



Forging Human Rights by Breaking Chains: Addressing Modern Slavery in Supply Chains in Corporations with Special Focus on India.

Dr. Namita Vashishtha¹ and Shubham Sharma²

¹Assistant Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Delhi

²Research Scholar, Faculty of Law, University of Delhi

*Corresponding Author: Namita Vashishtha

*Email ID- namitav.law@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Modern Slavery is a grave violation of human rights. Addressing it is a challenge, which grows even tougher when the intricate web of supply chain gets involved. These are times where trade practices have turned the world into a small village. The corporates control production and ultimately the supply chains. Corporations can outsource raw materials and labour at the cheapest rates available in any part of the world, thereby maximizing their profits. With the systemic vulnerabilities and disproportionate power differential, modern slavery finds the perfect haven to thrive. There is an imperative necessity for transparency, accountability and solid governance within these supply chains. This article examines the dimensions of modern slavery, its manifestations and the factors that drive it, with a particular emphasis on the existing Indian regulatory framework and South Asian context.

Key Words: Modern Slavery; Human Rights; Corporate Management; Labour Laws

Introduction

Modern slavery is a grave violation of human rights that continues to affect millions worldwide. It finds no borders and one can find its root in all kinds of economies and industries.¹ Also, there is a common perception that modern slavery is confined to domestic settings or may be just small-scale operations, but the fact is that it is extensively interwoven into the global supply chains of major industries.²

Modern Slavery in supply chains, encompasses various forms of human rights violations such as human trafficking, forced labor, bondage and child labor that ultimately presents a complex and critical challenge for the stakeholders including the respective governments.³ Since the nature of modern slavery within supply chains is intricate and hard to identify⁴, it remains difficult to accurately estimate the global number of affected individuals. However, the International Labor Organization⁵ reports that at least tens of millions of people worldwide fall victim to these modern forms of enslavement.⁶

On this backdrop, this paper attempts to address the concept of modern slavery with special focus on modern slavery in supply chains with a particular emphasis on India and South Asia. These regions are not only pivotal to global economic dynamics but also represent some of the most challenging environments for combating these practices. The paper examines the causes and drivers of modern slavery in these settings and tries to find workable solutions and interventions to curb the vulnerabilities of the workers and help them fully enjoy their rights.

Global Context of Modern Slavery

Modern Slavery is a complex phenomenon and could be found in all sectors ranging from agricultural, horticultural, mining, construction to service sectors such as hospitality, domestic work, nail salons, car washes, cleaning services, and security. The major indicators signaling the presence of modern slavery, include insufficient or nonexistent wages; exceptionally long working hours and continuous workdays without respite; the confiscation of passports; recruitment fees resulting in debt bondage.⁷ Further, individuals affected by modern slavery are often denied the right to unionize or voice grievances.⁸

Additionally, working in hazardous situations without proper access to safety measures and kit points to modern slavery. Industrial catastrophes and labor scandals have underscored the extent to which prominent 'first-world' brands depend on a variety of suppliers, many of whom present significant human rights risks, including child labor and human trafficking.⁹ For example, the Rana Plaza disaster in Bangladesh in 2013, which resulted in the deaths of 1,134 garment workers, involved multiple garment factories supplying well-known fashion brands in Europe and North America through various contracts and subcontracts.¹⁰

Another striking case is the Nike supply chain scandal, which brought to light the severe conditions faced by workers in its South Asian factories.¹¹ Despite Nike's efforts and corporate audits, reports from 2005 revealed that abusive treatments, including restricted access to basic amenities and forced overtime without proper compensation, were rampant, affecting a significant portion of its workforce.¹² This example illustrates the complex challenges corporations face in managing their supply chains and the critical need for accountability and transparent practices.¹³

Also concerning is the scale at the practice occurs. Recent estimates indicate that 40.3 million individuals are subjected to slavery worldwide, equating to 5.4 victims of modern slavery per 1,000 people globally. Of these, 30.4 million are in the Asia-Pacific region, 9.1 million in Africa, and 1.5 million in developed economies.¹⁴ Among those enslaved, approximately 21 million are workers experiencing forced labor.¹⁵ According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), forced labor alone generates an illicit profit of \$350 billion annually, underscoring the lucrative and exploitative nature of these practices.¹⁶

