



Addressing modern slavery through climate change mitigation

Rights Lab briefing based on research findings by Bethany Jackson, Jessica Sparks, Chloe Brown and Doreen Boyd, 2020ⁱ

Research by the Rights Lab has explored the nexus of modern slavery, deforestation, and climate change action via UN's "Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation" (REDD+) programme.

Key research findings

The key findings across the research were that:

1. Locations where populations are most reliant on forests and their ecosystems services for subsistence and development are also areas where modern slavery persists.
2. There exists a co-occurrence between modern slavery and tree loss due to a number of activities such as mining, illegal logging and agricultural practices. The correlation between tree loss and modern slavery is complex but *not* coincidental.
3. There is a positive relationship between stronger environmental protections and lower estimated cases of modern slavery.
4. Conservation activities that do not consider the effects of modern slavery may be less effective, as modern slavery frequently provides the labour force needed to illegally clear land and deforest.
5. Many vulnerabilities to modern slavery identified in forests overlap with issues the REDD+ programme seeks to address.
6. REDD+ provides an opportunity to integrate and mainstream antislavery initiatives to support progress toward key social-ecological targets; thus protecting forests, people, and limiting the overall effects of climate change.

Why is this important?

To date, responses to modern slavery, climate change and environmental degradation have been discrete; there has been little cross-over and collaboration between activities and the actors working in each sector.

However, Rights Lab research has shown that activities involving deforestation are high-risk for modern slavery. Therefore incorporating antislavery interventions with REDD+ programmes would improve efficiencies, target populations that are more vulnerable, protect the environment, and support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Identifying synergies between conservation and antislavery action and policy could accelerate and/or improve the likelihood of attaining the SDGs by 2030. With the deadline for renewal of REDD+ extended to the 31st December 2021, now is the time to take action to integrate these measures.

Recommendations for REDD+ Programme & Partner Countries

- Create opportunities for antislavery actors to participate in REDD+ programme conversations at a local, national and international level, and invite their collaboration in REDD+ programme design wherever feasible.
- Request that REDD+ country partners detail how they are assessing and responding to modern slavery risk, as part of their national strategy, reporting on progress in relation to the wider safeguards.¹
- Support the development and delivery of a pilot scheme to test the efficacy and impact of incorporating antislavery tools into REDD+ programming.
- Provide guidance and training for frontline environmental responders in REDD+ partner countries to identify and report potential signs of modern slavery, lifting the burden on victims to self-report.

¹ <https://redd.unfccc.int/fact-sheets/safeguards.html>

Research overview

Environmental degradation, climate change and modern slavery intersect but are often treated as separate issues. The relationship between the issues is cyclical; modern slavery is linked to activities that can lead to forest degradation, which is linked to climate change (limiting carbon sequestration and increasing CO₂ emissions), which in turn, increases risk of workers being subjected to modern slavery (climate change impacts can lead to food insecurity and loss of livelihoods increasing vulnerability to exploitation). This nexus needs to be at the forefront of all three movements, going forward. To this end, there needs to be greater collaboration across sectors to identify the synergies between conservation and antislavery action and policies.

Tree loss

Tree loss, and predicted future tree loss, in four countries (Brazil, Ghana, Indonesia and Mozambique) was compared with estimates of modern slavery prevalence in the same areas. These countries have experienced tree loss associated with industries known to have high rates of modern slavery.

The modern slavery estimates were taken from the Global Slavery Index (2016) modelled against the Environmental Performance Index.ⁱⁱ To determine modern slavery levels associated with tree loss, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and Walk Free estimates of people trapped in agriculture, forestry, quarrying and mining (sectors known to contribute to tree loss and degradation) were used. These were then compared with the potential losses from deforestation caused by modern slavery—calculated by identifying rates of illegal logging from a number of sources. There was found to be a positive relationship between stronger environmental protections and lower estimated cases of modern slavery.

