

# Stanford SOCIAL INNOVATION<sup>Review</sup>

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*Case Study*  
**Casting a Tight Net**  
By Sarah Murray

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# CASE STUDY

AN INSIDE LOOK AT ONE ORGANIZATION

➔ *AT SEA: Burmese migrant fishermen sail out after delivering their latest catch at Samut Sakhon, Thailand.*

# Casting a Tight Net

The exploitation of workers in the Thai seafood industry is one of the worst examples of human rights abuse in the world today.

**Humanity United** is pursuing a strategy that combines carrots and sticks—collaboration and activism—to confront that problem.

BY SARAH MURRAY

**I**n June 2014, *The Guardian* newspaper published a series of reports<sup>1</sup> that detailed the practice of human trafficking in the Thai fishing industry. Migrant workers had paid brokers to help them find work in Thai factories or on Thai construction sites. Instead, the brokers or their associates had sold the workers to fishing boat captains—at a price of less than \$400, in some cases. One trafficking victim said that he had witnessed the killing of roughly 20 of his fellow workers. He had even seen members of a fishing boat crew tie one worker by his limbs to the bows of four vessels, so that the ocean waves would tear the worker's body apart. Such abuses, according to the *Guardian* investigation, lay at the heart of the industry that puts shrimp on the tables of consumers all around the world. Much of the global seafood industry, in short, is built on a modern form of human slavery.

In recent decades, Western companies in industries such as textiles and electronics have outsourced more and more of their manufacturing to complex networks of third-party suppliers. As that trend has accelerated, people have become increasingly aware of labor rights violations in those industries. Yet few previously reported abuses are as horrific as those documented in the *Guardian* series.

That series was the culmination of a six-month investigation that drew extensively on the newspaper's own resources—its money, its time, its intellectual capital. Significantly, however, the newspaper also received support for this ambitious reporting project from Humanity United (HU), a San Francisco-based foundation. Founded in 2005, HU is part of the Omidyar Group, a philanthropic entity created by Pierre Omidyar, a cofounder of eBay, and his wife, Pam. In its official tagline, HU puts forth two broad goals: “building peace and advancing human freedom.” Under the aegis of the second goal, the

foundation has led a wide-ranging, carefully orchestrated campaign to end modern slavery and bonded labor in the Thai seafood industry.

The decision to fund the *Guardian* investigation was a crucial element of that campaign—a campaign that aims, in part, to apply public pressure to companies that source products from a morally compromised supply chain. The *Guardian* series raised awareness of the link between commercial seafood and modern slavery, and it did so in a compelling and far-reaching way.

“Investigative journalism has paid huge dividends in our strategy,” says Ed Marcum, vice president for investments at HU. “The *Guardian* article has clearly been very influential.”

In the wake of the *Guardian* investigation, several corporate buyers of seafood products—including the US retailer Costco, the UK retailer Tesco, and Charoen Pokphand Foods, a Thai conglomerate—announced that they would scrutinize their supply chains, and work to avoid suppliers that engage in human trafficking. The *Guardian*'s reporting also prompted follow-up coverage in publications such as *The Bangkok Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today*, and on broadcast media such as the BBC, Fox News, and Voice of America. In addition, prominent media outlets such as the Associated Press and *The New York Times* have undertaken similar investigations of human rights abuses in the seafood industry and on the high seas.

The *Guardian* series, moreover, came at a timely moment. Shortly after the series appeared, the US State Department issued its 2014 “Trafficking in Persons [TIP] Report.” That report placed Thailand in what the department calls Tier 3—the lowest possible tier when it comes to meeting “minimum standards for the elimination of





PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRIS KELLY, COURTESY OF THE GUARDIAN

trafficking.”<sup>2</sup> Like the *Guardian* investigation, the TIP report laid out the extent to which trafficking and the use of slave labor are common in the Thai seafood industry. “Those two things together”—the newspaper series and the government report—“were able to amplify the issue in a way that neither on its own would have done,” says Kendra Kreider, reports and political affairs officer in the State Department’s Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons.

### A TARGETED APPROACH

The appearance of both the *Guardian* series and the TIP report in mid-2014 reflected another development: HU had established itself as an important player in the global movement to eradicate forced labor in the seafood industry. Three aspects of the foundation’s work in this area stand out, and together they point to an intriguing model for philanthropically led efforts to achieve broad-based social change.