Drivers of Modern Slavery

Modern Slavery remains difficult to plug in because of the vast, intricate and multilayered networks that are difficult to monitor and regulate effectively.¹⁷ The complexity of global supply chains, characterized by a vast network of suppliers and subcontractors, often results in the obfuscation of labor practices, thereby enabling exploitative conditions to persist unnoticed.¹⁸

Also, the absence of protective measures, lack of observance of rights, minimal physical safety and security and sparse access to essential resources such as food, water compound the problem manifold. Add other phenomenon such as migration, displacement, and conflict, and you have a perfect breeding ground for modern slavery.¹⁹

It could be noticed that all these causative elements vary by context and setting. Drivers of modern slavery seldom function independently; they often act in tandem, intersecting, and intensifying one another in intricate ways.²⁰

For instance, refugees may face exploitation while *enroute* to safer destinations, as a means of survival in refugee camps, or as part of their employment in the host country.²¹ So, displacement, absence of rights, poverty, absence of adequate and appropriate protection combine to create grounds for modern slavery. Major factors that could be seen in intersection of major modern slavery instances are discussed.

Poverty

A pervasive state of poverty compels individuals to accept unstable and insecure employment opportunities. Lack of opportunities and money ultimately drives people to migrate and that's where the cycle begins. This dynamic creates a cyclical pattern of disadvantage, where impoverished individuals are continually thrust into vulnerable positions, further entrenching their economic hardship and limiting their prospects for upward mobility.²²

The intersection of poverty and precarious employment not only perpetuates economic instability for individuals but also undermines broader efforts to achieve social equity and economic justice.²³

Inadequate legal framework

Exacerbating this issue are weak regulatory frameworks, which significantly contribute to an environment conducive to exploitative labor practices due to the lack of stringent oversight and enforcement mechanisms.²⁴ In the absence of comprehensive regulations, employers may feel emboldened to disregard fair labor standards, resulting in widespread violations such as inadequate wages, excessive working hours, and unsafe working conditions²⁵.

Also, there are definitional issues within respective legislations as well. For instance, the proposed Hong Kong Modern Slavery bill differentiates between trafficking and modern slavery in terms of facilitation or movement. That makes the Palermo Protocol almost ineffective, since the latter mandates that trafficking could occur without the displacement of the victim. This constrained definition impedes international collaboration and enforcement efforts, as it fails to align with the more comprehensive understanding of trafficking adopted by numerous other nations. Such disparities generate enforcement challenges and undermine the global initiative to combat trafficking, as envisioned in Article 4 of the Palermo Protocol, which advocates for international cooperation. This is just one instance among many others.²⁶

The lack of clear guidelines on these practices perpetuates a culture of non-compliance.

Lack of accountability due to multiple parties involved

Next comes is the intricate and multilayered nature of subcontracting networks which hinders in maintaining transparency and enforcing accountability²⁷. The nexus often results in an opacity which would make it difficult

to segregate contractors from sub-contractors and the blame game continues without fixing responsibility and accountability.²⁸ Consequently, it becomes exceedingly challenging to trace labor practices and ensure compliance with ethical standards.²⁹

International Conflict and Migration

Slavery tends to proliferate in contexts where law enforcement systems are dysfunctional. It is notably prevalent in areas adjacent to fragile and conflict-affected states, as displaced individuals often seek employment opportunities in neighboring countries or regions. Vulnerable populations, particularly women and children, face heightened risks of human trafficking and forced labor under these circumstances.³⁰

Climate Change

Bales underscores the intrinsic connection between modern slavery's exploitation of individuals and environmental degradation. A considerable body of literature is emerging that addresses the interconnections between climate change, environmental destruction, and natural disasters, alongside the heightened risk of exploitation and trafficking. Nevertheless, further research is necessary to comprehend the relationships among these issues fully.³¹

