. The Walmart Foundation's Women in Factories Initiative

18 We have followed the approach taken by the UN High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment in their report: "XXXX"

19 Adhvaryu, Kala and Nyshadham (2017) "The Skills to Pay the Bills: Returns to On the Job Soft Skills Training."

<https://pedl.cepr.org/content/skills-pay-bills-returns-job-soft-skills-training>

20 P.A.C.E. Advancing Women, Changing Lives, Evaluation by ICRW; Women in Factories Initiative Evaluation (forthcoming).

delivered rights and skills training to over 40,000 workers in Bangladesh, resulting in both an improved sense of empowerment and job satisfaction and a reduced tolerance for issues like gender-based violence among women workers. Women reported being able to communicate more effectively with their line managers to raise issues and concerns.<sup>21</sup>

This approach can be used for combatting modern slavery, as women and girls need both the knowledge and awareness to steer clear of harmful situations but also the skills to challenge harmful gender norms in their homes and communities which increase the risk of modern slavery. Enhancing the voice and confidence of women is also critical for preventing modern slavery. Increased confidence to make decisions and influence their own circumstances enhances women's ability to avoid falling into modern slavery. This approach to preventing modern slavery through skills building to increase women's confidence and decision-making has already been tested in some interventions, for instance by Tesco, UNICEF and the Ethical Tea Partnership in the tea industry in Assam.

## **2. Strengthen visibility, collective voice and representation**

As the ETI have pointed out, the right to freedom of association and freedom of expression are central to combatting modern slavery.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, strengthening the visibility, collective voice and representation of women is critical to women's economic empowerment.

However, while freedom of association is "at the core of the ILO's values: it is enshrined in the ILO Constitution<sup>23</sup>", it is all too frequently denied (see text box), both by deliberate undermining by employers and governments and by weak institutions

### **The fragile state of Freedom of Association**

The ITUC Global Rights Index 2018 ranks 142 countries against 97 internationally recognised indicators to assess where workers' rights are best protected in law and in practice. The report's key findings include:

- 65% of countries exclude some groups of workers from labour law.
- 87% of countries have violated the right to strike.
- 81% of countries deny some or all workers collective bargaining.
- Out of 142 countries surveyed, 54 deny or constrain free speech and freedom of assembly.
- The number of countries in which workers are exposed to physical violence and threats increased by 10% (from 59 to 65)
- Countries where workers are arrested and detained increased from 44 in 2017 to 59 in 2018.
- Trade unionists were murdered in nine countries

Attempts to strengthen freedom of association and the collective voice and representation of women workers have proven vital for women's economic empowerment. Enabling women to identify the root causes of inequity and exploitation, define their own agenda and take action is at the core of empowerment. This approach is particularly effective when combined with work to build skills and agency as described previously, but goes beyond this by enabling women to support each other and work collectively to tackle harmful norms and working conditions.

<sup>21</sup> Women in Factories Initiative, Endline Evaluation

<sup>22</sup> <https://ethicaltrade.org/blog/human-rights-defenders-civic-space-and-links-to-modern-slavery>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.ilo.org/global/standards/subjects-covered-by-international-labour-standards/freedom-of-association/lang--en/index.htm>

For example, CARE developed Empowerment Knowledge and Transformative Action (EKATA) groups in order to support peer-to-peer networks and social solidarity among women living and working in the same area, first with agricultural day labourers and more recently with women working in the garment industry in Bangladesh. EKATA groups enable women workers to share, reflect, and critically analyse the barriers they face to achieving respect for their rights in their homes, communities and workplaces. In EKATA groups, women workers themselves identify the most important shared challenges, create action plans, and take collective action to promote their rights; supported by tailored training on their rights and entitlements, and on important life skills, to ensure they have the confidence and skills they need to take collective action. Crucially, EKATA groups have developed links to other civil society organisations and trade unions, in order to develop a shared agenda and deliver joint advocacy and bargaining with employers, service providers and the government. EKATA groups in Bangladesh have played a major role in empowering women, supporting reductions in the gender wage gap among agricultural day labourers and enabling over 5,000 women garment workers to get take action to claim their rights in their communities and workplaces. Achievements include getting local government support to prevent sexual harassment when workers are commuting, organising workers in factories to make sure all workers receive their bonuses, negotiating with a health clinic to provide special opening hours on workers' day off, and supporting numerous workers to raise their complaints to managers – including miscalculation of overtime pay and complaints of sexual harassment against managers.

