



HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

**A STUDY OF CHILD LABOUR AND HUMAN
TRAFFICKING IN RAUTAHT, NEPAL**



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**WORLD DAY AGAINST
TRAFFICKING
IN PERSONS
30 JULY**

Front Cover Image

Gauri, 14 years old, Rautahat District

A study of child labour and human trafficking in Rautahat, Nepal

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The sexual exploitation of women and children is one of the most profitable forms of human trafficking in the world today, with an annual turnover of US\$99 billion. It is a business that fuels the trafficking of 40 million people a year, 71 per cent of them women and girls – the majority of whom will end up being sexually exploited.

Human trafficking and child labour are complex, cross-cutting, global phenomena that touch all aspects of people's lives. Across the world 152 million children are trapped in child labour; 73 million of them facing the worst forms including child slavery. Child labour steals childhoods. People's hopes of escaping poverty and building a better life for their families are exploited. They often fall deeper into poverty.

This study focuses on Rautahat district, Nepal, a vulnerable rural area where human trafficking and child labour are intergenerational. We will hear stories such as those of 37-year-old Nasruddin, who still carries the trauma of being lured by a false promise of employment at the age of 10. He was trapped in a cycle of debt bondage and regularly experienced beatings, sleep deprivation and starvation whilst he worked 6am to 3am for a textile company in India doing fine embroidery on bridal dresses. Like many debt bondage victims, Nasruddin received no wages for five years of labour.

The report highlights the complex factors that underpin trafficking and child labour in Rautahat district. It also focuses on Islamic Relief and its partner the Rural Development Centre's project to reduce child labour and trafficking in the area.

A wide range of interviews were conducted in February 2020, with respondents including at-risk children and survivors of child labour and human trafficking, parents of child survivors, civil society organisations, anti-trafficking activists, local authorities, human rights organisations, district police and faith leaders.

Three key themes emerged from these discussions: the devastating and increasing impact of climate change and its interplay with trafficking and child labour; the cultural norms and practices that are perpetuating the current trend; and the potential role of faith leaders and faith institutions in combating trafficking and child labour.

CLIMATE CHANGE, CHILD LABOUR AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

A key finding was that climate disasters in communities in Rautahat district exacerbated the risk of child labour and human trafficking. For example, devastating flooding in Rautahat in 2017, which adversely affected 80 per cent of individuals in this study, brought with it increased cases of both child labour and human trafficking within the district. Sudden and slow onset disasters are placing mounting pressure on communities who have few resources to adapt to the rapidly changing climate.

The impact of climate change is particularly acute for women, girls, those with disabilities and marginalised castes and groups such as Dalit, Janajati castes and Muslim communities. These factors separately and collectively increase a person's vulnerability to trafficking and child labour.

CULTURAL NORMS AND PRACTICES

A second key finding from this study is that cultural norms and practices play an influential role in perpetuating and normalising child labour and human trafficking. Harmful patriarchal norms and practices put women and girls at an increased risk of abuse and exploitation including gender-based violence and early forced marriage. Young women and girls are particularly vulnerable because of the structural and cultural barriers they face in accessing education and employment opportunities. These cultural underpinnings help to produce an environment that normalises and silences trafficking and child labour victims.

ENGAGING FAITH LEADERS AND FAITH INSTITUTIONS

Over 84 per cent of the world's population identifies with a religious group. As such, faith plays an important role in shaping societal norms and human experience. Faith leaders and faith institutions are the backbone of communities (including those in Rautahat district), and they are uniquely positioned to challenge harmful cultural practices that seek to weaponise faith to advance harmful norms and practices.

Faith leaders can use this faith literacy to raise awareness and educate communities about the norms and practices that perpetuate child labour and human trafficking. Despite their limited capacity and resources, faith leaders in Rautahat district have been using faith literacy to raise awareness of the risks of child labour and human trafficking. Faith leaders also form part of the community reporting system, often referring at-risk children to local authorities and NGOs.

Building equal partnerships with faith leaders and institutions is an integral part of the puzzle. Faith leaders have strong relationships with communities, and understand the cultural nuances that underpin child labour and human trafficking. Faith-based partnerships should also reflect and encompass the diverse voices of faith-based communities, including female scholars and young faith leaders. Faith leaders are valuable stakeholders in the global fight against human trafficking and child labour.

LOOKING FORWARD

As we work towards the realisation of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development goals, we must put communities at the heart of solutions to tackle these issues. Meeting the needs of communities through Goals 5 (gender equality), 8 (decent work and economic growth) and 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) are key to addressing human trafficking and child labour, which is a key part of the development agenda. Addressing the root causes of trafficking and child labour requires partnerships and long-term funding to ensure that anti-trafficking and child labour projects effectively strengthen the capacity of local actors.

Whilst human trafficking and child labour have a global scope, they also have significant local impact. The responses to trafficking and child labour should equally be locally rooted. Local ownership begins with local people analysing their situation and recognising their capacity to make change. Local ownership is critically important in improving aid effectiveness and in giving local people a voice and a stake in their own futures. An integral part of this should be in the planning implementation and design delivery, which should result in an enabling environment for communities to thrive. This includes diversifying the voices of faith actors to include both male and female and young leaders. To exclude them is a costly mistake.



Shahin Ashraf, MBE
Head of Global Advocacy



INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking and child labour are complex phenomena influenced by social, cultural, economic, environmental and political factors. These factors often depend on the specific context of the local geographical area, as well as the country in which they occur. There are, however, common factors that make people vulnerable, including discrimination and a lack of social and economic opportunities. Local and regional instability due to conflict or climate-related disasters also produce conditions that increase vulnerability to trafficking, such as the mass displacement of vulnerable groups including women and unaccompanied children.

In some communities, cultural attitudes also contribute to an increased pattern of trafficking and child labour, such as patriarchal norms that perpetuate the social and economic marginalisation of women. This often occurs in the context of a lack of political will and capacity to address the issue, or the structural inequalities that underpin it. Porous borders and corruption also facilitate trafficking and child labour, particularly by organised criminal groups.

The majority of victims of trafficking and child labour are from developing countries, with traffickers targeting young, poorly educated individuals from marginalised communities. Traffickers increasingly use social media and mobile technologies to lure their victims, preying on individuals with false promises and hopes of escaping poverty and reaching a destination that provides a better life.

Human trafficking and forced labour is an estimated US\$150 billion industry that continues to grow. The Asia Pacific region accounts for over a third of that profit and Nepal, which acts as a source, transit hub and destination country for victims of trafficking, is one of the most lucrative markets in the region. There are over 1.6 million children engaged in child labour in Nepal, 60 per cent of whom are girls. There are also over 20,000 women and children trafficked annually, with girls making up the overwhelming majority of victims.

This study will focus on trafficking and child labour in Rautahat district, Nepal, with particular focus on Islamic Relief and our partner the Rural Development Centre's project to reduce human trafficking and the worst forms of child labour in Rautahat district.



11 year old Ritesh and his family were left homeless after severe flooding in 2017. Rautahat District

Rautahat district, part of Province 2, is one of seventy seven districts in Nepal and shares a long border with India. The area has a very high prevalence of trafficking and child labour. Historically poor and vulnerable, major flooding in 2017 further increased people's burden as thousands of homes and livelihoods were destroyed. Vulnerable families were forced to turn to harmful coping mechanisms to deal with the disaster, including distress sales of assets, male adult migration and other risky methods. For at-risk families, the loss of assets combined with loss of family protection and desperation for alternate livelihoods has resulted in disastrous consequences for women and children, who are facing a heightened risk of sexual and gender-based violence, human trafficking, child marriage and child labour.

Along with the economic and environmental challenges, there is also a whole host of social and cultural practices that facilitate or increase the risk of trafficking and child labour in this area. In rural communities where poverty is endemic, child labour is rife. The majority of child labourers work in low-skilled labour intensive industries such as brick kilns or the agriculture sector. Brick kiln owners usually recruit labourers by offering high interest loans in exchange for work. Struggling families agree to these exploitative loans in order to get through the monsoon season, when their income is disrupted by heavy rainfall or flooding. They subsequently get trapped in debt bondage, unable to pay back the loan.

