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Contemporary Slavery in an Era of Climate Change: State and Civil Society Responses in the Andean Region

Recent statistics from the International Labour Organization (ILO) indicate that over 40 million people worldwide are subject to contemporary forms of slavery. However, efforts to address this issue have been criticised for treating it in isolation, largely unrelated to the prevailing economic model. This project examines the effect of climate change on contemporary slavery. The ILO has noted that climate change is driving volatility, thus escalating migration, poverty, and landlessness – all acknowledged as conditions that increase the risk of contemporary slavery.

In his 2015 Encyclical on the Environment, Pope Francis called for a joint approach to tackling climate change and contemporary slavery; however, research on the relationship between these issues is scarce. Meanwhile, some high-profile anti-slavery campaigners treat climate change as an effect of contemporary slavery, failing to analyse the impact of economic models. This research project addresses this shortfall by collecting data from two countries affected by both climate change and contemporary slavery: Peru and Bolivia. Both countries are experiencing the negative impacts of climate change, including water scarcity, extreme weather events, and rising temperatures, which are combining with extractive activities to drive levels of social vulnerability.

Existing research highlights the central role of the state in reducing such vulnerability and supporting communities in adapting to this new reality. Accordingly, this research focuses on the question of the importance of the state in articulating responses to these complex issues. These countries share common features but differ in terms of economic model. This project examines responses to these issues at state and civil society levels; assesses their effectiveness; and analyses the degree to which approaches to contemporary slavery are connected to the wider issue of climate change. This research is making an original and important contribution to the understanding of the complex and multi-faceted phenomena of climate change and contemporary slavery, advancing knowledge of their intersectionality, which will aid NGOs, policymakers and researchers.

Chris has written about his research on the Anti-Slavery International website:

<https://www.antislavery.org/climate-change-slavery/>

He has also conducted interviews while in South America (in Spanish):

- Reporte Alternativo: <http://chsalternativo.org/reportealternativo/2019/09/05/chris-oconell-la-consecuencia-mas-inmediata-del-cambio-climatico-es-la-migracion/>
- IDL Radio: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-JNQgGGO7U&feature=youtu.be>