Supporting women to take leadership positions as worker representatives is also crucial, as worker representatives within workplaces and senior trade union officials are commonly male and do not always understand or prioritise the agenda of women workers. The ETI's Social Dialogue programme in the garment industry in Bangladesh has supported 40 women to participate in Worker Participation Committees in 9 factories,<sup>24</sup> and CARE's OIKKO (Unity) project has delivered training to 318 women union activists to develop their skills to organise women workers and supported 26 union leaders on gender equality mainstreaming, communication and public speaking skills.

### **3. Address adverse social norms in the workplace and beyond**

Women participating in global value chains are held back by social norms (defined by the UN HLP as "rules of conduct acceptable by a dominant group or society"). For example, social norms that suggest that women have responsibility for domestic work leads to different roles for men and women with regards to care work, which in turn frequently constrains women's ability to take on paid work. Similarly, social norms underpin the marginalisation of particular groups which leads to their being at risk of modern slavery.

Engaging men and boys to challenge harmful gender norms is vital for improving outcomes for women. It also helps to prevent negative consequences for women, as improvements in women's agency and decision-making skills can lead to a heightened risk of violence from intimate partners and others if they are not engaged in the intervention. For example, CARE's work in garment factories in Bangladesh revealed that women who received skills training with the support of their supervisors achieved better outcomes at the end of the training, whereas if the supervisor was not supportive then there was an increased risk of conflict on the production line.<sup>25</sup>

One critical insight on social norms from the women's economic empowerment field is therefore recognizing that norms govern behaviour both at work and at home – and that it is important to

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<sup>24</sup> Joint ETI Social Dialogue Programme, Evaluation

<sup>25</sup> Women in Factories Initiative, Endline Evaluation

engage women and employers, but also families, communities, and policymakers. The UN HLP toolkit outlines guidance on combatting adverse norms in media, education, and other areas.<sup>26</sup>

Recognizing the influence of norms in shaping the roles and type of work – as well as the risks associated with that work including incidents of modern slavery – is important for reducing risky work. Norms around mobility may constrain women to working within the household as homeworkers rather than in a formal factory. Analyses that consider the gender norms that govern additional risks faced by women are important considerations for modern slavery initiatives. These norms are specific and vary by local context.

#### **4. Ensure legal protections**

Business can have an important voice in influencing Government legislation. Business, however, is often perceived as being in favour of a “race to the bottom”, or at least hoping that governments will take a very “hands off” approach to business. However, progressive companies recognise across a wide range of issues the need to influence governments towards better protection of workers’ rights, both to avoid breaches of the rights of workers in their supply chains, but also to ensure a level playing field where no-one can gain a competitive advantage by breaching human rights. For instance, the ETI (“on behalf of international garment, footwear, and travel goods brands and retailers”) participated in a letter to the Cambodian government to implement commitments on labour law previously made by the Government, including in areas such as the minimum wage and dispute adjudication<sup>27</sup> Also the B-Team<sup>28</sup>, a group of business leaders has been encouraging businesses to support a new ILO Convention on Ending Violence and Harassment in the Workplace.

#### **5. Change business culture and practice.**

The Global Business Coalition Against Trafficking (GBCAT) has set out a view of the serious obstacles to how business can tackle modern slavery (see text box below). However, despite these obstacles, progressive businesses are clear on the important role they can play in tackling the problem.

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26 HLP Norms toolkit <http://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/hlp%20wee/attachments/reports-toolkits/hlp-wee-toolkit-driver-1-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5507>

27 <https://www.ethicaltrade.org/resources/letter-to-cambodian-government-labour-law-reform>

28 *A group of business leaders describing themselves as: “a not-for-profit initiative formed by a global group of business leaders to catalyse a better way of doing business, for the wellbeing of people and the planet”* <http://www.bteam.org/about/>

## Business Challenges in Tackling Modern Slavery

*From: Global Business Coalition Against Trafficking*

### **LACK OF TRANSPARENCY**

- Low visibility into Tier 2+ recruitment practices
- Trafficking often found in the informal economy

### **LACK OF DISCLOSURE**

- Suppliers not forthcoming or don't know what to report on
- Audits are inaccurate

### **LACK OF CAPACITY**

- Lack of expertise or resources from suppliers to address issue
- Businesses lack access to resources to help address the issue

### **LACK OF INCENTIVES**

- Limited legislative pressure on companies and their suppliers
- Few commercial incentives for suppliers to improve
- Suppliers and brands may not understand the business case

### **BUSINESS MODELS**

- Brand procurement practices
- Seasonality drives need for short-term labor generally from abroad
- Lack of requirement for direct contracting

### **SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES**

- Modern Slavery is often present in countries that maintain a weak rule of law
- Corruption is an enabler of all forms of modern slavery
- Lack of unions to help provide protection

From "About Modern Slavery" by the Global Business Coalition Against Human Trafficking (with minor amendments) <https://www.gbcat.org/modern-slavery/>

In turn, women's economic empowerment initiatives have shown that while individual capacity is critical, transformative outcomes for women depend upon institutional changes by their employers. More favourable conditions for women, for example through strengthened access to health products and services in a factory or farm, improved access to sick leave, annual leave and maternity entitlements; or access to training opportunities through cooperatives, lead to more long-lasting and meaningful changes for women.

