Letters

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Why ending supply chain exploitation should matter to all of us

There is a truth woven into the things we use every day, a truth that is behind the coffee we drink in the morning, the clothes we wear to work, the phone we are holding, because long before these products reach us they pass through many hands, many stories, and not all of those stories are fair.

Supply chain exploitation is not just a policy issue, it is the man whose passport is taken away at a construction site far from home after he borrowed heavily to secure the job. It is the woman who accepted what sounded like a life-changing opportunity only to find herself trapped in forced labour with no safe way out. It is the child working long hours in fields or factories while school continues without them. Human trafficking does not exist in isolation, it feeds off weak systems, unregulated recruitment, poverty, and our collective comfort with cheap and fast production without asking enough questions about how it was made possible.

We like to think trafficking is something that happens "out there", to someone else, but global supply chains connect all of us in ways we rarely see. When exploitation hides in those chains, it becomes part of the global economy that benefits us all. That is why ending it is not charity or activism, but a responsibility tied to the kind of markets and societies we want to build.

For businesses, this conversation has moved far beyond image management. A company can invest years building a respected brand and lose it in one headline exposing forced labour in its supply chain. Investors are paying closer attention, laws on human rights due diligence are expanding, and consumers are asking questions. Yet beyond legal and reputational risk lies a simple truth; an economy built on fear and coercion is unstable. Exploited workers and systems that rely on silence eventually crack under scrutiny.

For governments, especially in countries like ours where youth unemployment and migration pressures are part of daily reality, supply chain exploitation is connected to social cohesion. When decent work is scarce at home, migration becomes a survival strategy. Recruiters promise opportunity, families take loans, and hope travels ahead of caution. Sometimes that journey ends well, but too often it ends in situations of abuse, withheld wages, confiscated documents, and isolation.

When that happens, the damage does not stay abroad, it returns home in the form of debt, trauma, and loss. In our trafficking prevention as a country, we must look upstream by regulating recruitment agencies, strengthening labour inspections, coordinating across borders, and ensuring that laws protecting workers are enforced in practice.

Communities feel the impact in ways statistics cannot fully capture. When a parent is trapped in exploitation, children leave school to compensate for lost income. When wages are stolen, households slip further into poverty. Yet the opposite is also true, when work is dignified and fairly paid, everything shifts, and the narrative changes from desperation to possibility and stability. Dignified work is not only an economic issue, it is one of the strongest forms of prevention against trafficking.

Ending supply chain exploitation requires more than polished reports, it requires companies to look beyond their first-tier suppliers and ask questions about who is recruiting workers and under what terms. It requires a firm stance that workers should never pay recruitment fees that trap them in debt before they even begin earning.

It calls for safe grievance systems where workers can speak without fear, and for governments to invest in trained labour inspectors who understand the indicators of trafficking and have the authority to act. It also demands survivor-centered protection systems, because rescue without recovery leaves justice incomplete and true accountability unfinished.

At its core, this issue is about the future of our economies and safety of all of us. Growth that depends on hidden abuse is fragile, because it does not align profit with human dignity and therefore erodes trust and weakens the social fabric that markets rely on. When we protect workers, we protect families and communities, and we build systems that refuse to tolerate exploitation.

Rogers Tulyahabwe,
rtulyahabwe@gmail.com