PROJECT SUMMARY

This report is centred on a project to Reduce Human Trafficking in Marginalised Communities of Rautahat District. Rautahat is a multi-ethnic, multilinguistic district on the border with India. It is also home to some of the most marginalised groups in Nepal, including Dalit and Janajati castes and Muslim communities. Islamic Relief along with its partner, the Rural Development Centre, is implementing a project preventing and responding to trafficking in children and the worst forms of child labour, through community-based integrated response mechanisms. The intervention is aimed at supporting vulnerable children and their families through specialised protection schemes that include education, livelihoods, skills training and psychosocial support.

The project started as an emergency response to the devastating 2017 flooding that affected more than 80 per cent of the population across Rautahat district. Prior to the floods, communities in Rautahat were already poor, with a significant amount of people living in poorly adapted low-lying areas and often engaging in seasonal wage work as a source of income. Consequently, the flooding had a disastrous impact, with the destruction of property, loss of livelihoods, displacement and disruption to education. During the emergency response phase, it quickly became apparent that desperate communities were becoming increasingly vulnerable to abuses such as child labour and human trafficking.

“Right after the 2017 flooding, there was an increase in trafficking and child labour in the community and the traffickers were usually well-connected with the communities,”

says Reenu, a female activist in Rautahat district. As a response, the project has supported 85 vulnerable children and their families over the last three years. Of those 85, 60 were girls and 25 boys aged between six and eighteen. The majority were from Muslim or from Dalit and Janajati ethnic groups. Fifty of the children supported were involved in daily wage work such as working in brick kilns, snack selling and agricultural work.

This study aimed to:

1. Understand the contributing factors that increase vulnerability to human trafficking and forced labour in Rautahat district.
2. Measure awareness levels and knowledge around prevention, protection and response to trafficking and forced labour.

Examine the role of faith leaders and faith institutions in combating human trafficking and forced labour.

This report unravels the complex web of factors that drive child labour and human trafficking in Rautahat district. It describes the experiences of some of the children, and the work that Islamic Relief is doing in supporting children who have been rescued or are at risk of trafficking and child labour.



A poorly adapted low-lying house in a flood prone area in Rautahat District

PROJECT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Of the 18 municipalities within Rautahat district, the project has so far supported children and families from four municipalities. The support provided includes livelihoods, education, skills training and psychosocial support. The project is anchored within the community, engaging and consulting with key stakeholders throughout the implementation process. Whilst the project is still ongoing, the following are some of the successfully implemented components:



Successfully supported 85 children, including 63 rescued from child labour, six from human trafficking, five at risk of child labour and 11 at risk of human trafficking.

Re-established 10 Ward Child Protection Committees, 10 youth groups and four women's groups. These form part of a community-based early warning system, making case referrals and raising awareness.



Established 10 Child Protection and Awareness Centres for children and their families.

Delivered several awareness-raising initiatives including anti-trafficking, children's rights and gender-based violence campaigns in cooperation with community members.



HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND CHILD LABOUR REPORT



Delivered four awareness workshops for young people, Ward Child Protection members, local leaders and local Ward representatives.

Provided education for survivors or children that are at risk of trafficking. Most of the education needs-based support encompasses an element of livelihood support for families e.g. it gives education support for children whilst also giving small loans for families to buy produce that they can make a profit on. The combined effort of the education and livelihood support eliminated the need for families to take their children out of school in order to support the family. Another example of an education based initiative is giving children bicycles to use in order to get to school – for one 14 year old girl her journey time to school went from two hours to just 30 minutes. This drastically improved her chance of remaining in school.



Provided livelihood support for families in the context of child labour in the district, where putting food on the table was always a priority over education. As such providing livelihood support for families was an important prerequisite and ensured that children stayed in school in the long term. Families were often given small loans or vegetables or groceries. Some used the loan to start a tea shop in order to sustain the family and eliminate their reliance on child labour to survive. Over 50 of the 85 families supported through this project received livelihood support.

Delivered skills-based training for children alongside education, e.g. in tailoring and financial management support. This helped ensure that children have some form of skills alongside their education that will improve their employability in the long term so that they are not reliant on high risk and low profit industries like brick factory work.



METHODOLOGY

The study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. To collect this data, the study team undertook a field visit to Rautahat to conduct interviews and focus group discussions with a wide range of stakeholders including project beneficiaries, community activists, human rights organisations, members of district police, faith leaders, local civil society organisations and members of the local child protection committee. All individuals interviewed for this study were either directly or indirectly involved with the project.

Altogether, there were 20 key informant interviews, including with four children (two boys and two girls) aged 11-15 who were rescued from child labour; two of whom (both girls) were also characterised as being at high risk of human trafficking. These interviews were followed by interviews with the parents and legal guardians of the four children, which provided a window into the complex socio-economic and cultural factors within the family that increased their vulnerability to trafficking and child labour. The study also included two focus group discussions, one interfaith discussion and one with the local Child Protection Committee.

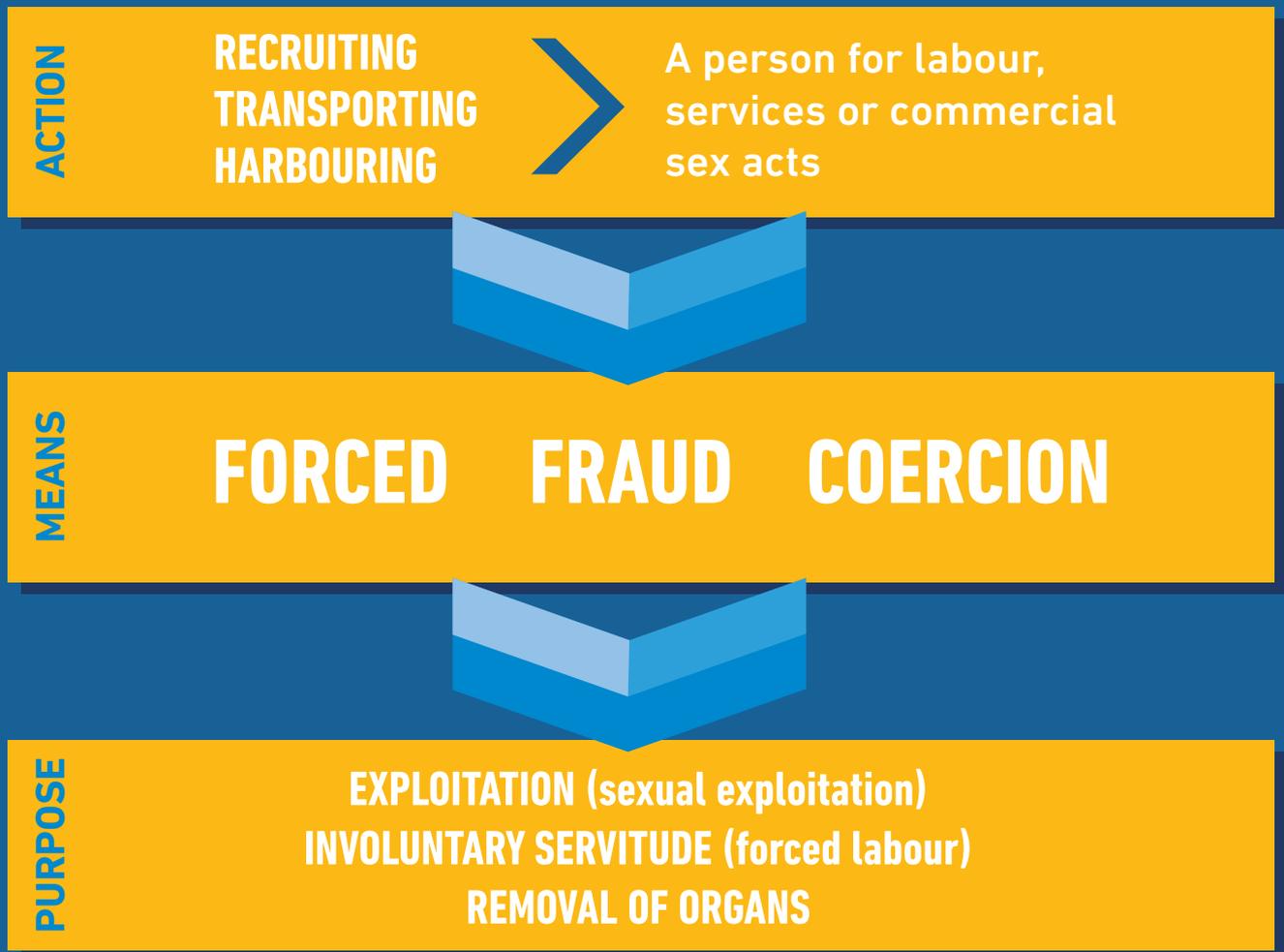
A literature review was also an integral part of the process. This included reviewing and referring to local literature and university libraries to review research studies, examine initiatives related to the study subject and scan major activities and initiatives implemented by institutions or groups with the aim of achieving a stronger and deeper understanding of the context. This was done through the online library search, and discussion and information collection from Islamic Relief Nepal and the Rural Development Council.