### **BSR HERrespect – Addressing Gender-Based Violence in the Garment Industry**

Women workers in global supply chains are particularly vulnerable to incidents of violence and harassment: BSR's research suggests that female garment workers in Bangladesh are more likely than the national average to experience all forms of intimate violence at home and at work – for example 42.8 percent of female garment workers experience sexual violence, versus the national average of 12.2 percent. Unequal power relations underpin and perpetuate violence and affect women in their roles at work and at home.

HERrespect is a 12-month workplace program supported by DFID's What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls Programme that aims to build more gender equitable workplaces in global supply chains. BSR piloted HERrespect in Bangladesh and India through three components:

- Capacity building: participatory training for female workers, male workers, and management to reflect on adverse social norms and build soft skills to address violence in workplace and intimate relationships, as well as joint sessions to improve dialogue
- Awareness raising: factory-wide campaigns on gender equality, respect, communication, and teamwork, and promotion of local women's and support organizations
- Improvement of systems: reviewing workplace policies with best practice and local law, improving support and grievance systems, and guidance on communication policies to workers

HERrespect is undergoing an external evaluation which will be completed in early 2019. Midline findings indicate a decrease in the acceptance and normalization of violence among participants, as well as an increase in gender equal attitudes and sense of personal responsibility to stop violence against women.

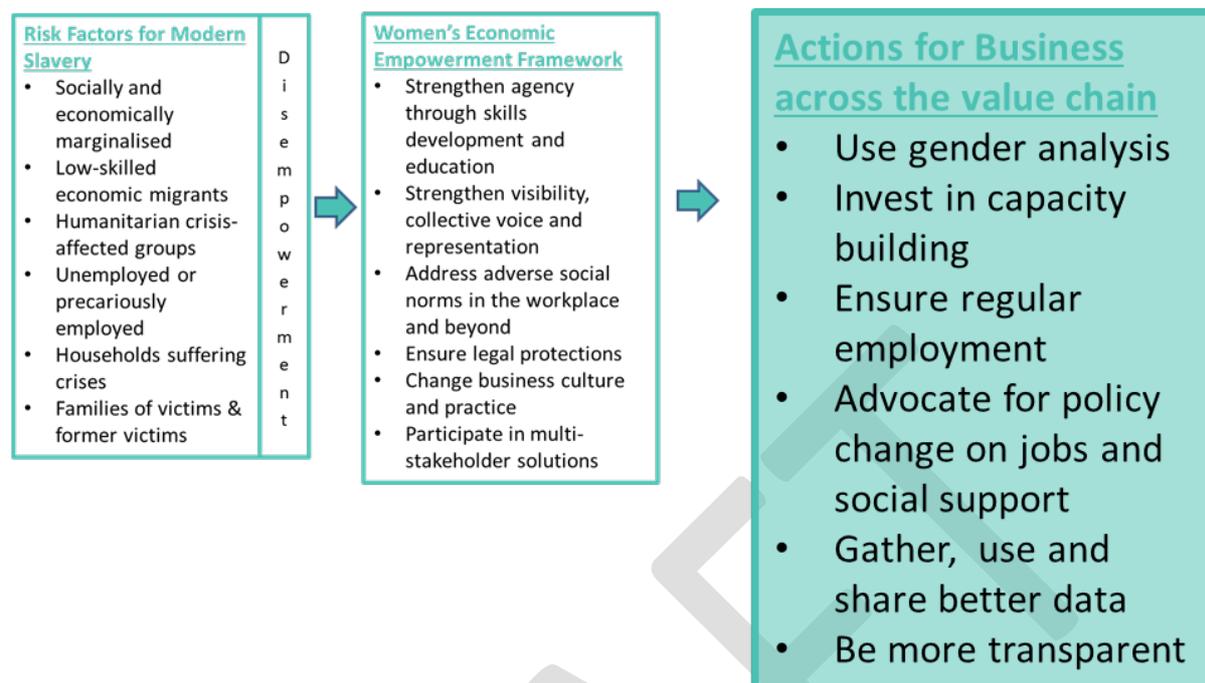
## **6. Participate in multi-stakeholder solutions**

Women's economic empowerment initiatives have been more effective and lasting when they engage multiple stakeholders including business, NGOs, trade unions, and government. Engagement across sectors brings additional visibility and support for these initiatives and allows each actor to leverage their respective strengths and contributions. ETI's multistakeholder approach has been effective in gaining support from business to conduct gender analyses of initiatives. These multistakeholder initiatives represent promising spaces to identify lessons and collaborate to scale up good practice.