First, in designing its campaign to combat slavery and human trafficking, HU opted to target a single industry in a single country. Ambitious, open-ended goals—“End human slavery!”—are certainly

laudable. But a highly focused strategy can enable an organization to find and exploit specific points of leverage. It creates an opportunity for a midsized foundation like HU to have an outsized impact. “The way seafood is organized, you can see a path to change. You couldn’t see that [path] in other industries,” says Lori Bishop, who developed and managed HU’s anti-slavery initiatives over a seven-year period.

Second, the foundation has gone beyond simply signing checks to grantees. HU has charted a coordinated strategy for change, and it has cultivated a network of partners to support that strategy. “It’s about being really engaged and humble,” says Bishop, who is now senior human rights advisor for Resiliensea Group, an advisory firm that serves the seafood industry. “It’s about talking to as many people as possible, building relationships, developing confidences, and having access to the information needed to make smart decisions.” The foundation has also tapped its own resources. “A lot of this work was done through the investment team, but the policy team also played a really important role, as did the communications team,” Bishop explains. “There are all sorts of engagements. It’s not just about writing grants.”

## CASE STUDY

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*Disclosure: Humanity United funded the writing of this article but had no involvement in its editorial development. Sarah Murray wrote the article entirely under the direction of Stanford Social Innovation Review.*

Third, HU has worked to strike a delicate balance in its interaction with the business interests that are at the center of the global seafood supply chain. It has used both sticks and carrots—efforts to prod companies into confronting human rights abuses, alongside efforts to help them improve labor conditions. Sponsoring campaigns that raise awareness of a problem or that apply pressure to companies plays a necessary role in HU’s work. But activism alone has its limits. In the end, only companies that take part in a supply chain can halt abuses that occur in that supply chain. “There’s a good-cop-bad-cop relationship that can emerge. A lot of people in NGOs are unwilling to accept that business has good intentions, while businesspeople feel that NGOs are uninformed,” says Marcum. “But there’s a place where we can facilitate a conversation [between those groups].”

In fact, the campaign against abuses in the seafood supply chain emerged from a broad, long-term push by HU to harness the power of the private sector as a force for social good. “We wanted to work with business to solve some of these problems while understanding that the solutions to these problems are difficult,” says Marcum. “They’re intractable for a reason.”

### THE TROUBLE WITH SEAFOOD

In tackling labor abuses in the Thai seafood industry, HU could hardly have chosen a more daunting target. Globalization, poor governance, and the push by multinational retailers for ever-cheaper seafood have created a supply chain in which bonded and slave labor thrive. Workers, often recruited under false pretenses or kidnapped, are subject to egregious brutality on the part of both police and employers.

In the seafood-processing industry, migrant workers—most of them women—receive paltry wages for standing all day while they peel shrimp in vast factories. They have no legal protections, and working long hours is often mandatory.

For men who work at sea on vessels to catch “low value” or “trash” fish (small or inedible fish used in the fishmeal that feeds farmed prawns), the pattern of mistreatment is more extreme. And the suffering of victims is largely invisible because it takes place on the high seas in a part of the world where flags of convenience, illegal vessels, and unreported catches are commonplace. The abuses uncovered by *The Guardian* are shocking: Men who had escaped from fishing boats told reporters about conditions that included 20-hour shifts, as well as beatings, torture, and execution-style killings.

An array of forces lies behind these systemic abuses. The sheer demand for seafood has turned catching, processing, and exporting fish into a vast and lucrative industry. In the United States alone, imports of edible fishery products in 2013 were valued at \$18 billion. In Thailand, meanwhile, the legislation that covers this industry is woefully outdated. (The country’s current fisheries law dates back to 1947.) Yet the Thai government has little incentive to tighten regulations either on fishing fleets or in processing plants. Seafood exports from Thailand, after all, generate about \$7 billion in annual earnings.

Finding workers to meet this demand is not easy. Thai government policies limit legal labor migration, and because of the high employment rate in Thailand, most citizens can find alternative work. As a result, Thai seafood suppliers rely extensively on laborers who enter the industry via trafficking from neighboring countries such as Cambodia and Burma. “Broadly speaking, you have 650,000 people working in the Thai seafood sector, and more than 90 percent of them are migrant workers,” says Steve Trent, cofounder of the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF), a UK-based advocacy organization. Complicating this problem is a history of cultural and political conflict between Thailand and the countries from which most of the migrant workers come. Because of this animosity, people in Thailand often have little concern for the fate of those workers. In some cases, Trent says, there’s a “darker side” to that attitude: “People see the abuse as justified.”

