Power, dignity and voice

Enhancing safeguarding in efforts to address modern slavery

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Antislavery
Knowledge
Network

About the authors

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Dr Leona Vaughn is currently Derby Fellow for the research theme of Slavery and Unfree Labour. She has extensive experience as a professional and academic researcher in the field of equalities and social justice in public and charity sectors in the UK and internationally. Her research interests are interdisciplinary approaches to risk/harm in the design and delivery of slavery and unfree labour research, especially anticolonial methods and methodologies which centre minoritized groups (e.g. women, children, BIPOC, LGBTQI+).

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Acronyms and abbreviations

AHRC	Arts and Humanities Research Council
AKN	Antislavery Knowledge Network
ADS	Anglican Development Services
DFID	Department for International Development
GCRF	Global Challenges Research Fund
LESLAN	Legacies of Slavery in Niger
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender
LMICs	Low- and middle-income countries
SOAS	School of Oriental and African Studies
UKCDR	UK Collaborative for Development Research
UoL	University of Liverpool
YOLRED	Youth Leaders for Restoration and Development

1 Introduction

From July 2019 to July 2020, the University of Liverpool's Department of Politics hosted a research fellowship on Safeguarding through the Antislavery Knowledge Network (AKN), an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Network Plus initiative.

The safeguarding research fellowship was dedicated to carrying out the project - 'Enhancing Safeguarding in Efforts to Address Modern Slavery through the UN's Sustainable Development Goals'. This work explored and assessed local safeguarding practice and methods in existing AKN projects that are using arts and humanities methods to develop community-based responses to modern slavery. Through a range of creative approaches, AKN staff and partners have critiqued and expanded concepts of power, dignity and voice that are central to understandings of safeguarding within the context of research in the antislavery and anti-trafficking field.

The role of Research Fellow was undertaken in two phases: Dr Leona Vaughn from August to December 2019, and Linnea Renton from January to July 2020. Leona has remained involved with AKN's safeguarding work through her role in helping to design, develop and disseminate safeguarding research and guidance, and in relation to her current research on anticolonial methodologies for slavery and unfree labour.

With the AKN fellowship formally drawing to a close at the end of July 2020, we are taking the opportunity to share our findings, reflect on what has been achieved during the year and consider some of the challenges that remain.

About AKN

The Antislavery Knowledge Network (AKN) is led by a coalition of Universities based in Ghana and the UK. It supports research and innovative and impactful work to address exploitation and contemporary slavery in Africa using approaches from the arts and humanities. The AKN commissioned a small number of pilot projects in Phase 1 (2017-2018), then a larger number of projects in Phase 2 (2018-2020). In Phase 3 (beginning late 2020) the network will be generating a range of outputs, synthesising and disseminating findings from across all projects for a range of audiences. Together we aim to grow our network and explore how approaches from the arts and humanities can address contemporary forms of enslavement by adopting a community-engaged, human rights focus that delivers development impacts.

For further information and summaries of all our projects please visit:
www.liverpool.ac.uk/politics/research/research-projects/akn/

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2 Background

An important precursor of AKN's involvement in safeguarding was Leona's work with Professor Alex Balch on the child labour research project, 'Clothes, Chocolate and Children: Realising the Transparency Dividend'. Funded by the British Academy, this research explored issues around exploitation and working conditions in supply chains involving UK-based companies, focusing on one commodity (cocoa) and one manufactured good (garments) in four low and middle-income countries, namely Ghana, Dominican Republic, Bangladesh and Myanmar. While the project itself focused on how/whether the UK's 'modern slavery' agenda, as part of a broader political economy of transparency, protects human rights and enhances the well-being of workers and children, it also highlighted some glaring gaps around safeguarding in research.

Subsequently, in the wake of the Oxfam Haiti scandal and other revelations of harm, abuse and exploitation in the international development sector, the AHRC offered additional funding to its existing grantees to address safeguarding. The opportunity was seized to design a project for AKN specifically focused on exploring the concept and implementation of safeguarding in the field of anti-slavery, including identifying challenges and highlighting local knowledge and systems to enhance safeguarding practices.