Members of the Child Protection Committee, Rautahat District.

PART 1: KEY DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTS

Human trafficking is defined as:



Human trafficking is distinctly different from people smuggling, which involves the irregular movement of persons into a country in exchange for financial benefit. The key distinguishing factors are highlighted in the table below:

| Distinguishing factors | Trafficking | Smuggling |
|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Purpose | Exploited as a commodity | Provides a service |
| Location | Within a national border or across an international border | Across an international border |
| Consent | Involuntary – use threat, force and coercion | Voluntary at individuals' request |
| Exploitation | Long-term exploitation | Short-term – limited to one-off payment |
| Crime | Perpetuated against an individual | Perpetuated against a state |

CHILD LABOUR

The term 'child labour' is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. It refers to work that:

- Is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children
- Interferes with their schooling by: depriving them of the opportunity to attend school; obliging them to leave school prematurely; or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work. 9

The worst forms of child labour involve children being enslaved, separated from their families, exposed to serious hazards and illnesses and/or left to fend for themselves on the streets of large cities – often at a very early age. Whether or not particular forms of 'work' can be called 'child labour' depends on the child's age, the type and hours of work performed, the conditions it is performed under and the legal definitions in individual countries. The answer varies from country to country, as well as among sectors within countries.



Gauri, 14 years old, Rautahat District

PART 2: LINKS BETWEEN CLIMATE CHANGE, HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND CHILD LABOUR

As in many vulnerable communities across the world, climate change is having a tangible impact on the livelihoods of marginalised communities in Rautahat district. Eighty per cent of those surveyed as part of this study have had their livelihoods disrupted by the impact of rapid and slow onset disasters.

Climate change increases the risk of climate disasters, which places strain on livelihoods and increases high-risk behaviours such as child labour and human trafficking. Climate change has the most detrimental impact on developing countries, particularly in already vulnerable communities that lack the capacity to cope with the short- or long-term effects of climate disasters.

To date, there is limited data to directly show the link between human trafficking, child labour and climate change, and much of the evidence remains anecdotal. This lack of data is particularly challenging in relation to human trafficking; global statistics only reflect the number of reported cases. Given the sensitive nature of the issue, gaining data, particularly sex-disaggregated data, is particularly challenging due to the number of unreported cases, as well as the lack of training for frontline staff such as police officers, healthcare professionals and civil society organisations. There is also a lack of understanding and training around the different needs of trafficking victims, displaced individuals and migrants. A lack of resources also adds to the challenge of reporting and data collection.

SUDDEN ONSET DISASTERS

Research has, however, shown unequivocally that sudden onset events are increasing in frequency and severity as a result of climate change. Sudden onset disasters are triggered by rapid and unexpected hazardous events such as earthquakes and floods, causing the immediate destruction of homes, livelihoods, health infrastructure and schools. This often results in the mass displacement of vulnerable groups such as women and children, who as a result have no access to healthcare, food, water, shelter, education or protection.

This displacement gives space for traffickers to exploit people's desire for safety and search for a means of income to help restore their lives. IDP and refugee camps are particularly high-risk sites for trafficking due to the vulnerabilities of the people living there, as well as a lack of stringent management, lack of effective coordination between organisations, and most importantly the lack of prevention and protection mechanisms against trafficking and child labour. IDP and refugee camps are usually created as temporary settlements, but the nature of protracted conflicts and recurrent climate disasters is slowly turning some into permanent settlements. The humanitarian support given by many organisations in these contexts often remains temporary in nature, leaving many in limbo, uncertain about their future and livelihood prospects. These people often develop negative coping strategies such as relying on human

smugglers, which drastically increases their vulnerability to trafficking.

In Rautahat district, heavy rainfall during the monsoon season often triggers flooding and landslides affecting thousands of people in the district. In 2017, persistent rainfall triggered mass flooding and landslides affecting 1.7 million people and displacing 350,000 throughout the country. Many of these communities, already living in poverty, were left displaced without any safety or protection. This research shows that communities were soon pushed into difficult options to secure their livelihoods, including through child labour. "During the early phase of the emergency response project, we noticed an increase in child labour cases and this was largely attributed to the flooding; desperate families often took their children out of school and sent them to work," Project Officer Alook, Rural Development Centre.

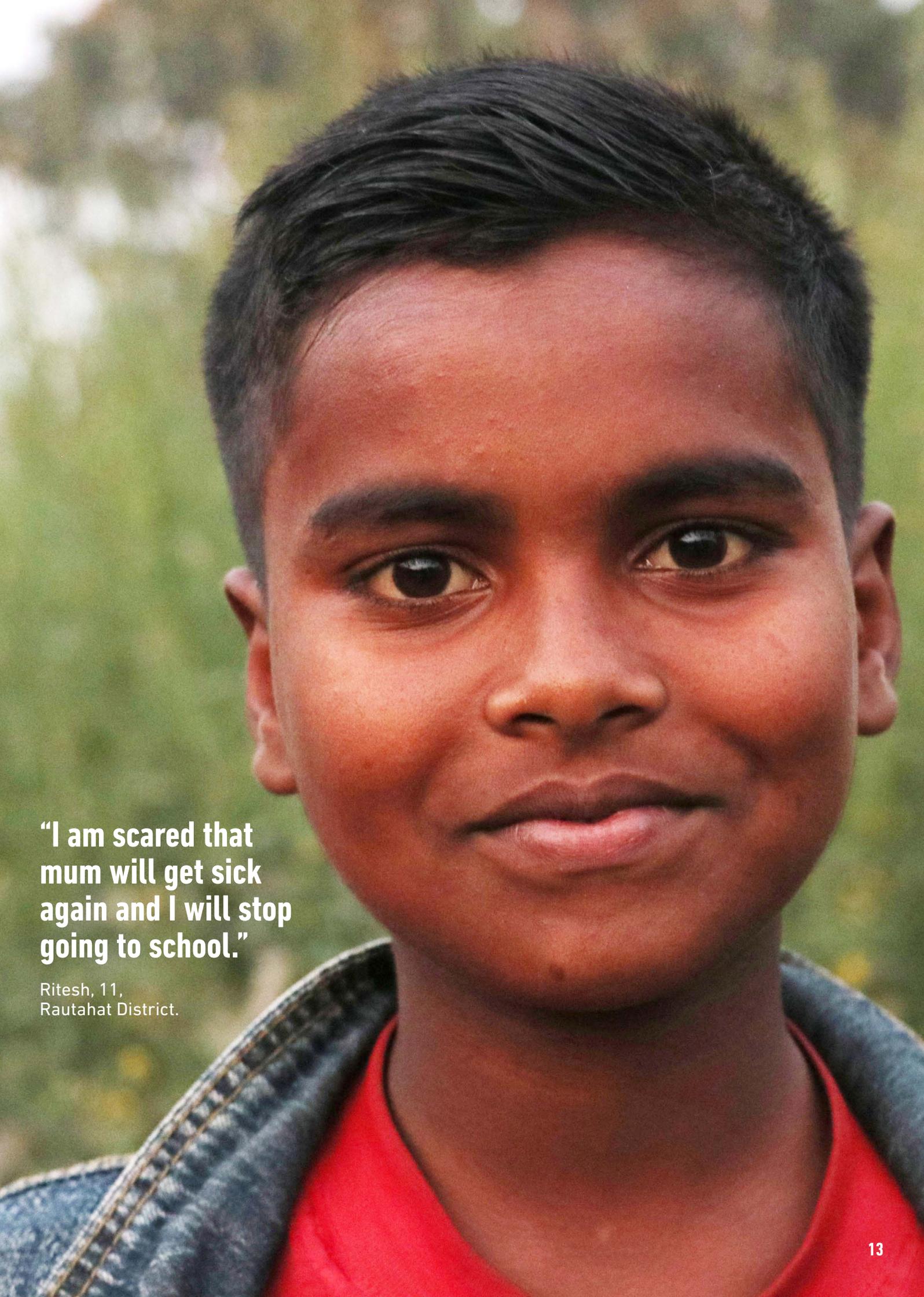
RITESH'S STORY:

