



Evidencing COP26 at the Rights Lab

Dr Bethany Jackson¹ and the Ecosystems team explore work from across the Rights Lab

COP26² is being touted as one of the most important in the conference's history. As the IPCC has reported, the international community must take drastic and meaningful steps to limit the effects of anthropogenic climate change. Here we outline some of the work being undertaken in the Rights Lab that can highlight, provide evidence, and provide recommendations to achieve the outcomes noted by the current COP agenda.

Why should we focus on modern slavery and COP26?

Whilst focus is placed on mitigation and adaptation strategies, and the targeting of resources to countries most affected by climate change, the nuances of some drivers and outcomes of climate change are missed. Modern slavery is one example. Whilst **the modern slavery-environmental degradation-climate change nexus** is being explored by the antislavery community – sometimes in partnership with the environmental sector – this issue has not yet made the global agenda.³ Here we outline some of the work being undertaken in the Rights Lab that can provide evidence and recommendations to achieve COP outcomes.

The nexus is a cyclical and multi-directional series of factors, where modern slavery can be both a driver of and a resulting outcome of environmental and climate change impacts.⁴ Numerous sectors are associated with the nexus (e.g., agriculture, mining, fishing etc.).

What is clear is that there are a range of sectors, countries and methods that are being applied to investigate such connections.

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² <https://ukcop26.org/>

³ Jackson *et al.* (2021). Modern slavery, environmental degradation and climate change: present and future pathways for addressing the nexus. Rights Lab, University of Nottingham.

⁴ Decker Sparks *et al.* (2021). Growing evidence of the interconnections between modern slavery, environmental degradation, and climate change. *One Earth*, 4(2), 181-191.

Why is this important?

In order to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, and limit global warming to 1.5°C efforts are needed now to understand, quantify and enact change to end modern slavery, limit environmental degradation, and mitigate climate change impacts.

COP26 has four main goals relating to: mitigation, adaptation, finance, and collaboration. Here at the Rights Lab there are a vast number of projects – that have and continue to be – undertaken to support such goals in a holistic social-ecological approach.

Using the daily themes of COP26 as a guide, here we outline several important projects occurring at the Rights Lab, which can assist in the achievement of a successful outcome for both people and the planet.

Finance

- Target the **development and finance** communities in policy changes.⁵ Both businesses and governmental bodies rely on access to such funds for investment in markets, and to fund interventions that lead to social-ecological improvements.
- Businesses rely on financial investments to develop supply chain transparency; making compliance with legislation a component of funding eligibility and receipt would improve compliance.³

Energy

- **Green technologies** are being invested in as an important factor and response to climate change.
- We need to make sure that renewable and green technologies – which rely on the extraction of vast natural resources for battery technology – are not overly reliant on extractive practices, nor socially degrading practices such as modern slavery.
- Work in the DRC⁶ is mapping informal cobalt mining sites where communities are vulnerable to both the environmental and health impacts of mining, economic precarity, labour exploitation.

⁵ Cockayne, J. (2021). Developing Freedom: The sustainable development case for ending modern slavery, forced labour and human trafficking. UNU-CPR, New York.

⁶ Brown *et al.* (2020). Investigating the potential of radar interferometry for monitoring rural artisanal cobalt mines in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. *Sustainability*, 12(23), 9834.



Youth & Public Empowerment

- Ensuring that sustainable business practices are implemented to ensure that there are safe working environments available for all.
- **Social determinants of resilience against exploitation** have been developed by the Communities Programme to ensure public and worker empowerment.⁷ These factors are part of a wider approach to develop resilient communities.
- Further, centring the voices of survivors, workers and local communities affected by the nexus will improve outcomes for not only the empowerment of individuals, but society and the planet as a whole.

Land

- Risk of forced labour in agricultural supply chains of fruits and vegetables have been assessed. It has been shown that there is a broad abundance of **forced labour risk** within many of those foods consumed within the US.⁸
- To improve such supply chains, it is vital that workers are given priority⁹ – to both protect the land and improve working conditions. **Worker Driven Social Responsibility programmes** and Unions will be critical to achieving such goals.

Adaptation, Loss & Damage

- Communities who do not have access to the resources needed may face increased vulnerability to both climate change and modern slavery.
- Establishing common ground to provide support and resources from the antislavery and environmental sectors is key; provided the relevant expertise lead in appropriate circumstances.³

Gender

- Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM) have previously been linked to climate change impacts. In order to establish gender equality more research is needed into the connection between the two.

- A series of research projects¹⁰ are beginning to identify the risks to communities from CEFM in relation to climate change: what is clear is that blanket approaches unlikely to succeed.

Innovation

- **Develop monitoring systems** that account for modern slavery as being both a driver and result of environmental degradation and climate change. This will involve movement from assessments of co-occurrence to quantification of the nexus.³
- Supply chain transparency and movement beyond audits are considered an important innovation when tackling modern slavery and climate change.
- This includes tools such as the *Modern Slavery Risk Barometer*.¹¹

Transitions

- **Just Transitions** need to account for the increased risks that may be associated with a change in the economic system. For example, decarbonisation is necessary but social impacts need to be factored in when making changes rather than being view as a trade-off.¹²

Cities, Regions & Built Environment

- Development of urban environments relies on the accessibility of goods, including bricks.
- Identifying the scale, location, typology, age and environmental impact of the brick-making sector of South Asia has been a large-scale project.¹³
- These **findings are now supporting UNDP India** in the inspection of brick kilns. Currently, these data are being used to identify kilns that are not compliant with environmental legislation in Bihar. Now the application of these data are being expanded, so that they can also be used to monitor cases of debt bondage and labour exploitation.

⁷ Gardner *et al.* (2021). Building Slavery-free Communities: A resilience Framework. *Journal of Human Trafficking*, 7(3), 338-353.

⁸ Blackstone *et al.* (2021). Risk of forced labour embedded in the US fruit and vegetable supply. *Nature Food*, 2(9), 692-699.

⁹ Kurtz *et al.* (2021). The true cost of labour must be worker-defined. *Nature Food*, 2, 630-631.

¹⁰ <https://forcedmarriageresearch.ac.uk/>

¹¹ <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/beacons-of-excellence/rights-lab/research-projects/index.aspx>

¹² Rights Lab. (2021). <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/25777/pdf/>

¹³ Boyd *et al.* (2021). Informing action for United Nations SDG target 8.7 and interdependent SDGs: Examining modern slavery from space. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 8(1), 1-14.