Underlying the AKN proposal was an understanding that equitable partnerships are a fundamental part of safeguarding, as stated in the application to AHRC:

> "... *a core aim of research should be the development of equitable partnerships in the design, delivery and co-production of knowledge. From this perspective, safeguarding practices emerge as central to our Network Plus activities and it becomes essential to establish effective principles and methods that can be adhered to in a collaborative and contextually sensitive manner.*"

2.1 Partners, objectives and activities

The resulting one-year initiative, 'Enhancing Safeguarding in Efforts to Address Modern Slavery through the UN's Sustainable Development Goals', has involved the following AKN commissioned projects:

Antislavery Knowledge Network project	Partners	Country
Bila pi Kuc: Creative art based therapies for the prevention, reintegration and healing of ex-child combatants in Northern Uganda	Youth Leaders for Restoration and Development (YOLRED), University of Bristol	Uganda
Community Stories: Stories of modern day slavery from Mogori County, Kenya – empowering voices and sharing knowledge for change through community media	Rongo University, University of Brighton	Kenya
Emerging Voices: Exploring the next generation's awareness of historic and modern slavery in Ghana, and how this can help develop antislavery strategies	City Hearts	Ghana
From Hope to Despair: An ethnography of youth experiences of human trafficking	Anglican Development Services (ADS)	Kenya
Healing Spaces: Developing an evidence-based design framework for care facilities serving human trafficking survivors in East Africa	BuildX Studio (formerly Orkidstudio)	Kenya and Uganda
Hidden Histories: The untold stories of James Town and slavery	James Town Community Theatre, James Town Walking Tours, University of the West of Scotland	Ghana
Legacies of Slavery in Niger (LESLAN): Mobilising memory, heritage and politics to end abuse	Timidria, Abdou Moumouni University, University of Birmingham	Niger
Visualising Liberté: Producing a graphic novel and an animation on the history of slavery and emancipation in Kayes, Mali	Association Donkosira, SOAS	Mali

Working with these partners in East and West Africa, the research was designed to explore the concept and practices of safeguarding in the field of anti-slavery, reflect on how participants' needs were being met, and work collaboratively to design and disseminate new systems and approaches. A particular area of interest was the role of local knowledge and systems to enhance safeguarding, with attention to pre-existing local cultural safeguarding practices and the power-related challenges and opportunities for collaborative work in this area.

The AKN safeguarding project had the following specific objectives:

1. To gain insights into safeguarding in anti-slavery work in sub-Saharan Africa that can be utilised to create a safe and trusted environment for researchers, participants and communities, and to explore the potential for these to be used in other fields

2. To drive organisational change (in the first instance, in those involved in the AKN, but longer-term in the wider research community) around the way research organisations and their partners think about their research, their participants, the communities they are working in, and how their work directly affects individuals and wider society.

3. To improve the ways in which policies that aim to provide protection and safety are understood and communicated in wider UK and African research communities, for example ensuring that incidents or reports of improper behaviour are appropriately acted upon.

The following activities were envisaged:

1. To examine current safeguarding practices in AKN projects and work together with the rest of the Network Plus Management Team and International Steering Group to enhance existing safeguarding practices and share and further develop common principles

2. To commission a sample of Phase 2 projects to undertake additional work that may include auditing and assessing local safeguarding needs

3. To develop a set of capacity-building tools e.g. webinars and online materials, for dissemination to our partners as well as previous applicants and partners to our phase 2 funding, based upon consultation with relevant projects and partners

4. To hold an end of project event to disseminate findings from our Phase 2 Projects on existing and developing effective safeguarding practices in research in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs)

5. Following an initial exploratory phase we expect to work intensively with a smaller sub-group of 2 or 3 projects who will then help us to organise capability training based on our collaborative work to the full range of partners and co-organise the final event.

2.2   Context of safeguarding in international research

'Safeguarding' is an area of law, policy and practice which has a longstanding tradition in the provision of services, especially to children and other 'vulnerable' groups in the UK, e.g. through the child protection system. It is, at its core, an attempt to anticipate, avoid and prevent harm from occurring. In the context of international research and development, it is an issue which has received intense scrutiny and consideration following high profile incidents of abuse.[1]

For international research, safeguarding is a concept that goes beyond established ethical research practice. Its scope has been defined by the UK Collaborative on Development Research (UKCDR) as "any sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment of research participants, communities and research staff, plus any broader forms of violence, exploitation and abuse… such as bullying, psychological abuse and physical violence."[2]

The UKCDR briefing on safeguarding and its draft principles for researchers, both UK-based and in-country organisations working with UK researchers, suggest that the Department for International Development (DFID) statement 'Enhanced Due Diligence: Safeguarding for External Partners'[3] should be central to

safeguarding practices in international research.[4] The work by UKCDR and DFID makes some important acknowledgements about safeguarding in international contexts:

- Safeguarding is a term that is unfamiliar to many researchers outside the UK

- Research principles have to be flexible to apply in different social contexts, research methods and disciplines, not only to make them more practical but also to avoid colonial imposition and address power inequalities.