Eleven-year-old Ritesh is the youngest of five siblings. After both his parents became ill, Ritesh dropped out of school aged nine and started selling water bottles on the side of the highway in order to earn a small wage so that the family could eat. Ritesh was the sole provider in the family for almost two years.

Ritesh's family live in a low-lying house which was flooded during the 2017 floods. "The water was up to my chest, I was very scared, I thought I was going to drown," he says. After the flooding, the family were left homeless. "Mum use to come back to the house to find food but most of the food was spoiled by the water. So she use to cook whatever she could find and give it to us."

With support from Islamic Relief and the Rural Development Centre, Ritesh is now regularly attending school and has stopped selling water bottles on the side of the highway.

"I am scared that mum will get sick again and I will stop going to school. Mum wants me to stay in school and become a doctor but I want to go to school so I can be a bus driver because they earn 50,000 rupees (£500) a year. I have to go to school to read and write so that I can read the road signs when I am driving." Ritesh would like to buy a house for his family in the future.



**“I am scared that
mum will get sick
again and I will stop
going to school.”**

Ritesh, 11,
Rautahat District.

SLOW ONSET DISASTERS

Slow onset disasters, such as a rise in sea levels or drought, can take months or years to develop. They do not occur from a single disaster, rather they emerge gradually from a confluence of different events. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), global temperatures are set to increase by 1.5-2°C above pre-industrial levels between 2030 and 2052, the impact of which will be vast through the rise in sea levels, increases in the frequency and severity of droughts, and overall exacerbation of the land degradation process.

Those who rely on the land for their livelihoods are particularly vulnerable to the effects of slow onset disasters such as droughts, coastal erosion and glacial melts. Rural communities already use strategies to diversify their income such as crop switching, changing to growing crops that are more resistant to the adverse effects of climate change. A common coping strategy in many vulnerable communities is for male family members to migrate in search of work, leaving behind women, children and the elderly to bear the burden at home.

This migration changes roles and responsibilities within the household, leaving women as the head of the household and elders and older children sharing childcare duties. Migration is a last resort. Nevertheless, traffickers target climate migrant and vulnerable communities that are struggling to cope with the allure of 'better economic opportunities'. Female-headed households are often directly targeted by traffickers, who exploit their extra vulnerability. Recruitment can take place within communities, during the migration process or at their destination, e.g. urban slums and IDP camps.

Human trafficking is a US\$150 billion dollar industry, with a well-connected network of traffickers who can operate locally, nationally, regionally and internationally. As such, climate migrants are an easy target for traffickers due to their vulnerabilities and sense of desperation – which in some cases pushes communities and individuals to collude with traffickers in exchange for money or protection. This may involve men selling their wives, or parents selling or loaning their children to traffickers for labour in order to cope with the losses associated with climate change.

KIRAN DEVI RAM'S STORY: THE DANGERS OF DEBT BONDAGE

Victims of child labour often become victims of debt bondage – where they find themselves trapped in a cycle of labour, often working in harsh conditions, unable to pay back high interest loans. Debt bondage usually begins when poor people have no choice but to take a loan or wage advance from their employer or community members to cover emergency or major social expenditures such as a dowry. They subsequently find it impossible to repay for a combination of reasons, including high interest rates and low pay.

Kiran Devi is a mother with three sons and one daughter. All three sons are survivors of child labour. Manish, the middle child, was also a victim of debt bondage in India.

"My three sons started working at brick factories. Manish worked in a brick factory in Kerala. He worked very long hours, often with

CLIMATE CHANGE AND CHILD LABOUR IN RAUTAHAT DISTRICT

In Rautahat, slow onset events such as changing rainfall patterns are threatening people who depend on agriculture to make a living, forcing children to engage in alternative sources of income generation to help their families. Extreme shocks such as the 2015 earthquake and 2017 floods have exacerbated existing patterns of abuse and exploitation. Seasonal migration is an adaptation strategy for many families as it reduces their reliance on agriculture. Brick kilns in particular draw families for seasonal work, and child labour is often needed to pay off the loans that families incur over the lean monsoon season.

The majority of child labourers in Rautahat work in brick kilns or the agriculture sector. Brick kilns usually function seasonally from October to May, or until the monsoons start. They produce plumes of hazardous black smoke that, in the short-term, hampers vegetation growth and crop production, and in the long-term leads to photochemical smog, a decrease in groundwater, a depletion of the ozone layer and global warming.

From 2010 to 2015, Nepal experienced one of the highest rates of urbanisation in the world. This rapid growth in urban areas due to rural to urban migration has led to increased demand for bricks and subsequently a large number of unskilled labourers, meaning children often join their families in brick kilns. Damage caused by climate disasters such as earthquakes and floods also fuels the demand for bricks, as housing and infrastructure need to be rebuilt.

The brick kiln sector is a low-skilled labour intensive industry with small profit margins. Kiln owners usually recruit labourers by offering high interest loans in exchange for work. Struggling families agree to these loans in order to get through the monsoon season when their livelihoods are disrupted – over 70 per cent of labourers were found to have taken an advance loan prior to starting work in the kilns. They subsequently get trapped in debt bondage, unable to pay back the money. In October, entire families often turn up to work at the kilns under enormous pressure to pay back the loans, which are deducted from their monthly or annual pay cheque. On average, brick kiln labourers work 5-10 hours a day, six to seven days a week earning 2,500-5,000 rupees a month (£16-33).

little food and he didn't always get enough money to send home. He had a lot of debt to pay back so he worked a lot to try and pay it back but the interest rate was very high. He ran away from the factory and when he came back to home he was very thin and weak. He is still very sick and he can't work anymore so he stays at home. As a mother, it makes me very sad. It is difficult for me to see him in this condition."

The family receives support from Islamic Relief and the Rural Development Centre's project to reduce child labour and human trafficking. As part of prevention and protection measures, Kiran's youngest son receives skills training from the project.

Children are often involved in different stages of the brick-making process, from clay mounding to carrying and transporting bricks to different destinations. "I used to carry the bricks on my head and take them to the construction site. It took me an hour to walk there and back; I had to do several deliveries," a 14-year-old female survey respondent told us. Labourers are usually paid per brick, and so there is huge incentive for children to work as much as possible in order to support their families.



*Kiran Devi, Rauthat District
Mother of 3 child labour survivors – trying to break the cycle of child labour within the family*

SANG: A SEASONAL WAGE WORKER

Sang is a 15-year-old former seasonal worker from Rautahat. He is the youngest of four; his older brothers and sister all work in the brick kilns.

Sang dropped out of school aged nine to join his siblings at the brick factory. He often earned less than the national minimum wage of 517 rupees per day (£3.40). "I used to mix the clay with water, mould them into bricks using a metal frame, put them in the sunlight to dry and then put them in kilns to bake. After they're done I used to stack them up. The whole process took about three days and I got one rupee per brick; I usually made about 400 rupees a day (£2.70)."

