

Modern slavery and climate change are in a vicious cycle of degradation, according to experts

October 22 2018, by Charlotte Anscombe

The relationship between climate change, environmental degradation and modern slavery needs to be better understood in order for the interconnected crisis to be tackled, according to a new report.

The report, which is released today by experts from the University of Nottingham's Rights Lab, Royal Holloway University of London and the UK's Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner (IASC), critically reviews what is currently known about the relationship and assesses the academic research that has already been done.

The Rights Lab is a University of Nottingham Beacon of Excellence that brings together over 100 scholars to deliver research that helps to end global [slavery](#) by 2030.

The new report, led by Dr. Doreen Boyd at the Rights Lab, and Professor Katherine Brickell at Royal Holloway, working with the IASC, suggests that there is a two-way, potentially cyclical nexus between climate change, [environmental degradation](#), and modern slavery.

The authors argue that a better understanding of this relationship is vital so that all three can be tackled as part of an integrated strategy.

The intersections between modern slavery, environmental destruction, and climate change have been identified in a limited number of industry

sectors and are also geographically focused on particular hotspots. The report identifies four key sectors—fisheries, field, forests, and factories.

Dr. Boyd says: "From our research, we can clearly see that the nexus between modern slavery, climate change and environmental degradation tends to emerge sectorally or in geographical locations. Our review also shows that what is happening in one sector is, directly or indirectly, influencing what is happening in another sector, often connected with flows of climate-induced migration."

The report highlights a specific link between over-fishing, the environmental decline of fish stocks, and the exploitative labour practices on fishing boats.

Dr. Boyd says: "The fishing industry in Thailand is a clear example of how climate change and modern slavery are connected. The demand for cheap seafood is leading to worsening abusive and exploitative conditions for fishing labourers, often in the form of debt bondage, as well as leading to further overfishing and ecosystem decline in fisheries, often as part of illegal and pirate fishing networks."

The report also looks at recent research which emphasises the vulnerability faced by agrarian communities in the Global South because of current and future [climate change impact](#) – such as the rise of and severity of droughts and flooding, as well as increasing sea levels and temperatures.

Small farming communities, with declining state support and facing increased marketisation in agriculture are more vulnerable to exploitative labour practices and human trafficking.

The research into forest areas has shown the destructive nature of the logging industry, leading to debt-bonded labour and deforestation,

mainly in Brazil. Other studies have also highlighted the dependency in Brazil and Indonesia on expensive charcoal, cattle and palm oil industries upon an exploited workforce.

This shows that debt-bonded labour is entangled with deforestation and large-scale clearing of the Amazon, Sumatran and Bornean forests.

New research featured in the [report](#) from Royal Holloway explores the lives of debt-bonded workers on brick kilns, and the trajectory that led them there from rural villages across Cambodia.

The 'blood bricks' study (www.projectbloodbricks.org) has shown that in the majority of cases, debt-bonded brick workers originate as farmers, who became indebted through taking on loans from local micro-finance institutions (MFIs) to mitigate the impacts of [climate](#) change. Climate change deepens the income insecurity of small farmers, leading them to acute indebtedness, and in turn, debt-bonded labour.

Professor Brickell says: "We see this review as a starting point for more research into this area. Practitioners, NGOs, intergovernmental agencies and experts need to come together to gain a better understanding of the two-way relationship between [modern slavery](#), environmental destruction and [climate change](#), only then can we plan future interventions."

More information: Modern Slavery, Environmental Destruction and Climate Change: Fisheries, Field, Forests and Factories:
[tracking.vuelio.co.uk/tracking ... a6g2oEbasGKgTFCebfE1](http://tracking.vuelio.co.uk/tracking...a6g2oEbasGKgTFCebfE1)

Provided by University of Nottingham

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