



NEPAL

Annual report 2024-2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Freedom Fund began working in 2014 to address the challenges faced by Harawa-Charawa agricultural bonded labourers in the southeast of Nepal. In 2021, with funding from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), the program expanded to incorporate the Haliya and Kamaiya freed agricultural bonded labourer movements from the far west of the country. Through this program, the three bonded labour networks representing the Haliya, Harawa-Charawa, Kamaiya and Kamlari communities established the Joint Struggle Committee, a unified survivor-led movement working to eradicate bonded labour in Nepal.

The Joint Struggle Committee prioritised the liberation of the Harawa-Charawa, who had been excluded from earlier government rehabilitation packages for the Haliya, Kamaiya and Kamlari. Their joint advocacy efforts were rewarded and the Harawa-Charawa were declared free by the Prime Minister on 18 July 2022. The bonded labour networks, with the support of hotspot partners, then turned their attention towards getting rehabilitation packages for the Harawa-Charawa as well Haliya, Kamaiya and Kamlari who had been excluded from previous schemes.

In 2024, there have been significant policy advancements including the endorsement of rehabilitation guidelines for Haliya, Kamaiya and Kamlari in Sudurpaschim/Province 7 and the establishment of data collection, verification, and identity card distribution guidelines for Harawa-Charawa in Madhesh/Province 2. Another significant achievement has been the federal government's specific prioritisation of landless Haliya, Kamaiya, Kamlari and Harawa-Charawa within the Land Commission distribution criteria. The Freedom Fund's NGO partners have played a crucial role in supporting advocacy efforts and have enhanced the resilience of communities affected by bonded labour through direct services including facilitating access to citizenship certificates, birth registration for children and school enrolment, as well as livelihood and income-generation support for communities affected by bonded labour. Following the completion of the Norad funded program in June 2024, the Freedom Fund continued to provide funding for all six implementing partners for another 18 months.



The Joint Struggle Committee has remained active at the national level, engaging in high-level discussions and educating policymakers about the persistent challenges faced by agricultural bonded labourers. At the end of 2024, with funding from Humanity United, the Freedom Fund signed two-year grant agreements with the Kamaiya, Haliya, Harawa-Charawa and networks to support their individual movements and advocacy goals. This was the first grant ever received by the newly registered Harawa-Charawa network and was a historical moment for the community.

Despite these achievements, several challenges persist, including frequent changes in the government, weak political commitment and the slow pace of implementation. However, the movement, led by those from the community itself, continues to move forward. Achieving long-term transformation will require continuous and collective efforts to ensure justice, dignity and economic stability for freed bonded labourers' communities.

OPERATING CONTEXT

Frequent shifts in the make-up of the coalition government in 2024 led to political instability. The Maoists first aligned with the Nepal Congress Party, then with the UML party. Ultimately, in July, the Nepal Congress and UML formed an alliance, leading to K.P. Oli becoming Prime Minister for the fourth time in his political career. The change in coalition government at the central level also resulted in changes in leadership in Provinces 2, 5 and 7, where the program is being implemented.

In October 2024, the new government revived the politically appointed Land Commission. The re-established Land Related Problem Resolution Commission is the 16th such body formed to address landlessness in the country. Successive governments have frequently dissolved commissions formed by their predecessors, hindering sustained progress in land distribution. Despite this instability, past commissions have distributed land to thousands of families.

The latest commission includes a broader remit and a greater role for local and provincial governments, raising hopes for more effective land distribution. However, activists emphasise the need for political stability to ensure the commission can fulfil its mandate. The commission has completed the formation of district commissions and has reached agreements with 739 out of 754 municipalities.



PROGRESS TOWARDS SYSTEMS CHANGE

The hotspot has a strong focus on advocacy, working to bring about systemic changes to improve the lives of agricultural bonded labour communities. During 2024, we have observed several key systemic changes.