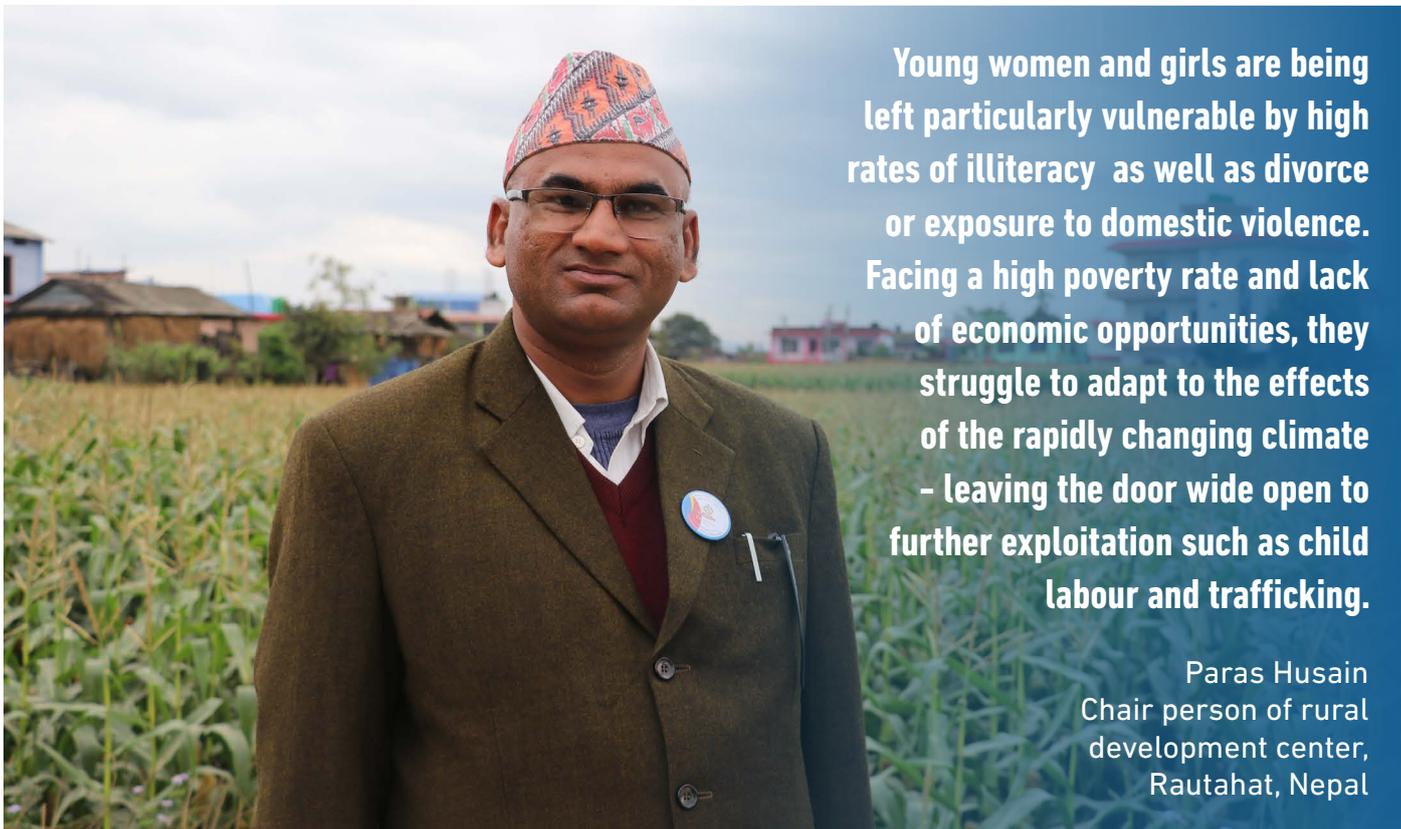
During monsoon, Sang worked in a greenhouse nursery, where he packed small plastic packs with mud and seeds. "I used to fill about 1,000-1,200 packs per day and I got 400 rupees. I used to go to work with my friends (aged 5-10) at 6am and we used to come back home at 5pm." Sang also worked in the fields collecting crops when the brick factory and nursery were closed; here he earned 200 rupees (£1.35).

With support from the joint project between Islamic Relief and Rural Development Centre, Sang is now receiving tailoring and financial management training to help him start his own business. "I now know how to sew trousers and shirts; I am still learning. I want to open a tailoring shop and earn enough money to buy a home. I have no fears, I am hopeful for the future."



Sang with community activist Chameli.

Chameli (right) is a community based activist working to provide skill based tailoring training to child labour survivors like Sang (left).



Young women and girls are being left particularly vulnerable by high rates of illiteracy as well as divorce or exposure to domestic violence. Facing a high poverty rate and lack of economic opportunities, they struggle to adapt to the effects of the rapidly changing climate - leaving the door wide open to further exploitation such as child labour and trafficking.

Paras Husain
Chair person of rural
development center,
Rautahat, Nepal

SOCIAL VULNERABILITY

Climate change is not the only problem people in vulnerable communities are facing. Gender, age, disability, ethnicity and socio-economic status can all increase the impacts and burdens of climate change – for instance women, who already account for the majority of the world’s poorest, are now facing higher risks and increased care burdens due to the effects of climate change. In addition, they face gender-based violence, discrimination, socio-economic marginalisation and exclusion from political decision-making platforms. These inequalities expose women and children to abuse and exploitation, making them more susceptible to trafficking and child labour. “Women in this community suffer a lot. A lot of us are illiterate, we cannot inherit property and we only get financial support through our husbands. We are forced to make difficult decisions to survive,” one female respondent told us.

Gender also plays a role in the type of trafficking an individual is likely to experience. Women and girls are more likely to be trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation, whilst men and boys are trafficked more often into forced labour. However, there are regional and national discrepancies. In the context of Nepal, both boys and girls are involved in child labour whilst girls are also more likely to be trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Culture and socio-economic status also play a role in influencing the type of trafficking an individual is likely to experience.

Whilst the Rautahat project has not yet supported trafficking and child labour survivors with disabilities, since 2015 Islamic Relief has been mainstreaming disability inclusion across all our programmes. This experience helps us to understand the structural barriers that increase people with disabilities’ risk of trafficking and child labour. People with disabilities are more at risk of trafficking due to their limited access to education, resources and services that would allow them to adapt to the rapidly changing environment. Inaccessible information and inappropriate communications systems are also significant

barriers that inhibit survivors with disabilities from accessing criminal justice services. In the rare situation where they do try to report or seek help, they are presented with additional challenges such as a lack of tailored and accessible support services.

In addition, people with disabilities are marginalised and disregarded by authorities, often having their credibility (particularly if it concerns sexual exploitation) questioned due to their disability. The types of exploitation, process of recruitment and impact of trafficking is slightly different for people with disabilities, and there may be variation in the types of exploitation based on the nature of the disability. Individuals with intellectual disabilities are more likely to be trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The use and threat of violence is a common strategy used to recruit and keep individuals entrapped and compliant.

Social vulnerabilities such as those above also increase people’s risk in emergencies such as the current Covid-19 pandemic. The socio-economic fallout of this pandemic will undoubtedly have a significant impact on trafficking and child labour patterns. Rautahat, for example, lies within Province 2, one of the areas worst affected by Covid-19 in Nepal. Whilst the impact of the pandemic was not directly explored in this study, the socio-economic reality for many of the study participants is undoubtedly a factor that will increase their risk of contracting the virus. Many of the participants, particularly children and their families already living in compact multi-generational households, some with pre-existing health conditions and limited access to safe water and sanitation, will find it near impossible to implement social distancing and self-isolation for the sick and vulnerable. Many are already living hand-to-mouth with no safety nets, meaning lockdown measures are placing them at increased risk of food insecurity, a factor Islamic Relief is quickly working to address with emergency food distributions. Once Nepal emerges out of lockdown, there is also the possibility that the socio-economic hardship may force communities into early forced marriage, child labour and human trafficking, as was the case after the 2017 flooding.