- Safeguarding risks are also posed to communities when unequal power relationships exist e.g. control over personal information; not feeling free to say no, especially in situations where they are funding or aid dependent.

- Mandatory reporting of disclosure of harm can risk more harm to victims

- Safeguarding approaches in equitable partnerships need to be honest about obligations, simplify procedures and demands, rather than over-burden less well-resourced partners, and build in two-way learning.

- Safeguarding policy in UK often uses legal definitions (e.g. significant harm), whereas the broader vulnerability concept is what is used in ethics.

- The ethical review process in research institutions is often seen as panacea for safeguarding, but it leaves gaps on researcher conduct (including in-country involvement in social/personal life), the researcher capability to deal with safeguarding issues/challenges (i.e. training), the in-country legal contexts (e.g. consent), the extent to which research partners are also responsible for safeguarding/ethical practice.

- Safeguarding risks to researchers are unequally distributed e.g. children/adults, male/female, UK/indigenous or in-country, early career or junior researchers/senior researchers)

- Research which by its nature foregrounds safeguarding risks (e.g. researching 'modern slavery'), is claimed to imply a more advanced understanding than others.

- Training for safeguarding in research is inconsistent and varies in availability.

The UKCDR briefing advocates for a 'victim/survivor-centred approach' to safeguarding and makes a number of specific recommendations, referred to as Key Principles,[5] for research organisations to anticipate, mitigate, report and respond to safeguarding situations.

1   The sexual abuse scandal in Haiti prompted an investigation of Oxfam and the UK Government response to addressing safeguarding e.g. www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/oxfam-child-abuse-haiti-scandal-inquiry-sexual-exploitation-charity-commission-a8953566.html, www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmintdev/840/840.pdf
2   Orr, D et al. (2019) *Safeguarding in International Development Research: Briefing Paper*, p.1. Available at: www.ukcdr.org.uk/resource/safeguarding-in-international-development-research-briefing-paper/
3   DFID document available at www.assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/767037/safeguarding-external-partners.pdf

4   This is also a recommendation for the aid sector, made by BOND in 'Our Commitment to Change in Safeguarding' for Non-Governmental Organisations www.bond.org.uk/resources/our-commitment-to-change-in-safeguarding
5   Orr, D et al. (2019) *Safeguarding in International Development Research: Briefing Paper*, p.4. Available at: www.ukcdr.org.uk/resource/safeguarding-in-international-development-research-briefing-paper/

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3 Gap analysis of AKN policies

At the start of the 'Enhancing Safeguarding' initiative, a gap analysis of AKN Phase 1 projects' safeguarding (and safeguarding-related) policies was carried out, using the draft principles developed by Dr David Orr et al. for UKCDR as described above. The relevant policies and statements were also analysed against the DFID statement on safeguarding. The intention of this review was to identify areas for further exploration, not to ensure compliance. The following key issues were identified:

Defining Safeguarding

Two out of the eight policies or statements reviewed utilised a similar definition to that given by UKCDR. The key areas of variation in the other policies were whether the policy applied only to children, and whether the policy also applied to staff/researchers as potential targets of abuse or exploitation.

Scope of Safeguarding

The policies all imagined 'scope' in various ways. The UKCDR definition of safeguarding as the anticipation, prevention, mitigation and reporting of harm was generally not reflected in the policies, with all of the actions that this full scope would require (e.g. community informed risk assessment at design, implementation and review stages of research projects; appropriate internal and external reporting e.g. procedures for handling disclosure and whistle blowing; procedures for vetting staff; procedures for investigations of allegations; policies on supporting victims).

Responsibilities, Expectations and Partnerships/Collaboration for Safeguarding

Policies broadly did not identify that it was a project responsibility to prevent any potential harm to communities that the research could create or amplify. One policy mentions this specifically.

Four out of eight referred to some form of framework guiding work on safeguarding which addressed cultural norms and local or international law, policy and practice e.g. the international standard of do no harm, organisational ethics etc.

Policies varied in their explanations of whether they should be proactive or reactive to harm and where their organisational responsibility to prevent harm to research participants begins and ends.