Provincial level policy breakthroughs for bonded labour communities

In March 2024, the Sudurpaschim/Province 7 cabinet approved the *Sudurpaschim Province Freed Kamaiya, Haliya, and Kamlari Rehabilitation Guideline-2080*, which includes provisions for the data collection and rehabilitation of unregistered Kamaiya, Haliya and Kamlari families, a significant step towards addressing the needs of these communities who were previously left out of government schemes. The guideline also includes provisions for land acquisition, cash assistance for house construction and skills development to promote sustainable livelihoods. This milestone was achieved following months of strong advocacy led by the Freed Kamaiya Society Network and the Mukta Haliya Samaj Federation (Freed Haliya Network) with collective support from the Joint Struggle Committee, ActionAid International Nepal and the Rastriya Dalit Network (RDN). Representatives from the Haliya and Kamaiya networks were directly involved in the drafting committee and feedback sessions. After endorsement, the guideline was published in the government gazette and is now ready for implementation.

In June 2024, a similar Harawa-Charawa rehabilitation guideline was passed by the Madhesh/Province 2 government. However, due to the provincial government changing in July 2024, the guideline has yet to be endorsed and published in the government gazette. The Harawa-Charawa Rights Forum and the NGO partners are regularly conducting follow-ups with the Madhesh/Province 2 government to push for final publication.

Municipal level advancements

Several municipalities within Sudurpaschim/Province 7 took the initiative to develop municipal level rehabilitation guidelines. The Freedom Fund, ActionAid International Nepal and network representatives provided technical support to draft and finalise the guidelines. Following more than a year of discussions and advocacy, three municipalities now have rehabilitation guidelines for Haliya, Kamaiya and Kamlari in their constituencies.

Data collection initiatives

Identifying freed bonded labourers missed from previous schemes is the first step within the Sudurpaschim /Province 7 directive. To support the implementation of this directive, two municipalities have issued notices to collect data on these communities. A further ten municipalities have completed data collection on unregistered Haliya and Kamaiya.

Land Commission expanded mandate to address issues of bonded labourers

The Government of Nepal announced in the policy and programs for 2023/2024 that "The work of the National Land Commission will be expedited. The problem of freed Haliya, Kamaiya, Kamlari, Harawa-Charawa, landless squatters and unorganized settlements will be solved. An integrated special program will be implemented for the development of these communities." In November this year, the newly convened Land Commission announced that they have integrated this policy to their remit which means they have an official mandate to deliver policies that benefit bonded labour communities. This is a significant achievement for the advocacy work of the Joint Struggle Committee and hotspot partners who have been lobbying directly with the Land Commission and Ministry of Land for many years. alised by May 2025 and disseminated to the 10 regional governments.

HOTSPOT OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

Headline results

8,952 individuals benefitted from social and legal services

Partners provided a range of services including support with applications for vital documents (birth and citizenship) and with government schemes and entitlements as well as direct services such as livelihoods support. Among the recipients there were 3,825 women, 1,486 men, 2,008 girls and 1,633 boys.

3,503 agriculture bonded labour children enrolled into school

In 2024, partners successfully enrolled 3,503 children (1,943 girls and 1,560 boys) from Harawa-Charawa, Haliya and Kamaiya families into school. At the start of the academic year, partners conducted school enrolment campaigns in their respective villages to attract the students.

600 Harawa-Charawa children benefitted from partner-delivered supportive education programs

Partners working in the southeast of Nepal have supported 24 tuition centres in their working areas. The centres provide academic support for Harawa-Charawa children who still face discrimination in schools and often have no place at home to do their homework. The classes have been very successful and have greatly improved the results of the children who attend.

3,528 earning a new income or starting a micro-enterprise

In 2024, 3,528 people from Harawa-Charawa, Freed Haliya and Freed Kamaiya communities received support to create alternative income for themselves. Small business startup support provided through partners has played a crucial role in strengthening the livelihoods of these communities. Many families now sustain themselves through joint farming, small grocery shops, meat and fish stalls, and goat and chicken rearing, earning between NPR 500 and 1200 (USD 5-8 a day).

Progress towards hotspot objectives

Hotspot Objective 1: A united movement of agricultural bonded labour groups is formed and active at the national level

Joint Struggle Committee revised their movement strategy

Since 2021, the three bonded labour networks – Kamaiya, Haliya and Harawa-Charawa – have been working together collaboratively and in 2022 they decided to form the Joint Struggle Committee (JSC) to take forward their joint advocacy plan at the national level. The JSC unanimously prioritised the rehabilitation of the Harawa-Charawa communities as well as Haliya, Kamaiya and Kamlari who were missed out from earlier government schemes. Other objectives included access to the basic needs, meaningful participation and risk mitigation (such as the concerning the impact of climate change on agricultural workers).