“I worked from 6am to 2am every day without a break, and I was given 2 rotis (flatbreads) with a red or green chili a day. There were times where I was so tired that I fell asleep whilst sewing hundreds of bridal garments and would be beaten by the men for falling asleep.”

Nasruddin, former child labourer,
Rautahat District

PART 3: CULTURAL NORMS AND PRACTICES: LINK TO TRAFFICKING AND CHILD LABOUR

Cultural norms and practices are an integral part of a society's identity. However, as well as being a force for good, they can also be used to justify and rationalise abuse and exploitation such as early forced marriage, human trafficking and child labour. Given that these exploitations are rooted in cultural norms and practices, any effective protection and prevention strategy must also address these root causes, rather than the symptoms.

EARLY FORCED MARRIAGE AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

According to a report by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 88 per cent of sex trafficking victims are women and children. Harmful cultural practices increase the vulnerability of women and children to the dangers of trafficking, whilst also maintaining and supporting the trafficking system through a process of normalisation. Many harmful cultural practices are rooted in patriarchal norms that seek to exploit women and girls. For instance, in many cultures a girl's passage to womanhood is rooted in the patriarchal practice of moving from the father's household to the husband's household through the institution of marriage at a young age.

The reasons behind early forced marriage in Nepal are complex. Poverty, the low value attached to girls and lack of access to education are contributory factors, while the caste system and patriarchal culture similarly play a role. The culture of stigma around sex outside marriage, along with perceptions of purity, gives unintended licence to traffickers to target 'virgin girls,' a huge demand in brothels in India. In a bid to protect and preserve family honour, parents often arrange to marry off their daughters once they reach puberty. Forty per cent of girls in Nepal are married before the age of 18, and over 10 per cent are married before the age of 15. The minimum legal age of marriage in Nepal is 20 for both boys and girls.

Marriage is also used as a strategic move to secure protection and reduce the economic 'burden' of girls on their families, particularly after devastating disasters. The payment of dowry by a bride's family to a husband's family remains widespread, despite being illegal in Nepal. The practice is particularly prevalent in the southern Terai plains, where parents marry their daughters off at a young age to avoid higher prices. Girls living in the poorest households are more likely to marry at a younger age than those living in more economically stable households. In these communities, young girls are socialised to believe that marriage is the ultimate purpose in their lives. In addition, young girls also use marriage to secure safety and get away from the domestic violence and abuse they endure within their families.

"The high rate of trafficking in the community is usually due to the lack of livelihood for families and education for children; girls were usually not sent for education for fear that they would fall in love, elope and bring shame to the family,"

says Reenu, an activist advocating for women's empowerment and girls' education.

The dowry system contributes to the pressure for young girls to marry, because the price increases as girls get older and is higher for more educated husbands. Subsequently, young girls fall prey to male traffickers posing as potential husbands. Traffickers target poor and vulnerable families, using the tactic of 'dowry-less' marriage as a ploy to marry vulnerable girls; families often agree to this arrangement. Once married, girls are sold to brothels in Kathmandu and India, or trafficked across Asia and the Middle East to work as sex workers. The demand from the sex tourism industry contributes to this pattern of trafficking in Nepal.

The culture of stigmatisation and value attached to 'purity' contributes to the silencing of sex trafficking victims, particularly young girls. This stigmatisation also makes it significantly more difficult for sex trafficking and sexual abuse victims to integrate back into society, thus they are far more likely to be re-victimised. According to Kopila Timalisna (District Coordinator of a local NGO), "The fear of stigmatisation ensures that sex trafficking and sexual abuse victims suffer in silence. We have worked with survivors who have refused to report the abuse they experience because of the stigma they have or will likely experience, they suffer in silence and are far more likely to be re-victimised as a result.... If the girls (often from marginalised castes) report their abuse and exploitation particularly against those in positions of power, it is more difficult for them to marry and assimilate back into the community."

Abusers and traffickers will purposely target young, illiterate women and girls from marginalised communities who have no awareness about their rights, support services or resource for justice. "I got married when I was 14, my husband was 19. My parents could not afford the dowry for an educated and economically stable man so they arranged for me to marry my husband who is also illiterate and comes from a poor family... We struggled a lot, particularly during and after my pregnancies. There were times we did not have enough food and water, I became very sick and I could not produce enough milk, so we had to give the babies formula milks. The children were very weak and sick because there was not enough food and milk. I often went hungry so that I could feed my children. The hospital was very far and we could not afford take them to hospital." A female respondent and mother of a child labour survivor.

EARLY FORCED MARRIAGE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN RAUTAHAT DISTRICT

Rautahat is one of the poorest districts in Nepal, home to some of the most underprivileged and marginalised castes in the country. Fifty-eight per cent of people are illiterate, 63 per cent of them female. There is a high prevalence of domestic violence (particularly mother- and daughter-in-law violence), and few educational opportunities for girls.

Social exclusion and discrimination against Dalit, Janajati, Muslim and Madhesi communities contributes to their lack of economic opportunities and education, leaving them with few options to earn a living. Early forced marriage is particularly common among Muslim communities in the district. Children, particularly girls, have no formal education. According to Rural

Development Centre, 80 per cent of children in the district are identified as 'out of school,' 30 per cent of these are from the Muslim community. Some boys are sent to the 'madarasa' (Islamic education schools) boarding schools in the district or in India, whilst girls are more likely to remain at home doing domestic work, preparing for marriage.

NAJMUN: FORMER BRICK KILN WORKER

Fourteen-year-old Najmun is from a marginalised Muslim community in Gaur municipality, Rautahat district. She enjoyed going to school and had plans for the future. But she was pulled out of school to work in a brick kiln with her father. Both her parents are illiterate and involved in low-skilled manual labour work.

Najmun worked for a minimum of eight hours a day in the brick kiln, carrying bricks to construction sites in the blistering heat. She was scared of being one of the few girls in a male-dominated brick kiln, feeling very uncomfortable and often targeted by the older males in the kiln. Sexual exploitation in brick kilns is rampant, but girls working here are very unlikely to formally report any abuses or exploitation. Najmun has seen inappropriate behaviour perpetrated by older males against girls in the brick kilns.

One day, Najmun overheard her parents talking about getting her married. When her father told her he was in the process of looking for a husband for her, she was extremely upset. Thanks to the Rural Development Centre and Islamic Relief, Najmun has now stopped working at the brick kiln and she is receiving skill based tailoring training. She is also regularly attending the Child Protection Centre.



Najmun, 14, Rautahat District.
Former child labourer, at risk of Early Forced Marriage and child sex trafficking

PART 4: THE ROLE OF FAITH LEADERS AND FAITH INSTITUTIONS

The acts of human trafficking and child labour are considered immoral among many religions. Islam condemns any practice or behaviour that causes harm and encourages all to do no harm. According to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), “There should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm.” As such, human trafficking does not align with this principle or other core Islamic values such as *rahma* (compassion), which encourages all to treat individuals with care and compassion. This also extends to the protection and wellbeing of vulnerable group such as children. In Islam children are regarded as gifts from Allah, they are trusted in our *amana* (custodianship). As such we are primarily responsible for their care and wellbeing, ensuring their health, psychosocial and social wellbeing. These principles contradict the practice of abuse and exploitation of children. Similar values and practices can also be found in many other religions.

FAITH LITERACY

Faith and spirituality plays an integral role in the lives of many communities around the world. Whilst faith can be used as a positive guiding force, it can also be misconstrued to justify harmful cultural practices that do not align with core values and teachings within a faith. Faith literacy aims to use a faith perspective to challenge harmful practices that increase vulnerability to trafficking and child labour. However, the effectiveness of faith literacy is very much dependent on two correlating elements.

The first element centres around the role faith leaders and faith institutions can play as change makers. Given their knowledge, experience and status within communities, faith leaders are uniquely positioned to dispel misconceptions and change harmful practices that perpetuate abuse and exploitation. Faith leaders can use sacred scripture and principles to guide discussions on sensitive issues. They can create interpretations of sacred scriptures to challenge structural inequalities and practices. In order to do so, faith leaders require training, tools and resources (particularly around language use) to help them promote more equitable practices and challenge harmful practices.