Social and Cultural norms too play a part

Some cultural and societal norms like the deeply entrenched caste system in countries like India and Nepal play a substantial role in perpetuating exploitative labor practices. This hierarchical structure often dictates one's occupation and social status, confining individuals from castes to menial and low-paying jobs.³² This social stratification ensures a steady supply of cheap labor for factories and supply chains, as individuals from lower castes have limited opportunities for upward mobility.³³

Further, gender norms significantly contribute to labor exploitation in South Asia. Women face discrimination and are typically employed in lower-wage jobs within the supply chain. They are more susceptible to workplace harassment, wage theft, and poor working conditions. The patriarchal nature of the society often discourages women from speaking out against such injustices, further entrenching these exploitative practices.³⁴

Furthermore, the societal acceptance of child labor in some parts of South Asia perpetuates exploitation. Due to economic pressures and the normalization of child labor within certain communities, children are often pushed into the workforce at a young age. These young laborers are particularly vulnerable to exploitation, given their lack of awareness of their rights and their inability to advocate for themselves.³⁵

The normalization of informal labor practices also contributes to the perpetuation of exploitation. Many workers in South Asian supply chains are employed informally, without contracts or legal protections.³⁶ This lack of formal employment status makes it easier for employers to exploit workers, as they are not bound by labor laws that regulate wages, working hours, and working conditions.³⁷

Region-Specific Analyses

India

India, being the world's most populous nation, harbors the highest estimated total of individuals enduring conditions of modern slavery globally. The manifestations of modern slavery within the country are multifaceted, encompassing a spectrum of exploitative practices as previously discussed.

As per the Global Slavery Index of 2023, there were more than 11 million people in India living in modern slavery in 2021.³⁸

An investigation of 29 spinning facilities in Tamil Nadu reveals significant evidence of forced labor risks, indicating that existing voluntary corporate improvement measures have been insufficient and highlighting the urgent need for stronger, systemic changes to protect human rights in the region's textile industry.³⁹

India's sandstone mining sector, dominated by Rajasthan, employs approximately three million seasonal workers and supplies significant quantities to the United States, yet faces severe human rights abuses⁴⁰—including bonded labor, child labor, and fatal occupational diseases like silicosis—exacerbated by an unregulated supply chain, deep-rooted social inequities, and inadequate enforcement of protective laws, thereby breaching both Indian and U.S. legal standards.⁴¹

Another sector that is seldom discussed, remains underexplored and receives limited scholarly attention is the Indian garment industry. The primary markets for India's garment exports include the United States and the European Union, which together constitute nearly half (47%) of the nation's apparel exports.⁴² The Indian garment industry is recognized as the world's second-largest manufacturer and exporter, surpassed only by China. In India, home-based garment workers largely comprise women and girls from historically marginalized ethnic communities, earning an insufficient wage of \$0.15 per hour.⁴³ This sector formally employs 12.9 million individuals in factory environments and indirectly engages millions more in informal, home-based settings.⁴⁴ The unorganized sector in India, particularly within industries such as agriculture, brick kilns, and textiles, remains heavily dependent on the labor of vulnerable populations, including displaced individuals.⁴⁵

Existing legal interventions

The Indian Constitution has been essentially worker centric and has always endeavored to promote the welfare of workers and laborers through various provisions aimed at social justice and equality.⁴⁶ To realize the

socialistic principles of the Indian Constitution, Articles 41 to 43 of the Indian Constitution encompass significant rights, including the right to work, education, and public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, and sickness.⁴⁷

Beyond constitutional provisions, Indian legislations have consistently made efforts to protect the rights of workers. Laws such as the Minimum Wages Act, Factories Act, and the Employees' Provident Fund Act have been enacted to ensure fair wages, safe working conditions, and social security. These legislative measures reflect a continuous commitment to safeguarding the interests of workers, laborers, and the economically disadvantaged.⁴⁸

Article 23 of the Indian Constitution prohibits bonded labor and analogous forms of forced labor, stipulating that any violation shall be punishable by law. This prohibition falls under the concurrent jurisdiction of both the central and state governments.

