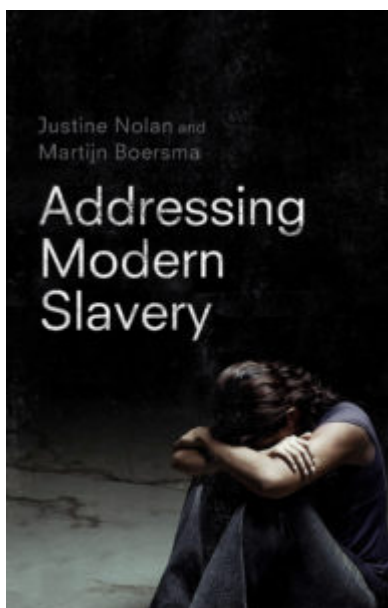


Addressing modern slavery, Justine Nolan and Martijn Boersma

Edition 3, 2020

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DOI: [10.37839/MAR2652-550X3.14](https://doi.org/10.37839/MAR2652-550X3.14)



Addressing Modern Slavery provides important insights into the complexities that perpetuate slavery in a contemporary context, long after it was officially abolished. This book confronts the dark side of development that comes with intractable, complex, multi-tiered global supply chains. In particular, it highlights that global supply chains not only link us to modern slavery, but frequently generate the preconditions necessary for modern slavery to flourish in industries such as agriculture, manufacturing and mining, which account for the majority of slaves in the world. Governments can also be complicit: while modern slavery can be connected to companies and consumers through supply chains, there are also governments that actively promote and benefit from slave labour.

Of the 40 million modern slaves worldwide, almost two-thirds are in Asia; with India, China, and Pakistan accounting for 60 per cent of the victims in the region. The situation is likely to further deteriorate due to the adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic—recent estimates indicate a likely increase of forced labor and human trafficking. *Addressing Modern Slavery* could be a useful resource for policy makers in assessing the problem in a holistic manner as governments develop policies and national frameworks on business and human rights in Asia.

Authors Justine Nolan and Martijn Boersma highlight a key challenge in defining the problem – the lack of a standard definition of modern slavery. The lack of a standard definition questions the scale and scope of data available, and therefore limits the effectiveness of measures to address the problem. While the authors critique the use and connotations of the term, they acknowledge modern slavery to be a range of systematic and structural abusive practices that negate the agency of the victims to demand and access rights.

The authors detail the evolution of the discourse on modern slavery and in doing so, they introduce the history and evolution of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. The UNGPs provide a global framework for states and businesses to prevent, mitigate and remedy business-related human rights abuses. There's growing momentum within human rights discourse for the implementation of mandatory rather than voluntary responses to address modern slavery. While the authors commend those nations which have introduced mandatory disclosure laws, they draw attention to a lack of specific data around the ethical sourcing of goods and services and lack of enforcement.

Importantly, the authors place the proliferation of modern slavery in the contemporary context of economic globalisation, the international fragmentation of production, business models, the changing nature of work, migration trends, power of large corporations, lack of effective regulation around the world and growing inequality. Nolan and Boersma note that addressing modern slavery without also addressing these issues will only deal with the symptoms of human trafficking and

forced labour rather than its root causes. They recommend a broad range of strategies, facilitated through a multi-stakeholder engagement on multiple fronts focusing on collaboration and connectivity.

Collaboration requires States to accept their regulatory role in enacting and enforcing new laws that address slavery, and for business to take action to fulfill their human rights responsibilities. The role of civil society, consumers and investors is of paramount importance in this collaboration. Together, they can pressure businesses and governments to change course as required.

Connectivity refers to understanding and appreciating the ways and means by which modern slavery is connected to our lives. 'Modern slavery affects all' is one of the central themes of the book as the authors demonstrate the prevalence of modern slavery in our everyday lives and actions. It encourages the public to understand and educate itself about the connection between individuals' actions, such as purchases, investments, and slavery.

The book could have benefited from discussion of the contribution of labour movements and unions in addressing modern slavery, particularly the role they can play in prevention and remedy. There is also very little information about the diversity among modern slaves and therefore the specific impact and solutions that are needed.

However, *Addressing Modern Slavery* does a commendable job in bringing together information and discussion from various perspectives and standpoints. The authors have effectively utilised examples presented through a smart mix of case studies, practices undertaken by States and businesses and lived experiences of the victims and survivors. The documented lived experiences of slaves from all over the world demonstrates that modern slavery is everywhere. The authors also highlight opportunities that could potentially change the lives of millions of slaves in the world and compels readers to measure their footprint in terms of the proliferation of modern slavery and take actions, small and big, to eradicate it.

The author wishes to note that the views expressed in this review are personal and not those of the UNDP.

Banner image: Construction workers in Manila, Philippines. Credit: [Wayne S. Grazio/Flickr](#)