Misinterpretations of sacred scriptures are a common occurrence, especially when there is a conflation between culture and religion. Faith leaders and faith institutions are locally rooted and form part of the community infrastructure, so they are not only highly trusted but they are also familiar with

local socio-economic and cultural factors that drive trafficking and child labour. As such, they have the capacity to be change agents and influence or change behaviours in their communities. In practice, faith leaders can integrate faith literacy into the daily worship process. This would not only remove adhocism (thereby ensuring sustainability) but it would ensure consistency, which is particularly crucial in challenging harmful practices and trying to bring about behaviour change. For instance, faith leaders can deconstruct misinterpretation of sacred scriptures and raise awareness about the dangers of child marriage, trafficking and child labour in their communities during Friday sermons in the mosques. They are also well positioned to raise awareness on these issues using a faith-centred approach when working with communities of faith.

“No matter which religion, faith leaders whilst preaching about the religion must also talk about the issues relating to trafficking and they must raise awareness around trafficking,” said one faith leader during the focus group discussion.

The second element of faith literacy is the practical component, which centres on the role of key stakeholders (governments, INGOs, donors and policy-makers) in facilitating faith literacy. They are an essential part of the faith literacy strategy, as they can provide the capacity-building and resources to allow faith leaders and faith institutions to effectively carry out faith literacy initiatives. However, it's equally as important for key stakeholders to adopt a faith-sensitive approach and acknowledge the value of faith and how it can be used to challenge structural inequalities and harmful practices.



Two young faith leaders

Faith leaders and faith institutions have been notably absent from global policy discourse and strategies to combat human trafficking and child labour. The response has for the most part been a 'top down' approach, with key decisions and strategies being made at global level and implemented locally. The voices of locally-rooted faith leaders and institutions rarely reach the policy-making level. Whilst there are some regional and global faith networks to combat trafficking and child labour, they are deeply embedded in grassroots anti-trafficking and child labour efforts. By partnering with local faith leaders and institutions, key stakeholders can benefit from their local expertise whilst ensuring that their voices are elevated to global policy and decision-making spaces.

In order for the faith literacy approach to be effective and successful, both elements need to be actively implemented.



DIALOGUE TO ACTION

Interfaith dialogues provide a platform for faith leaders to discuss and provide solutions to social challenges within their communities. Human trafficking and child labour has global scope with local implications. As such, human trafficking and child labour have become concerns for faith leaders, with many taking awareness-raising initiatives within their communities. There have been many interfaith dialogues, such as the 2014 International Day for the Abolition of Slavery signing ceremony, where prominent faith leaders convened at Vatican City to sign a declaration to end human trafficking by 2020. Local faith leaders – whilst overwhelmingly involved in the implementation of faith-based anti-trafficking and child labour initiatives – have for the most part been absent from these high-level interfaith dialogues. This sort of top down approach can create a perception that these dialogues are more symbolic than actionable and practical. Engaging faith leaders at all levels is an integral part of faith-based anti-trafficking initiatives.

Engaging and strengthening the capacity of faith leaders at a local level can improve sustainability, whilst also ensuring that their voices and expertise are implemented in policies. As part of this study, Islamic Relief and Rural Development Centre convened interfaith focus group discussions to examine the role faith leaders play in combating human trafficking and child labour in Rautahat district. The faith leaders' response to trafficking and child labour within their community was centred on prevention, protection and partnership.

PREVENTION

Faith leaders in Rautahat are already engaged in various prevention mechanisms to reduce human trafficking and child labour. The promotion of education and awareness-raising was a key theme during the discussion with faith leaders, who were all taking different initiatives within their communities.

In an attempt to address the root causes of the social challenges within their communities, faith leaders from Hindu communities have been holding education and cultural awareness sessions in the temples. The sessions aim to promote education and challenge the cultural practices that do not align with core principles and practices such as seva (selfless acts of service), satya (meaning truth), and sanyam (referring to self-control). These sessions also focus on the promotion of education for children (particularly young girls), as part of a wider strategy to eradicate practices such as child marriage. The sessions also focus on assisting the most vulnerable groups within the district. "We have been going to Dalit communities and inviting them to the temple, although this is not common practice. In other temples, Dalits are not allowed to enter and worship in the temple. The caste system is not part of religious teachings, it is a man-made system we have to fight against," said one faith leader during the discussion.

Faith leaders have also been challenging cultural practices (such as dowry abuse) that perpetuate early marriage, child labour and trafficking. Dowry abuse also significantly increases the risk of gender-based violence, particularly when the bride's family is unable to pay dowry price. "As faith leaders we must discourage this practice. We can have influence in this if we stop facilitating marriages that involve dowry." Faith leaders have also been raising awareness about the cultural practices that normalise gender inequalities that leave women and girls vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

As part of prevention, faith leaders have also been contributing to the community alert systems, where community members actively identify and report suspected traffickers to the police and local authorities. Community members have also been directly reporting trafficking and child labour cases to faith leaders, who in turn report to the police, child protection committees or local NGOs. However, the reporting and prevention mechanism remains sporadic, with little coordination or unified approach to prevent human trafficking and child labour.

PROTECTION

As part of their protection strategies, the response from faith leaders in Rautahat has largely been centred around the protection and safeguarding of vulnerable children. These activities include awareness-raising initiatives for communities (particularly parents), stressing the moral and legal obligations to protect and safeguard the wellbeing of children.

***"Child labour is a sin, when the transaction of money happens between parents and traffickers, and vulnerable children are involved, it's an even bigger sin."
Said one faith leader.***

Through referrals from community members, faith leaders were able to identify children at risk or involved in human trafficking and child labour. Armed with this information, some conducted monitoring and wellbeing check-ups, prioritising the physical, social and spiritual wellbeing of children. Others directly referred cases to local authorities, child protection committees and NGOs working on trafficking and child labour issues. For the most part, faith leaders have been aligning their activities with district level governmental child protection initiatives.

MOBILISING FOR CHANGE: BUILDING INTERFAITH NETWORKS AND EQUAL PARTNERSHIPS

Faith can be a powerful motivating force, inspiring individual and community action both spiritually and practically. Faith-based organisations have a unique capacity to be the frontline of the defence against trafficking and child labour. Faith leaders have a significant influence over the attitudes and behaviours of individuals within their communities, giving them the ability to amplify the effectiveness of their response by building interfaith networks and partnerships to end human trafficking and child labour.

In Rautahat district, there is currently no interfaith coalition or network to coordinate the faith-based response to trafficking and child labour. The result is a sporadic, uncoordinated response with different faith groups overlapping their initiatives. Whilst some faith leaders have been collaborating with local authorities and NGOs, limited resources and capacity has meant there is a high degree of duplicate responses and little communication or coordination.

During interfaith focus group discussions, there was common consensus among faith leaders of the need for an interfaith network to share knowledge and resources, but also to effectively communicate and coordinate their response to trafficking and child labour.

"There is a need for an interfaith common platform for communication and coordination between faith leaders, with representation from all faith groups. We should spread the message together rather than individually. We should prioritise our message before spreading it to communities,"

a said a one faith leader working to discriminatory caste based system. Whilst there is great will and enthusiasm from faith leaders, there is equally a recognition that there needs to be effective partnerships to tackle the social challenges their communities face.

Through these partnerships, faith leaders can receive the necessary capacity-building training, particularly around appropriate language use and training to identify socio-economic and environmental indicators for human trafficking and child labour; an integral part of the community alert and reporting system.



“We should have a common effort to promote education awareness, and one day we can achieve the objectives of eradicating child trafficking and child labour in Rautahat.”

Said a Hindu faith leader during a focus group discussion.

CONCLUSION

Human trafficking and child labour are a global problem with significant local impact. As such, responses to combating trafficking and child labour must also be locally rooted. Victims of trafficking and child labour often grapple with socio-economic and structural inequalities that are exacerbated by environmental and cultural factors, making them more vulnerable. Now they face an added risk due to the Covid-19 pandemic and consequent economic fallout, as the global economy starts to shrink, placing further burdens on communities that were already struggling to live above the poverty line.