To implement this constitutional mandate, the central government enacted the Bonded Labor System (Abolition) Act of 1976 (BLSA).⁴⁹ This Act formally abolished all forms of bonded labor, prohibited coercion into such labor, prescribed criminal penalties including for companies and established measures to eliminate bonded debt and rehabilitate freed bonded laborers.⁵⁰

According to the definition, bonded labor is established if a person takes an advance in exchange for pledged labor or service and is restricted to a geographic area, cannot work for another employer, or is not allowed to sell their labor or goods at market value.⁵¹ This agreement could be oral or written, fixed in duration or not, and might involve wages or not.⁵² Individuals born into such agreements made by an ascendant are also included.⁵³ Any restriction on the freedom of movement, employment, or the right to sell any product of labor at market value constitutes bonded labor.⁵⁴

The BLSA mandates the establishment of District and Sub-Divisional Magistrates and Vigilance Committees to ensure the Act's implementation.⁵⁵ To rehabilitate identified and released bonded laborers, the Central Government revised the Centrally Sponsored Plan Scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded Laborers, renaming it the "Central Sector Scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded Laborers," effective May 17, 2016.⁵⁶ This scheme provides financial assistance, including debt liquidation, to rescued bonded laborers at increased levels, and establishes a Bonded Labor Rehabilitation Fund at the district level in each state to grant immediate aid to rescued individuals. This initiative has resulted in the reported liberation of 292,355 bonded laborers.⁵⁷ While the Bonded Labor System (Abolition) Act of 1976 possesses the potential to address the bonded labor issue in India effectively, its proper implementation is crucial. Also, complementing the BLSA, 1976 are the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act of 1970 (CLRAA), and the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act of 1979 (ISMWA). Collectively, these legislations form a system of labour and penal provisions to tackle trafficking and similar exploitative practices.

The CLRAA and ISMWA address contract labor and migrant labor, respectively. These labor forms exist on a spectrum between bonded labor and ostensibly 'free' labor. The CLRAA imposes obligations on recruiters and intermediaries, with ultimate responsibility falling to the principal employer.

The ISMWA provides additional protections for migrant workers, particularly those recruited for out-of-state projects. These statutes offer an alternative conceptualization of coercion and exploitation.⁵⁸ Indian Supreme Court interpretations have expanded the definition of force to include economic compulsion, such as poverty or starvation. This broader interpretation was also incorporated in to the 1985 amendment to the BLSA, which classified contract laborers and interstate migrant workers in forced labor conditions as bonded laborers.⁵⁹

As per the observations of Siddarth Kara, the implementation of these laws has been inadequate and to some extent, poor.⁶⁰ However, what needs to be seen is the structure that these laws have created. The structure identifies exploitation as the main factor in recognizing trafficking or slavery or any such practice rather than the means. Further, the combination of labor law and penal provisions creates a robust safety net for the vulnerable. A unique feature of this act is that it brings all workers coming from all state within the purview of either the Government of India or other state governments, under the ISMW (Regulation Of Employment And Conditions Of Service) Central Rules, 1980. Every establishment proposing to employ inter-State migrant workmen will be required to be registered with registering officers appointed under the Central Government or the State Governments, depending on whether the establishment falls under the Central sphere or State sphere. Likewise, every contractor who proposes to recruit or employ inter-State migrant workmen will be required to obtain a licence from the specified authority both of the State to which the workman belongs (home State) and the State in which he is proposed to be employed (host State)

Criminalization of Trafficking and Forced Labor

The newly introduced criminal laws of India have characterized trafficking of persons as organized crimes.⁶¹ The political will to punish trafficking is reflected in the fact that the commission, abetment and attempt of the offence attracts similar maximum punishment of life imprisonment, including death penalty in some cases. It also attracts heavy fines. The present definition aligns more closely with international definitions. It goes a step ahead by declaring a group of two or more persons as a syndicate as against the group of three.⁶² Unlawful compulsory labor is a punishable offence in India.⁶³ In addition to these the expansive judicial pronouncements on forced and bonded labor remain valid.