REDD+ and antislavery action

The UN'S REDD+ programme has evolved from a market-focused emissions reduction mechanism with an emphasis on forest degradation to one that encompasses 'conservation, sustainable management and enhancement of forest carbon stocks'.ⁱⁱⁱ

REDD+ is partnered with 65 countries and more than 350 projects had been operationalised in national strategies by the end of 2018. A number of projects currently focus on afforestation/reforestation, whilst others address emissions.

Vulnerability to modern slavery on a national level is classified by Walk Free into five categories (addressing 23 risk factors); in which they include environmental performance indicators. From an individualistic perspective, poverty, education, and employment opportunities, climate change and environmental degradation, are seen as critical 'push' factors into modern slavery. Some of these vulnerabilities are reflected in the aims, and issues, associated with REDD+, in particular, governance, inequality, and basic needs.

Existing criticisms of REDD+ include the idea that it is 'fragmented', 'patchy' and 'uncoordinated' and that its 'top-down approach' to finance, results in higher estimated implementation costs, compared to locally oriented approaches.^{iv} These criticisms could be counteracted by tying achievement and funding to clearly defined social issues known to hinder environmental conservation, such as by integrating antislavery objectives into REDD+ work. Advancement of local multi-sector 'bottom-up' action could include antislavery tools.

Survivor support

Environmental destruction and associated crimes are often more recognisable than hidden modern slavery abuses and because of this, representatives from environmental agencies are often inadvertently first responders to modern slavery cases. However, because of existing issues over jurisdiction, there is a lack of impetus to report these cases. A more holistic, integrated approach to modern slavery and REDD+ could provide training on identifying and reporting modern slavery in cases of environmental crime, which would provide greater opportunity for detection and remove the burden of reporting from survivors.

REDD+ renewal and refresh

The expiration of the current term of REDD+ funding will occur on 31st December 2021, and will be then up for renewal. Given the congruency of REDD+ and antislavery communities, its renewal is a pertinent opportunity to integrate antislavery initiatives into REDD+, which is of mutual benefit to both sectors. REDD+ provides an opportunity to integrate and mainstream antislavery initiatives to support progress toward key social-ecological targets; thus protecting forests, people, and limiting the overall effects of climate change.

ⁱ Findings based on two academic articles – 'Ending slavery by decarbonisation? Exploring the nexus of modern slavery, deforestation, and climate change action via REDD+', Bethany Jackson & Jessica L. Decker, Sparks, 2020. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2020.101610> and 'Understanding the co-occurrence of tree loss and modern slavery to improve efficacy of conservation actions and policies', Bethany Jackson, Jessica L. Decker Sparks, Chloe Brown & Doreen S. Boyd, 2020. Available at <https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/csp2.183>

ⁱⁱ The Global Slavery Index is a ranking of the number of people in modern slavery, as well as an analysis of the actions governments are taking to respond, and the factors that make people vulnerable, produced by Walk Free <https://www.globalslaveryindex.org/about/the-index/>. The Environmental Performance Index provides a data-driven summary of the state of sustainability around the world. Using 32 performance indicators across 11 issue categories, the EPI ranks 180 countries on environmental health and ecosystem vitality.

ⁱⁱⁱ O. Venter, L.P. Koh, Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+): game changer or just another quick fix? *Ann. N. Y. Acad. Sci.* 1249 (2012) 137–150, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-6632.2011.06306.x>.

^{iv} M. Aguilar-Steen, Better safe than sorry? Indigenous peoples, carbon cowboys and the governance of REDD in the Amazon, *Forum Develop. Stud.* 44 (2017) 91–108, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08039410.2016.1276098>.

A. Savaresi, A Glimpse into the future of the climate regime: lessons from the REDD + architecture, *RECIEL*. 25 (2016) 186–196, <https://doi.org/10.1111/reel.12164>. M.E. Recio, Dancing like a toddler? The Green Climate Fund and REDD+ inter-national rule-making, *RECIEL*. 28 (2019) 122–135, <https://doi.org/10.1111/reel.12286>.