Joint Struggle Committee collective action

With support from hotspot partners, the JSC has been active in several campaigns with government ministries and the media to pursue the demands of their joint strategy. In February, representatives joined a panel discussion with journalists, NGOs and Dalit activists during the 16th World Social Forum held in Kathmandu, where they highlighted the issues of former bonded labour communities. The Kamaiya movement ran a signature campaign during the event to pressure the government to respond in a timely manner and build solidarity among the public on the issue.

Media and advocacy campaigns

The Freedom Fund supported the Harawa-Charawa Rights Forum (HCRF) in creating a short film to share their experience working under bonded labour and their demands to government. The film was disseminated through a campaign in June 2024 to raise public awareness about the issue and increase public support for their cause. The campaign leveraged popular media outlets (such as Ujyaalo) and platforms like Facebook and YouTube posting regular boosts and responding to direct messages. The film itself was viewed 361,000 times and reached 204,000 people.

Other important media coverage included a CNN feature story on the Harawa-Charawa for My Freedom Day on 14 March 2024.

Four TV programs produced by ActionAid International Nepal (AAIN) and RDN and broadcast in Nepal received significant media coverage and further raised public awareness.

Strengthening grassroots movements

Meanwhile, the three survivor-led networks continue to build their individual movements and advocate on their specific demands at provincial and local levels. The Harawa-Charawa Rights Forum's National Conference saw many new representatives elected across the eight district level forums, 25 of which were then nominated to the central level forum.

Engaging youths in advocacy and movement building

Engaging young people in the movement is essential because they bring fresh energy, innovative ideas and the power of social media to amplify their voices and reach broader audiences. Involving youth also helps prepare the next generation of activists who will carry the movement forward.

Advocacy partner RDN facilitated youth engagement and capacity-building interventions for 30 young Harawa-Charawa. AAIN selected 59 young people (43 female and 16 male) from freed Kamaiya and Haliya families to join an activist training workshop. Participants gained insights into their communities' liberation struggles and learned about labour rights and climate justice issues. By the end of the sessions, they had developed action plans to implement in their local communities.

Funding for survivor movements

The Freedom Fund has entered into agreements with the three agricultural bonded labour networks whom we have worked closely with over the past three years: the Harawa-Charawa Rights Forum, Rastriya Mukta Haliya Samaj Federation (Freed Haliya Federation) and Freed Kamaiya Society. This core funding marks a major step forward, empowering these networks to operate independently, build institutional strength and amplify their movement-building efforts. The three networks have welcomed this partnership with optimism and determination, seeing it as a catalyst for lasting change.

Hotspot Objective 2: The government changes policies to address agricultural bonded labour and provide support services for survivors

Following the declaration of freedom of the Harawa-Charawa on 18 July 2022, the Joint Struggle Committee and Freedom Fund partners have tried to build on this momentum and keep up the pressure on the government to bring about real change for the Harawa-Charawa, Haliya, Kamaiya and Kamlari. In 2024, the hotspot recorded 13 policy changes from national, provincial and municipal levels of the government. Key federal and provincial policy changes have been outlined in the system change section above.

Government budget allocations for freed bonded labourers

The allocation of budget reflects the government's commitment to supporting agricultural bonded labourers. Both the federal and provincial governments have designated funding specifically for the welfare of the Kamaiya, Haliya and Harawa-Charawa communities. A significant proportion of annual budgets are frequently underutilised. In the 2023/2024 fiscal year, 45% of the Madhesh/Province 2 budget remained unspent, highlighting the importance of partners pushing government to follow through on delivering budget commitments.

In the fiscal year 2024/25, the Madhesh/Province 2 government allocated an additional NPR 2.5 million (USD 18,055) to a fund introduced last year that provides livelihoods support for the Harawa-Charawa community. So far 12 community groups supported by Freedom Fund partners received grants through the scheme and they have applied for additional funding this year.

Lumbini/Province 5 government allocated NPR 55.4 million (USD 400,090) to ensure women's meaningful participation in agriculture through income-generation and self-employment programs and will target marginalised groups such as freed Kamaiya, Kamlari and landless poor families.