The Indian Constitution does not explicitly define forced labor; however, the Supreme Court of India has provided specific guidance. In the case of People's Union for Democratic Rights vs. Union of India and Others⁶⁴,

1982, the Supreme Court determined that forced labor encompasses any labor for which the worker receives less than the government-stipulated minimum wage. The Court argued that individuals typically would not willingly provide labor or service for less than the minimum wage unless compelled by some force, such as hunger or poverty, to work for less than legally entitled wages.⁶⁵ The Court further held that the definition of forced labor should be interpreted broadly to include physical or legal coercion, as well as compulsion arising from socio-economic factors, placing the burden of proving the absence of compulsion on the accused.⁶⁶

India, as a signatory to the International Labor Organization's Forced Labor Convention No. 29, has also adopted the definition of forced labor as "Work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily."⁶⁷ To establish forced labor under the Convention, labor must be both involuntary and coerced. Though the Convention does not define these conditions explicitly, subsequent research maintains that the absence of freedom of movement and freedom of employment are central to the concept of forced labor.⁶⁸

It also addresses the needs of marginalized groups, including gig and unorganized workers, which were largely ignored in earlier legislation. Furthermore, it introduces mechanisms for welfare programs targeting these populations, alongside a toll-free helpline for social security inquiries and support. Further, following the Second Labor Commission's recommendation, the Code on Social Security, 2020 was brought in place. It is a sound consolidation of earlier legislation on labour welfare and social security. It has now provided a new comprehensive framework for worker welfare, including provisions for health, maternity, disability benefits, and social insurance.⁶⁹

Two of the best features of the code are the *inclusion of gig workers* under the definition of "worker" and the *mandatory registration for the workers*. That has led to clarity as well as compliance from all the parties involved. The employers have gained much needed clarity with regards to the gratuity provisions, whereas it has made easier to track the workers working in a particular setting. The inclusion of these provisions have opened avenues for the workers to get access to all facilities and rights guaranteed as per the Code.

E-Shram Portal

With the motive of empowering workers in India, the Government of India launched the "E-Shram" portal in 2021.⁷⁰ And as of now, almost 300 million workers have registered themselves in the portal, which includes more than 10 million street vendors. This has given them access to major government welfare schemes, thereby enhancing their financial stability and well-being.⁷¹

Nevertheless, the implementation challenges, such as bureaucratic inefficiencies and poor awareness among workers about their rights, persist.⁷² Therefore, while these legal frameworks signify progressive strides towards regulating labor standards within supply chains, their ultimate effectiveness is contingent upon robust enforcement mechanisms and heightened awareness and participation of the stakeholders involved.⁷³

The Indian domestic regime offers valuable insights for anti-slavery discourse. It has created exploitation as the baseline for slavery and trafficking, interpreted coercion broadly and has installed multiple pathways to prevent such practices. Also, with the combination of labour laws, obligations have been imposed on the employers as well to create decent working conditions for the workers.

South Asia

The Asia-Pacific region, home to approximately 60% of the global population, is paradoxically also the largest hub of modern-day slavery, hosting around 24.9 million men, women, and children in conditions akin to slavery.^{74 75}

Some notable examples is the the fishing industry which holds a pivotal position in Thailand's agricultural sector and food supply chain. In 2022, the primary importers of Thai fish and seafood included China, the United States, and Italy, underscoring the industry's substantial international market reach.⁷⁶ During the same period, the aggregate export value of chilled and frozen fish products from Thailand reached approximately 17 billion Thai baht.⁷⁷ However, the industry is plagued by rampant human trafficking for forced labor, with evidence suggesting that many of the 300,000 unregistered migrant workers are highly susceptible to severe exploitation.⁷⁸ Migrant laborers from Myanmar, Malaysia, and other neighboring countries are procured by labor recruiters and subsequently sold to boat captains. ⁷⁹These workers are then compelled to work for extended periods without pay until the recruitment fees are settled. Once at sea, these fishermen endure conditions akin to slavery, subjected to exhausting 20-hour workdays where systematic beatings and torture serve as common disciplinary practices.⁸⁰

Similarly, according to a report by the NGO Verité, approximately one-third of migrant workers in Malaysia's electronics industry, which supplies major global brands, are subjected to forced labor, a contemporary form of slavery⁸¹.