There was understanding of partnership approaches to safeguarding in various ways, but less clear was how this responsibility was shared between UK research institutions and in-country research partners, how local NGOs and government departments could be involved and some of the challenges to this more collaborative approach to safeguarding.

Mainstreaming Safeguarding

Policies differed in their approaches to mainstreaming safeguarding. Some had a stand-alone policy, others had a statement, and others had a statement of ethics. Within the documents, some explicitly signposted other policies such as HR, staff codes of conduct, complaints, whistleblowing etc, and some did not.

Learning in Safeguarding

Policies broadly did not outline the methods for mutual learning from safeguarding experiences and local perceptions or experience of safeguarding challenges.

Two out of eight policies gave a statement about learning opportunities (training/workshops). However, generally projects did not refer to developing safeguarding capacity and capability for the organisation, researchers and research participants in ways that appreciate the power dynamics that are considered endemic to research in the field of human trafficking and modern slavery.[6]

Power in Safeguarding

Policies did not explicitly articulate how safeguarding approaches might recognise and respond to structural inequalities (class, race, gender, disability, sexuality or age) or how they influence the power dynamics of who is seen as vulnerable, at risk or in need of protection. Gender-sensitive and survivor/victim-centred approaches were not reflected in the language or content of policies.

Further exploration

The findings from this preliminary analysis of safeguarding policies among AKN projects suggested a need to explore specific areas of safeguarding in more depth and from the perspective of what happens in practice rather than what is written in policy. This exploration was planned in three ways:

1. Commissioning a number of projects to undertake in-country research to explore these key areas of safeguarding using various methods

2. Surveying all AKN projects about existing practices to keep researchers and participants safe, and what benefits and challenges the UKCDR principles may pose for practice

3. Interviewing a targeted number of commissioned projects to explore the understanding and transferability of the safeguarding concept and explore existing in-country everyday practices for preventing harm.

As will be explained in Section 8, some of the further investigation took place in a different form from that originally envisaged. This was a result of opportunities that subsequently arose to involve AKN projects in a wider-ranging international consultation exercise on safeguarding in research.

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6   See, for example, Annie Bunting, Allen Kiconco & Joel Quirk (2020) (eds) 'Research as more than extraction? Knowledge production and sexual violence in post conflict African societies': OpenDemocracy: London.

4 Workshops with AKN partners

Safeguarding was included as a key thread in two AKN workshops, held with West Africa partners in Accra (30-31 January 2020), and with East Africa partners in Nairobi (3-4 February). The workshops also coincided with the formal handover from Leona to Linnea and served as part of the latter's induction. Together we facilitated sessions exploring the concept of safeguarding and how to construct a model of safeguarding framed around values and rights.

A recurring theme that emerged in discussions, of relevance to many of the participants, was what safeguarding means for "activist researchers" and how risk is relative to where your 'risk line' is. For those undertaking research and/or research-based advocacy in the face of entrenched vested interests and power structures (e.g. descent-based slavery in Niger, cross-border trafficking between Kenya and Uganda, etc.), the definition of what is considered acceptable risk involves difficult calculations of potential danger to oneself and/or to participants. It also requires a nuanced and contextualised understanding of social, cultural and political power dynamics.

Another dilemma revolving around dual roles relates to research carried out by organisations that are also service providers. The potential blurring of boundaries may create a conflict of interest and affect the ability of research participants to give genuinely free and informed consent if they are also service beneficiaries.

Issues of translation – linguistic and conceptual – were also highlighted as important for safeguarding. In francophone African countries, for example, research carried out in the local language may end up being translated into French and then into English and back again, with important nuances potentially being lost at each step along the way. Accessibility of feedback to communities, and their ownership of their information, are also affected. This is a strong argument for the use of arts-based methods and media such as photography, drama, song, graphics/animation etc. as well as, or instead of, traditional written outputs.

YOLRED, a Ugandan community-based organisation of and for former child combatants, shared another striking example relating to language, communication and safeguarding. They have ensured that in cases when translation is necessary for research interviews, participants themselves now have the right to choose the translator, allowing them to select a person they trust, someone they feel safe and comfortable with – rather than someone unknown who might break their confidentiality and disclose their past to other members of the community. In this way, participants in a highly sensitive area of research have been able to exercise choice and control to ensure that their needs and rights are respected throughout the research process, making it a powerful illustration of survivor-centred safeguarding. In a similar vein, though in a different discipline, BuildX Studio shared the importance of survivors' input into the design of spaces in which to recover from trauma.