Sudurpaschim/Province 7 government has allocated NPR 83.8 million (USD 605,190) for improving the livelihoods of marginalised groups, including poor Dalits and freed Kamaiya, Kamlari and Haliya. A further NPR 20 million (USD 144,437) has been allocated for constructing housing and NPR 5.8 million (USD 41,887) for supporting disadvantaged groups including the Kamaiya, Haliya and Kamlari in accessing higher education.

Transition to waged labour

For hundreds of years, agricultural labourers in the Harawa-Charawa community have been paid in paddy (rice plant) instead of cash, a practice amounting to slavery and exploitation. The Harawa-Charawa Rights Forum and the NGO Dalit Janakalyan Yuba Club (DJKYC) coordinated with five municipalities in our working area to set a minimum wage aligned with the national standard. Thousands of daily labourers within the five municipalities will benefit from this new wage policy. Within our program areas, 1,066 Harawa-Charawa community members have directly reported they are now receiving their wages in cash, marking a significant change in labour practices and ensuring fair compensation for their work.

Hotspot Objective 3: Agricultural bonded labourers have greater resilience as a result of accessing government and NGO support services

The hotspot strengthened the resilience of communities affected by bonded labourer by enhancing their access to government services such as citizenship, birth registration and the government employment scheme. NGO partners also provided direct services such as education, legal support and livelihood interventions.

Land Ownership Certificate distribution to Harawa-Charawa members

Partners and the Harawa-Charawa Rights Forum (HCRF) have been working to secure Land Ownership Certificates for community members. Harawa-Charawa communities often reside on public land and, despite living there for there for many years, they face the constant risk of displacement. In Bramahan Gaurchhari, the DKLUY and HRCF in Lahan Municipality worked with the Land Measurement Office to secure Land Ownership Certificates for 191 people this year. The mayor and ward chairman attended an event to distribute the certificates to the families.



Vital registration and access to services for Harawa-Charawa

Our partners work closely with Harawa-Charawa communities to help them obtain essential documents such as citizenship for adults and birth registration certificates for children. Many children face challenges in securing these documents due to their parents' lack of citizenship and land ownership. This is a pressing issue, as without birth registration they are unable to enrol in school and later it will be difficult for them to get the citizenship certificates. In 2024, partner-initiated birth registration campaigns resulted in 1,808 children receiving birth certificates and 474 people received the citizenship certificate.

Earning a new income or starting a micro-enterprise

In 2024, 2,787 people from Harawa-Charawa, Freed Haliya and Freed Kamaiya communities received support for generating alternative income. Small business startup support provided through partners plays a crucial role in strengthening the livelihoods of these communities. Many families now sustain themselves through joint farming, small grocery shops, meat and fish stalls, and goat and chicken rearing.

Additionally, 741 Harawa-Charawa members benefited from cash investments and training to start small agriculture or livestock business through an intervention run by ActionAid. Details of the midterm review of the intervention are outlined in the research section below.

Supporting legal cases to increase access to justice

During the year, the hotspot supported 28 cases, including those involving critical issues such as rape and the displacement of Harawa-Charawa communities from their land. Legal cases are an essential tool to support marginalised groups such as Dalits to secure their rights and work towards systemic changes that challenge entrenched discrimination.

Neighbouring landlords and high-caste individuals have filed false or unnecessary cases against Harawa-Charawa communities. Due to a lack of awareness and financial resources, these communities often fail to respond to court orders, resulting in one-sided decisions that severely impact them. The Freedom Fund, through its partners and networks, has been providing legal support to help defend such cases.



SUPPORTING A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

The community of practice (CoP) is a valuable platform for NGO partners and survivor-led networks to share knowledge, experiences and develop strategies. Four CoP meetings were held this year hosted in various locations where the project is implemented to allow different partners to host and also showcase their work. In June 2024, the CoP celebrated the completion of the Norad program and made plans to continue the work into 2025.



CASE STUDY

Initiating a Path to Secure Housing for the Harawa-Charawa Community

Members of the Harawa-Charawa community are often landless, forcing them to build makeshift shelters on public land. This has made them highly vulnerable to displacement and limits their ability to secure a stable livelihood and future. In 2022, the Freedom Fund facilitated a study visit for a ministerial team so they could witness first-hand the challenges facing the bonded labour communities. Habitat for Humanity was also part of the study visit and after meeting the communities and our partners saw an opportunity to collaborate towards a solution for these communities.