Although many Asian countries have anti-trafficking and labor laws, these regulations often do not adequately address the root issues of slavery. Discriminatory social and cultural practices further entrench these conditions, normalizing them in many societies. ⁸²Consequently, Asia is both a significant source and destination for human trafficking, part of extensive global supply chains for industries such as agriculture, construction, fishing, and the sex trade. The region is particularly notorious for sex slavery, with an estimated 4.5 million women and girls globally trapped in the sex industry, two-thirds of whom are in the Asia-Pacific region.⁸³

In Pakistan alone, an estimated 2.1 million bonded laborers exist among the 3.1 million people living in slavery. The tea plantation hubs in Bangladesh⁸⁴ and Sri Lanka continue to struggle with extreme forms of ancestral slavery, a legacy from British colonial rule.⁸⁵ Laborers in these plantations endure long hours for meager wages, often passed down through generations.⁸⁶

Addressing modern-day slavery in Asia-Pacific demands a multifaceted approach that includes stronger legal measures, improved socio-economic conditions, and global awareness. Only through sustained efforts can the region hope to shed this dark legacy and ensure freedom and dignity for all its inhabitants.

Corporate and Governmental Responsibilities

Corporations play a pivotal role in the global fight against modern slavery, especially within their supply chains. The complexity of modern supply chains, often spanning multiple countries and involving numerous subcontractors, can obscure labor practices, thereby enabling exploitative conditions to persist unnoticed. Therefore, corporate responsibility not only involves compliance with legal standards but also proactive engagement in ethical practices.

Due Diligence and Transparency

Corporations must implement rigorous due diligence processes to monitor and manage their supply chains.⁸⁷ This involves regular audits, both announced and unannounced, to ensure compliance with labor laws and ethical standards at every level of the supply chain.⁸⁸ For instance, following the Nike supply chain scandal, there has been a significant push towards greater transparency and accountability in corporate operations. Companies are increasingly required to publish detailed reports on their sourcing locations, labor conditions, and the measures taken to prevent exploitation.⁸⁹

Worker Empowerment

Empowering workers is crucial for detecting and addressing instances of modern slavery. This includes establishing clear, confidential channels for workers to report abuses or exploitation without fear of retaliation. Training programs that educate workers about their rights and how to seek help are also essential components of corporate responsibility.⁹⁰

Establish Grievance mechanisms

As per a study conducted by Global Compact Australia, it was found that implementing effective grievance mechanisms significantly enhances transparency and accountability in business operations, providing a vital platform for addressing modern slavery concerns within supply chains. The research also indicated that while the majority of grievance mechanisms are not explicitly crafted to identify and address modern slavery practices, they are indeed considering and, to varying extents, incorporating the effectiveness criteria outlined in the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs). This approach aims to ensure that these mechanisms are reliable, accessible, and capable of resolving complaints related to modern slavery.⁹¹

Partnerships and Collaborations

Corporations cannot tackle modern slavery alone. Effective partnerships with NGOs, government bodies, and other corporations can lead to the development of more robust mechanisms to combat exploitation.⁹² Collaborative efforts such as the Better Cotton Initiative or the Fair Labor Association show how industries can come together to set higher standards and ensure better compliance across the board.⁹³

Protect the migrants

Implement measures to protect the rights of migrant workers, especially those in vulnerable categories such as young women and children.⁹⁴ These measures should include: regulating and monitoring government-sponsored and other recruitment agencies; educating workers and their families about their rights and realistic expectations of their new workplaces; ensuring job opportunities under government-funded skills training programs comply with domestic labor laws and international standards for decent work.⁹⁵