Although safeguarding was just one component of the workshops, it proved to be a rich source of reflection, debate and mutual learning for AKN projects in their efforts to build equitable, non-extractive partnerships able to anticipate, mitigate and address harm in the research process.

5 AKN safeguarding case studies

Following the policy gap analysis and workshops, three of the AKN projects were commissioned to analyse and document their experiences in using arts and humanities to assist with developing local understandings/ definitions of risk and harm. The resulting case studies are summarised below.

- **Complexities of Safeguarding – Experience from Western Kenya**

  Dr Willis Okumu, Anglican Development Services (ADS) Kenya

  The ADS work focused on cross-border trafficking of young girls for sexual exploitation, aiming to understand and document the key vulnerabilities that drive human trafficking. Failure to enforce existing anti-trafficking laws, along with structural vulnerabilities such as poverty, broken families and lack of safety nets, were identified as important contributing factors.

  One of the complexities for safeguarding efforts lay in the role of relatives and friends in trafficking networks, which blurred the lines in terms of how victims themselves characterised what had happened to them: *"The lack of awareness of the exploitative and undignifying nature of human trafficking enables these dehumanising acts to be seen as acts of charity."*

- **Exploring Safeguarding in James Town, Accra, Ghana**

  Nii Kwartelai Quartey, James Town Community Theatre

  Modern slavery in James Town is centred around three main groups: boys taken to work in the fishing industry on Lake Volta, girls brought from villages for sex work and young women leaving to work in the Gulf States as domestic slaves. The technique of Verbatim Theatre – building scripts and performances based on the real words and experiences of survivors – provided a platform for drama and post-drama dialogue, bridging linguistic and communication barriers.

  James Town Community Theatre found that the use of arts-based approaches in research projects helped in the democratization and demystification of research among participants (especially those ostracised by an inability to read or write) and communities, enabling deconstruction, reconstruction and construction of concepts of slavery on both the individual and communal level. The sharing of research findings with study participants, not only in a language they speak but in a medium they can validate, critique and own, encouraged full participation and ensured fairness.

- **Safeguarding Former Child Soldiers in Northern Uganda**

  Geoffrey Omony, YOLRED and Jassi Sandhar, University of Bristol

  YOLRED focused on investigating what practices former child soldiers themselves felt were harmful and exploitative within current research processes. These included provoking emotions and causing further trauma, raising expectations through empty promises, failing to provide feedback after research, lack of compensation for participants' time, and the extraction of information from the region with little to no benefits for the community members. There was a lack of guidance (national, regional, or international) specific to how to safeguard child soldiers involved in research.

  Outputs have included an updated safeguarding policy, an internal policy stating the ways in which YOLRED will work with researchers, and what they expect from researchers before engaging in projects with them, and a set of external guidelines for researchers on how to operate more ethically in the region.

A common theme from all three case studies was that any research that involves participants sharing the ordeal of their lived experiences should include ''insiders'' in research design, delivery and dissemination. This increases trust and rapport and facilitates safeguarding, owing to their familiarity with participants, their understanding of the sensitive nature of narratives and their nuanced knowledge on what is socially and culturally accepted within a given society.

Rather than relying on our interpretation, and in line with the emphasis on 'voice', we invite readers to refer directly to what our partners have written in their own words. The case studies and other materials produced to date are available in the underlined safeguarding section of the AKN webpage.

6 Addressing the impact of COVID-19

In common with all other research initiatives, AKN has been faced with inevitable adjustments to its planned activities and concerned about the impact of the pandemic on antislavery and anti-human-trafficking research and services. Accordingly, with the agreement of the AHRC, funds that were originally designated for a final face-to-face event on safeguarding were redirected to AKN partners in Kenya and Uganda to carry out additional research on the COVID theme. This rapid assessment, based on in-depth key informant interviews, focused on pandemic-related changes noted in the understanding of safeguarding; emerging or heightened risks, harms and vulnerabilities; and impacts on the demand for or supply of services for those affected by human trafficking.

Preliminary findings suggest that power dynamics and dignity are integral to the concept of safeguarding in this area of work. Risks, harms or vulnerabilities that are emerging or increasing during the pandemic include domestic violence, sexual and gender-based violence and child abuse during lockdown; COVID-related loss of income as push factor for trafficking; online recruitment targeting school-age children at home; and trafficked people stuck in host or transit countries.