Led by our partner, Community Improvement Center (CIC), in collaboration with the Harawa-Charawa Rights Forum and Habitat for Humanity, the group devised a multi-pronged approach in Ganeshman Charnath municipality to find a solution to the shelter problem.



The municipality provided land where safe homes could be built for landless Harawa-Charawa. CIC then worked with the Land Commission to ensure registration and ownership certificates were issued for the new homes, thereby providing long-term security for the community. The construction of the new houses was delivered through a joint funding model. Habitat for Humanity contributed 50% of the required funding, while the municipality covered the remaining 50%. CIC constructed the houses as per their joint agreement.

Each house consists of two rooms, a small living space, a hand pump for water, a toilet, and a separate kitchen – all constructed from locally-sourced materials. The homes provide not only physical shelter but also a sense of security and dignity to the liberated Harawa-Charawa. By having a permanent place to live, the families are now safeguarded from displacement and can focus on improving their livelihoods.

The success of this initiative highlights the power of collective advocacy and strategic partnerships. The model, where land is provided by the municipality and validated by the Land Commission, while funding is shared between local government and external donors, demonstrates a replicable approach that can be implemented in other areas facing similar challenges.

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION AND RESEARCH

Evaluation of Ending Agricultural Bonded Labour (EABL) project

Progress Inc. conducted a final external evaluation of the Norad-funded Ending Agricultural Bonded Labour project, submitting the report in June 2024. The evaluation highlighted the project's significant achievements in supporting a united, survivor-led movement against bonded labour, which led to the critical policy changes to liberate the Harawa-Charawa and advance government support for bonded labour communities. The report offered further recommendations for improving effectiveness and sustainability in the future. These include continued advocacy at provincial and local levels to secure government prioritization, including budget allocations for rehabilitation programs. The report also suggests expanding educational workshops for policymakers, strengthening gender-responsive livelihoods for marginalized groups and fostering leadership among former bonded labourers through activist training. Additionally, it recommends continuing to strengthen partnerships with local organizations, developing flexible funding frameworks and providing training in grant writing and financial management to support grassroots initiatives and ensure long-term sustainability.

Midline evaluation of livelihood program

ActionAid Nepal conducted a midline review of their Livelihoods Technical Assistance Project, which has provided start-up grants and agricultural and business skill training to 741 Harawa-Charawa community members. The review gathered data from 34 program participants to learn about their experience of the program and any changes in household income or other social indicators. The study found increases in income for the small sample and improved food security and education attendance for children. It also identified challenges such as market fluctuations, water scarcity and limited training. An endline evaluation of the project will be conducted in 2025, allowing enough time to assess the effectiveness of animal rearing interventions.





IMAGES

Women walking to the field to work. <i>Filmatory Nepal/The Freedom Fund</i>	Cover
Rajbati Devi Mandal, Treasurer of National Harawa-Charawa Rights Forum, prepares cooking fuel. <i>Filmatory Nepal/The Freedom Fund</i>	Page 1
Harawa-Charawa settlement. <i>Eva Jew/The Freedom Fund</i>	Page 2
The Freed Harawa-Charawa caravan, calling for increased action from the government of Nepal in the rehabilitation of the Harawa-Charawa community. <i>Filmatory Nepal/The Freedom Fund</i>	Page 4
Samundri is a member of a farming group made up of members of the Harawa-Charawa community who pooled their resources to lease a plot of land to grow fruits and vegetables. They sell the produce at market for a profit. The farming group was facilitated by Freedom Fund partner Community Improvement Center. <i>Eva Jew/The Freedom Fund</i>	Page 6
Ufim is a member of the same farming group. <i>Eva Jew/The Freedom Fund</i>	Page 7
Community of practice meeting, June 2024. <i>Eva Jew/The Freedom Fund</i>	Page 8
Harawa-Charawa community savings group meeting. <i>Eva Jew/The Freedom Fund</i>	Page 10-11

VISION

Our vision is a world
free of slavery.

MISSION

We invest in frontline organisations
and movements to drive a measurable
reduction of modern slavery in high-
prevalence countries and industries.

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The Freedom Fund UK is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales
(company number 08926428) and a registered UK charity (registration number 1158838).