Many of the communities in Rautahat district are socio-economically marginalised and struggle with accessing healthcare services both physically and financially. As Covid-19 continues to spread across Nepal, districts in Province two (which includes Rautahat) have been most badly hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. This will likely have a significant impact on rates of trafficking and child labour within the district.

The frequency and severity of climate-induced disasters adds another layer of complexity due to the disruption to livelihoods, education and loss of protection; all factors that increase vulnerability to trafficking and child labour. Many of the study participants lacked the knowledge or capacity to adapt to climate disasters. As such, there needs to be significant effort placed on building the resilience and adaptive capacities of communities to withstand climate disasters, which will in turn reduce their vulnerability to trafficking and child labour.

Cultural norms and practices such as patriarchy and early forced marriage are also factors that increase the risk of trafficking and child labour. As such, anti-trafficking and child labour responses should be culturally sensitive and respond to the cultural underpinnings that exacerbate such practices. Working with faith leaders and community-based advocates can be valuable assets in deconstructing the harmful cultural norms and practices using faith literacy.

In addressing these challenges, it is imperative that communities are placed at the heart of the response to trafficking and child labour. As such their voices need to be centralised, and they must be included in programme and policy frameworks such that their needs and experiences are reflected in these frameworks.

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented uncertainty, making it even more important that all stakeholders review and reaffirm their commitment to eradicating human trafficking and child labour as part of the Sustainable Development Goals (particularly Goals 5, 8 and 16). Human trafficking and child labour are complex global issues that require an equally complex and strategic response from key stakeholders, working with local actors in order to address the root causes.

Islamic Relief will continue to support children that are at risk of trafficking and child labour through education, livelihoods, vocational training and psychosocial support. We will also continue to work with local actors, particularly faith leaders and faith institutions, to address the cultural practices that underpin and facilitate patterns of trafficking and child labour. We will use these foundations to strengthen the capacity of local actors to conduct advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns in rural communities in Rautahat district and across the world.



“Child trafficking is very common within the district, we hear stories of children being trafficked all the time.”

Santi BK, Rautahat District

RECOMMENDATIONS



GOVERNMENTS

Islamic Relief calls upon governments to:

1. Adopt comprehensive national action plans and strategies to combat human trafficking and child labour, including specific budgets, detailed implementation plans and appropriate institutional arrangements.
2. Adopt and implement all international legal frameworks and standards for combating human trafficking and child labour, including Palermo Protocols, CEDAW and the Convention on Rights of the Child.
3. Implement policies that address the socio-economic and structural inequalities that increase vulnerability to trafficking and child labour.
4. Build sustainable partnerships at local, regional and international levels to tackle human trafficking and child labour.
5. Provide training to local authorities and organisations to identify and support all victims of human trafficking and child labour, regardless of migration status.
6. Recognise sexual trafficking as a form of violence against women, and integrate responses as part of the wider strategy to address violence against women.
7. Improve the collection of sex- and age-disaggregated data on victims of trafficking and child labour, including annual reporting.
8. Integrate child labour response policies as part of the overarching child protection mechanism at local and national level.

UN AGENCIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

Islamic Relief calls upon UN agencies and civil society organisations to:

1. Integrate the protection of human rights for victims of human trafficking and child labour into programmes across thematic areas such as livelihoods, education, health and others.
2. Integrate anti-trafficking and child labour prevention and protection measures in all emergency response projects, particularly in high-risk communities.
3. Advocate for policies and legal rules that protect women and children online, particularly in relation to sexual exploitation and human trafficking.
4. Work with local organisations to develop sustainable community-based early warning mechanisms for reporting children that are at risk of human trafficking and child labour.
5. Ensure that all anti-trafficking and child labour programmes are accessible and respond to the needs of vulnerable groups such as those with disabilities, minority ethnic groups and migrants.
6. Establish strong communication and coordination mechanisms with local authorities to facilitate information sharing, case management and reporting.
7. Develop a digitalised central case management mechanism and train local authorities and civil society organisations to utilise those mechanisms.
8. Strengthen communication and coordination channels with local, regional and international organisations working to eradicate human trafficking and child labour.
9. Strengthen and support local organisations to champion a comprehensive campaign awareness scheme, involving all stakeholders in the design process.
10. Engage and work with local faith leaders as part of awareness-raising initiatives to tackle the cultural and patriarchal norms that underpin human trafficking and child labour.

DONORS

Islamic Relief calls upon donor agencies and institutes to:

1. Mobilise resources to tackle the socio-economic, environmental and structural inequalities that increase vulnerability to trafficking and child labour.
2. Strengthen the capacity of grassroots and community-based organisations (including organisations of people with disabilities) to prevent and protect women and children from human trafficking and child labour within their communities.
3. Engage and build partnerships with faith-based organisations and faith leaders to use faith literacy to deconstruct the cultural norms and practices that underpin human trafficking and child labour.
4. Support the establishment of faith-based platforms for dialogues at a local level.
5. Build the capacity of faith-based organisations to identify and support victims of trafficking and child labour.
6. Invest in long-term funding of projects that aim to contribute to the eradication of human trafficking and child labour as part of commitments under Sustainable Development Goals 5, 8 and 16.
7. Promote and support rights-based, gender-responsive advocacy approaches to tackling human trafficking and child labour.
8. Strengthen the process of consultation with young people and survivors of trafficking and child labour, ensuring their voices and experiences are reflected in the planning and delivery process.
9. Invest and build the capacity of local civil society organisations to use digital platforms to raise awareness and conduct case management.



FAITH LEADERS AND FAITH-BASED ORGANISATIONS

Islamic Relief calls upon faith leaders and faith-based organisations to:

1. Use faith literacy to challenge the cultural and patriarchal norms and practices that underpin many social challenges such as early forced marriage, human trafficking and child labour.
2. Promote interfaith dialogues to share information and coordinate faith-based initiatives to combat trafficking and child labour.
3. Build partnerships with stakeholders actively working to address social justice issues that contribute to increased risk of trafficking and child labour.
4. Promote awareness-raising initiatives in communities alongside governments and civil society organisations.
5. Advocate for the rights of women, children and people with disabilities using a faith-based perspective.
6. Work with local authorities to establish standards of reporting, contributing to community-based early warning and reporting systems.
7. Advocate for survivors of human trafficking and child labour and play a key role in assisting the reintegration of survivors back into their communities.
8. Ensure the diversity of faith-based perspectives by including young faith leaders and female scholars in faith literacy discussions and interfaith dialogues.

RESEARCH AND ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

Islamic Relief calls upon research and academic institutions to:

1. Strengthen research and thought leadership on socio-economic, structural inequality and discrimination against women, and how that can increase vulnerability to trafficking and child labour, e.g. land rights, rights of people with disabilities, equal access to education and livelihoods.
2. Strengthen research on the links between climate change, human trafficking and child labour.
3. Strengthen research on structural inequalities such as caste, disability-based discrimination and their links to trafficking and child labour.
4. Contribute to the collection and analysis of sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data, providing actionable policy recommendations based on that data.
5. Investigate harmful cultural practices around masculinity and how this inhibits male survivors of trafficking from reporting or accessing support services.
6. Build partnerships with practitioners, faith leaders and faith-based organisations to develop best practice guidelines for engaging with faith leaders.
7. Strengthen research and data on the intersections between gender, disability and age in relation to trafficking and child labour.

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“I understood the power of education, and how it shapes your life experiences and the opportunities that become available to you, which is why I advocate and do the work that I do at the community.”

Mangalsar, Rautahat District

“My childhood has led me to this life of activism’ experiencing many difficulties along the way. I was widowed at 28, and now advocate for young peoples empowerment. We should all stand up for social justice in our communities.”

Reenu, Child Protection Centre, Rautahat District

MANGALPUR



DEDICATION

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Islamic Relief Worldwide

19 Rea Street South
Birmingham
B5 6LB
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 121 605 5555

Fax: +44 121 622 5003

irw@irworldwide.org

www.islamic-relief.org

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