The pandemic has had a range of impacts on both the demand for and supply of services, including restricted ability to report, refer, monitor or respond to safeguarding breaches or concerns. Maintaining safeguarding standards has also been affected by limitations to safeguarding training, recruitment checks and other measures.

Further findings indicate that research partnerships in the antislavery and anti-human-trafficking field have been affected by the pandemic. For example, in relation to actual or potential impact on the design, conduct and dissemination of research, the following were noted:

- Lack of time to build necessary rapport and trust
- Rush to prove 'relevance' during pandemic, potentially with little or no benefit to participants
- Restrictions on face to face data collection mean that those without access to phone or internet may be barred from participating
- Unfamiliar technology and inability to see the interviewer can affect confidence and trust.

While the repurposing of funds to address COVID-19 has been helpful in some ways, there have also been unrealistic expectations by some funders about how quickly such changes could be made. The shift of focus has also restricted partners' ability to develop new partnerships or source new funds for non-pandemic-related research or activities.

A co-produced article presenting and analysing these findings is currently being developed for the *Journal of Human Trafficking* for submission in autumn 2020.

7 Sharing good practice

An important element of our work, individually and jointly, throughout the research fellowship has been advocacy on safeguarding both within the University of Liverpool (UoL) and beyond. This has taken many forms, including presentations at meetings, workshops, webinars and podcasts:

- UKCDR workshop session, 'Keeping research communities safe from harm', International Research for Development Funders Forum, Dar es Salaam, 13 November 2019
- Presentations and updates to UoL's GCRF Communities of Practice group
- Presentation and participatory session, Association of Research Managers and Administrators Policy Forum, London, 10 January 2020
- Royal Society Panel for British Science Week, 'Science on the Frontline', London, 11 March
- Presentations to Research Ethics Committee, Research & Impact Strategy Committee, and Global Challenges Research Group, UoL, April-May
- Co-authored piece for *Discover Society*, published 12 May
- UoL Making an Impact series, 'Safeguarding in research', 11 June
- UKCDR webinar, 'Preventing harm in research – safeguarding in international development research', 01 July
- SOAS webinar, 'Safeguarding – by whom and for whom?', 16 July
- AKN podcast in conversation with Dr Lennon Mhishi (forthcoming)

There has also been an emphasis on building capacity in AKN projects on safeguarding through sharing practice and research findings in a variety of formats, e.g. video, blogs, etc.

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8 Influencing the wider research community

In parallel with the direct AKN safeguarding work over the past year, we have been keen to identify further opportunities to influence safeguarding policy and practice in international research and equitable research partnerships. This speaks directly to objective 2 of the AKN research fellowship (repeated here for ease of reference):

To drive organisational change (in the first instance, in those involved in the AKN, but longer-term in the wider research community) around the way research organisations and their partners think about their research, their participants, the communities they are working in, and how their work directly affects individuals and wider society.

In Autumn 2019, UKCDR commissioned a second phase of its work on safeguarding in the context of international development research, in order to consult more widely (particularly outside of the UK) on the draft principles and develop practical guidance. This presented an ideal opportunity to embed the AKN safeguarding work in a wider context and contribute to raising standards in the sector.

Leona headed up the successful University of Liverpool bid to undertake this work, using a deliberately inclusive, collaborative, anticolonial design that itself aimed to model good practice in international research partnerships. Professor Alex Balch led the delivery team as Principal Investigator, drawing on his experience with research and international collaborations addressing trafficking and modern slavery as an international development issue. The Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, with its strong background in safeguarding and equity, particularly in relation to public health, agreed to partner with UoL on this work and provide technical assistance in developing the methodology and reviewing the draft report and guidance. Linnea was brought into the team as a consultant on the basis of her experience and expertise in international development and human rights, and her extensive network of contacts working in social justice globally, especially in Latin America.

We share a longstanding interest in contested ideas around who has the power to define risk, harm and vulnerability, and the power to devise solutions to prevent and address harm. For example, these notions were at the heart of Leona's PhD research on how practitioners imagine and operationalise the safeguarding 'risk-work' for identifying and working with 'childhood radicalisation'. They have also been central to Linnea's work on the rights of those affected by HIV, with a particular focus on children, adolescents and young people.