Business, civil society, and government have a role to play in combatting risk factors of modern slavery. Systemic factors that allow slavery to persist such as lack of social protection which may push vulnerable men and women to situations of exploitative or forced work require interventions from different sectors.

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## 5. Practices and policies



From our analysis, it is clear that business can and must play a proactive role and implement **progressive practices and policies** in key areas, including:

1. **Use a gender analysis across the value chain** to better understand risks by identifying and drawing attention to places in their supply chain where the chances of risky work are higher.
2. **Invest in capacity building** throughout the value chain to ensure regular and quality work for women and men. This involves addressing women's agency and voice, but also supervisor, manager, and cooperative skills to uphold strong conditions for women and men workers and farmers including addressing social norms.
3. **Ensure regular employment** and a move away from casual, outsourced, and temporary employment which disproportionately impacts women.
4. **Ensure freedom of association and collective bargaining** through establishing dialogue with unions directly at the global and regional levels, and working with suppliers to build links to local unions. Buyers should also take a proactive role in influencing suppliers when worker and unions' rights are violated, particularly to tackle union busting and blacklisting.
5. **Advocate for policy change** that ensures a well-regulated job market and adequate levels of social support. Reducing the vulnerabilities women face and reducing demand for risky and exploitive work reduces the risk they will face forced labor.
6. **Gather and use better data** on the roles women play and supply chains as well as the labor conditions they face. Understanding the realities women face and how those change over time brings visibility to the status of women and risks they face with regards to modern slavery.
7. **Share information on your supply chain, due diligence, targets and progress.**

## 6. Conclusion

As businesses increasingly debate how best to tackle modern slavery in their supply chains, the framework of women's economic empowerment provides a way to use existing experience of what works, to address the risks faced by the women who represent a majority of the victims of forced labour.

We have ourselves adopted this framework and identified the key actions which we think business needs to address to be better able to identify necessary actions across their entire value chain to reduce the risk of modern slavery and at the same time create positive impact for women.

WOW will be supporting this agenda over the next few years by increasing visibility around women workers in global value chains, improving outcomes for women in informal work, addressing social norms and improving women's voice. We therefore are inviting companies tackling modern slavery and improving women's economic empowerment to discuss and improve our suggestions. We hope that you will contact us and see how we can best work together.

To contact the WOW programme to understand more about our work and how we can support businesses to make a difference, email Gerry Boyle of the WOW team at:  
[boyle@careinternational.org](mailto:boyle@careinternational.org)

## 7. Useful resources

### Modern Slavery

UK Modern Slavery Act <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/30/contents/enacted>

The 2017 Global Estimate of Modern Slavery  
<http://www.alliance87.org/2017ge/modernslavery#!section=0>

UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights  
[https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR\\_EN.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_EN.pdf)

Global Business Coalition Against Trafficking <https://www.gbcat.org/>

Bishop, K., Kangas, A. and Harrison, A. (2017) *Gender Analysis of Modern Slavery*, VAWG Helpdesk Research Report No. 141. London UK: VAWG Helpdesk.

Freedom Fund <https://freedomfund.org/>

ILO <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/lang--en/index.htm>

Business and Human Rights Resource Centre:

<https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/issues/labour/forced-labour-modern-slavery>

Know the Chain: <https://knowthechain.org/>

Global Business of Forced Labour project: <http://globalbusinessofforcedlabour.ac.uk/>

### Women's Economic Empowerment

WOW Guide to gender mapping of value chains (forthcoming)

UN High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment <http://hlp-wee.unwomen.org/en>

DFID Strategic Vision for Gender Equality <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfid-strategic-vision-for-gender-equality-her-potential-our-future>

## **Acknowledgements**

The WOW Programme would like to thank the following people who contributed to the development of this document: Christine Svarer, Elissa Goldenberg, Joe Sutcliffe, Faraz Hassan, Sally Baden, Professor Stephanie Barrientos.

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*“This document is an output from a project funded by UK aid from the UK government. However, the views expressed and information contained in it are not necessarily those of or endorsed by the UK government who can accept no responsibility for such views or information or for any reliance placed on them.*

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