### THE CHALLENGE FOR BUSINESS

Companies that want to procure seafood products that are untainted by human rights abuse face big challenges. The seafood industry supply chain is enormously complex. Fish and shellfish are sometimes caught at sea and sometimes produced on farms. Processing facilities then buy those products—sometimes directly, sometimes through intermediaries. The processing facilities may operate as independent enterprises, or they may be owned by large seafood brands. Eventually, the processed seafood gets shipped across the world to restaurants, supermarkets, and other retailers.

Some buyers turn a blind eye to the human rights abuses or are even complicit in them. But most leading retailers are keenly aware of the legal and reputational risks that come with being implicated in supply chain abuses. “For several years, all the big supermarkets have factored these issues into their social responsibility approaches. But seafood is phenomenally complicated,” says Roger Plant, former head of the International Labour Organization’s special action program on forced labor. (Today Plant is developing strategy recommendations for Seafish, a body funded by the UK government that represents the seafood industry.)

A company can have an ethical sourcing policy, in other words, and still not know where to start in tracing the origin of the products that it buys. Huw Thomas, head of seafood procurement at Wm Morrison Supermarkets, a UK retail chain, describes the multiple steps that separate his company from the origins of a seafood product: “If you take the UK supply chain, there might be one step. But if you’re talking about international supply chains, there could be 8 or 9 [steps]. And if you’re talking about fishmeal going into farmed products, it could be 10 or more.”

If a company does manage to map out its network of suppliers, it must decide what to do when it encounters poor compliance with labor standards. Some advocates suggest that retailers should just stop buying from offending suppliers. But others point out that when an ethical buyer walks away from a supplier, less-scrupulous buyers are usually lining up to take its place. That problem only gets worse

↓ **KNEE DEEP:** Thai workers unload a shipment of so-called trash fish at the Port of Songkhla, Thailand.

as one move down the seafood supply chain. Last year, in the wake of the *Guardian* investigation, Kevin Grace—who was then group commercial director of Tesco—cited these circumstances to explain why his company was not planning to boycott Thai fishmeal suppliers: “It is more complex to reach down to lower levels of the supply chain, but we are determined to use our influence to do so.”<sup>3</sup>

In any case, even if a company wants to stop buying from tainted suppliers, it confronts another problem: a lack of alternatives. “If there was enough sustainable seafood that was traceable and we knew it had no labor issues, every buyer in America would purchase that seafood,” says Monica Jain, executive director of Manta Consulting, a firm that works with social sector organizations. “But there’s not enough, so they’re stuck.”

Few resources exist to help companies identify parts of the seafood supply chain where human rights abuses do occur. Suppliers in the industry, to be sure, have long been subject to other kinds of scrutiny. In response to growing consumer worries about the environmental impact of the fishing industry, organizations such as the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) have developed certification and labeling programs that identify products that come from

sustainable fisheries or processors. But those programs generally don’t provide information on the labor conditions associated with seafood products. “There’s not one human rights, fisherman-centric program out there,” says Maya Spaul, director of the Fair Trade USA Fisheries Program. In the apparel industry, Spaul notes, a workplace certification process called SA8000 provides for social audits in factories. “But in seafood, no one has created a program that holistically puts the person first,” she says.

### A STRATEGY FOR IMPACT

In its effort to combat modern slavery, HU did not initially set the seafood industry or Thailand in its sights. Indeed, the decision to target the Thai seafood industry followed an extended, deliberate process in which the foundation sought to discover areas where it could make a real impact.

In 2007, for example, HU created the Alliance to End Slavery and Trafficking (ATEST), an initiative that brought together a broad array of organizations that work in this area. It arose from a sense that many of those organizations had been working at cross-purposes. “We came up with that idea because we identified a gap,”

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRIS KELLY, COURTESY OF THE GUARDIAN



## CASE STUDY

says Marcum. Today HU helps fund member organizations' participation in ATEST initiatives, but otherwise the group functions independently. "The coalition operates under a set of protocols that afford it a lot of autonomy," says Melysa Sperber, director of ATEST.

As it continued its own work on the problem of human trafficking, HU started to focus on industrial supply chains. It also began to explore the idea that for-profit companies, rather than being a cause of that problem, might offer part of a solution. How, the foundation asked, could companies use their influence to improve working conditions throughout their supply chains? What kinds of interventions could help them play that role more effectively?