From the outset, therefore, our aim was to embody the principles of a decolonised research relationship, i.e. making a concerted effort to tackle power imbalances in the design, delivery and dissemination of research. The methodology included collaborating with Global South partners on equal terms; the four consultants involved, based in Guatemala, Sierra Leone, India and the UK, were all paid at the UK daily rate, and all were given equal co-authorship with the UK-based Principal Investigator and Research Director.

The consultation process included an online survey in English, Spanish and French that attracted 555 responses globally and in-depth interviews in three regional hubs (Latin America and the Caribbean, West Africa and South Asia). Additional input and guidance came through consultative events and workshops with stakeholder groups in the UK, Ghana, Kenya and Tanzania – including AKN partners. We received consistent feedback, through all data collection methods and across geographical regions, that a fixed set of requirements would not only be impractical but also potentially reinforce Global North/Global South power dynamics. In acknowledgement of this, the Guidance is set out as a series of key questions for different audiences to ask themselves and each other as we all think about our roles and our responsibilities in preventing and addressing harm in international research practice. These role-specific questions are framed around four fundamental principles or pillars that together underpin sound safeguarding policy and practice:

- Rights of victims/survivors and whistle-blowers
- Equity and fairness
- Transparency
- Accountability and good governance.

The power to define risk, vulnerability and harm came through strongly as indicative of the position Global South partners inhabit in the hierarchy of international research relationships. Not only does this echo colonial thinking, which by its very nature presents those who are the 'other' as inherently risky, but it illustrates how using a narrow Northern lens to see what is risky or harmful is likely to restrict the ability to perceive forms of harm outside that context.

As one of our Latin America key informants stated:

"These efforts have to start from a change in mentality and that implies working with people to see what they cannot see. Because preventing means avoiding, and in order to avoid you have to anticipate; you can't see something that you do not have the mindset for."

The report on the UKCDR consultation process and findings, and the resulting guidance, were completed in February 2020 (by which time Linnea had taken over from Leona as AKN Safeguarding Research Fellow). However, it became clear in early March that additional advice was urgently needed on the practical application of safeguarding principles during the pandemic. Linnea was accordingly commissioned by UKCDR to produce a "companion piece" highlighting key considerations for preventing and addressing harm in international development research in the context of COVID-19, based on the original research and with additional input from Alex and Leona.

The UKCDR research report, main Guidance and COVID-19 supplement were officially launched in mid-April and have attracted considerable interest from research funders and research institutions in both the Global North and the Global South.

9 Challenges and recommendations

Research can never divorce itself from the socio-political context of its day. Black Lives Matter and its many manifestations — including within academia in general and UoL specifically — have underscored the need for ongoing critical self-examination by AKN of its own practices, leadership structure and methodology. This will be essential if the work is to remain relevant as understanding of safeguarding and equitable partnerships continues to evolve.

Leona's current work as Derby Fellow, 'Doing Harm By Doing Good?', highlights some of the key questions AKN and others must address:

- Can 'modern slavery' research, in how it is designed and delivered, avoid the pitfalls of the 'colonial gaze', 'poverty porn' and 'saviour' behaviour?

- How can the knowledge that is produced on this social harm, however well-intentioned, not result in further or different types of harm to communities already considered 'vulnerable' in different contexts (e.g. socio-economic, LGBT+, migrant, minority ethnic and religious)?

We believe that avoiding harm in the design and delivery of modern slavery research means developing and applying anticolonial approaches to processes for research and knowledge production. As we noted in our *Discover Society* piece, "To ensure that risk, harm and vulnerability are locally defined and the responses are locally led, owned and sustained, Global North researchers have to be ready and willing to give up some of their power in this relationship." It will be interesting to see how the AKN steps up to meet these wider safeguarding challenges in the months ahead.

10 Next steps

The AKN fellowship has been a fantastic opportunity to explore, debate and promote safeguarding principles and practice, both within and beyond the network. We extend our warmest thanks and appreciation to our AKN colleagues and partners in Liverpool and globally. Although the role officially concluded on 31 July 2020, that is not the end of AKN's — or our — work in this area. Future plans include:

- Identifying further opportunities for AKN projects and Fellows to co-author and co-present on safeguarding themes

- Identifying further opportunities for funding to grow some of the research, including the COVID-19 specific work

- Integrating the insights and outputs of this safeguarding project into the final phase of the AKN award, which will include co-creation of an exhibition with commissioned projects.

In our own personal and professional capacities, the authors also remain committed to exploring, promoting and interrogating concepts of safeguarding as an essential part of equity and social justice.