Corporate initiatives to mitigate modern slavery are crucial but insufficient on their own. Effective governance and stringent regulatory frameworks are essential to reinforce these efforts, ensuring that corporate policies translate into tangible improvements on the ground.⁹⁶ This synergy between corporate responsibility and governmental regulation is pivotal in creating a sustainable and impactful change across supply chains.⁹⁷

Governmental Responsibilities

While corporations have their part to play, governments have the ultimate authority and resources to enforce laws and regulations that prevent modern slavery. Their responsibilities are manifold and include legislation, enforcement, and international cooperation.

Legislation and Regulation

Governments must establish and maintain a strong legal framework that explicitly prohibits all forms of modern slavery.⁹⁸ This includes laws that not only target the direct act of enslavement but also address

contributory factors such as human trafficking, child labor, and debt bondage.⁹⁹ For example, the Bonded Labor System (Abolition) Act of 1976 in India represents a comprehensive approach to eliminating bonded labor.¹⁰⁰ However, legislation alone is not enough; it must be accompanied by robust enforcement mechanisms to be effective.¹⁰¹

Enforcement and Oversight

The presence of laws is futile without enforcement. Governments must ensure that there are adequate resources allocated to enforce these laws effectively. This includes training for law enforcement agencies and labor inspectors, proper funding for oversight bodies, and stringent penalties for violations.¹⁰² The role of local and regional authorities is particularly important in this context, as they are often the first line of defense against labor exploitation.¹⁰³

International Cooperation

Modern slavery is a global issue and requires a coordinated international response. Governments should engage in treaties and international agreements that aim to combat modern slavery.¹⁰⁴ Participating in global initiatives such as the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, helps standardize responses and share best practices across borders.¹⁰⁵

Education and Public Awareness

Finally, governments should invest in education and public awareness campaigns to highlight the issue of modern slavery.¹⁰⁶ Educating the public about the signs of exploitation and how to report them can be an effective tool in prevention. Additionally, supporting research and data collection on modern slavery can aid in formulating targeted policies that address the root causes and drivers of exploitation.¹⁰⁷

The battle against modern slavery in global supply chains requires a concerted effort from both corporations and governments. While corporations need to ensure transparency and ethical practices within their operations, governments must provide the legal and regulatory framework necessary for these practices to be enforceable.¹⁰⁸ Only through a combination of corporate governance, stringent legislation, and international cooperation can the scourge of modern slavery be effectively tackled. As the global landscape evolves, so too must the strategies employed by both sectors to protect the most vulnerable in society and ensure that the benefits of global trade are not tainted by human suffering.

Conclusion

This exploration into modern slavery within India and South Asia highlights the critical need for an integrated approach that combines legal, social, and corporate strategies.¹⁰⁹ It is imperative that stakeholders from all sectors, including international bodies, continue to collaborate and innovate to eradicate modern slavery. As the global landscape evolves, so too must our strategies to ensure a future where human rights are universally upheld and protected. The complexity of global supply chains, coupled with systemic socio-economic vulnerabilities, has created a fertile ground for exploitative practices such as forced labor, debt bondage, and human trafficking.¹¹⁰

The troubling increase in the estimated number of individuals living in modern slavery underscores the inadequacy of current interventions and the need for more robust measures. Industries such as textile manufacturing, sandstone mining, and agriculture, heavily reliant on vulnerable populations, highlight the systemic nature of exploitation.¹¹¹ The precarious legal status of refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons exacerbates their susceptibility to modern slavery, further complicating efforts to address the issue.¹¹²

Tackling modern slavery requires a collaborative approach involving stronger regulatory frameworks, international cooperation, and a fundamental shift in cultural attitudes. Enhanced corporate governance, stricter enforcement of anti-slavery laws, and targeted socio-economic interventions are essential to dismantle the structures that enable modern slavery.¹¹³ By securing the rights and dignity of workers, we can strive towards sustainable economic development and a just global economy.¹¹⁴

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