To answer those questions, HU in late 2008 embarked on a program of making small, exploratory grants that dealt with labor issues and corporate supply chain operations. One grant, for example, went to Verité, a nonprofit that develops tools that enable improved protections for workers. Other grantees included GoodWeave, a UK charity that works to end child-labor abuses in the rug industry, and Anti-Slavery International, a London-based NGO. This approach allowed HU to identify opportunities that it might not have encountered otherwise. "We were figuring out what we wanted to do," Bishop recalls. "Part of the reason for making those exploratory grants was to establish relationships with partners and to learn by doing."

At the same time, HU brought a strategic orientation to this exploratory process. The foundation grounded its funding decisions in an understanding of the ecosystem of forces that affect the practice of human trafficking—from policy changes to market forces. "We wanted to be as evidence-based as possible," says Marcum. "We wanted to understand the problem and take the narrative from conjecture to a fact-based conversation, so we could engage with companies, governments, and others."

HU's work at this stage reflected its overall philosophy of grantmaking. Significantly, the foundation does not accept unsolicited funding requests. Instead, it looks for partner organizations that share its goals and invites proposals from them. "We're at our best when we've analyzed a problem, we know what needs to be done, and we go out and find organizations that can do that," says Marcum. Mark Kramer, cofounder and managing director of the nonprofit consulting firm FSG, encourages grantmakers to follow a similar approach: "The question is not 'What's the most important issue?' but 'On which issue can your foundation have the greatest impact?'"

In 2008 and 2009, HU's work on the problem of human trafficking pivoted around exactly that question. "We were trying to figure out both where prevalence of slavery was highest and where the biggest opportunity for impact was," Marcum says. Ultimately, the foundation arrived at the decision to target the Thai seafood industry. Thailand, of course, is not the only offending country. From Bangladesh to Ecuador, poor labor conditions are prevalent throughout the seafood sector. Yet HU determined that by focusing narrowly on one country, it could set achievable goals. And once progress had been made in

Thailand, HU could take the tools and practices that it had developed there and apply them to other parts of the world.

Shawn MacDonald, director of programs and research at Verité, emphasizes the merits of this strategy. "By doubling down on one place, you can push it more," he says. "Thailand is so dominant, particularly around shrimp. If you manage to get companies to change their policies there, it will be easier to roll out in other countries because systems are in place."

### A FRAMEWORK FOR CHANGE

During its phase of exploratory grantmaking, HU arrived at an important insight: In working to combat slavery in the global seafood industry, the foundation would have the greatest impact if it focused on changing business practices.

An alternative would have been to fund nonprofits that work directly with migrant workers who labor on vessels and in shrimp-peeling shacks. But given the vast scale and fragmented nature of this industry, this approach lay beyond the resources of HU. "We could be heads down, working at a local level, freeing people one at a time," says Marcum. "But it's a very complex problem, and to focus on a single leverage point is probably unwise." To influence the bottom of the supply chain, the HU team needed to work with the top—with the companies that purchase seafood for Western markets from suppliers in countries such as Thailand. By changing the way that companies source their seafood, HU reasoned, it could improve the treatment of workers.

The idea of working with private sector companies to tackle human rights or labor rights problems is not new. In 2000, the US State Department and the UK Foreign Office brought together human rights groups, government agencies, and multinational corporations in an effort to end abuses by security forces that work in extractive industries. As a result of that effort, a large group of prominent companies signed on to a document called the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights. And in the 1990s, NGOs such as WWF (formerly the World Wildlife Fund) and the Rainforest Alliance started to form partnerships with companies in order to reduce the impact that industrial and commercial activity has on communities and the environment.

But for a grantmaker like HU, there were few if any precedents for adopting this model. To pursue a strategy that would rely heavily on collaboration with the private sector, therefore, HU needed to write its own guidebook.

In 2009, the HU team developed what it would come to call its Four-Step Framework. The framework sets forth the modes of operation that HU uses to execute any given strategy for social change: research, engagement, action, and confirmation. It governs everything from HU's choice of grantees to the foundation's method of collaboration with private-sector companies. HU designed the framework in order to structure its efforts to combat slavery in the seafood supply chain. But over time, it has become the model for all of the foundation's work of this kind. More recently, for example,

HU adopted the Four-Step Framework for its efforts to end labor abuses in the palm oil industry.

The first step in the framework—*research*—involves sponsoring investigations of human rights issues that the foundation seeks to address. Much of the exploratory grantmaking work that HU did in 2008 falls into this category. In some cases, the foundation supports academic research. In other cases, it works with business and NGO partners. For its work to stop abuses in the seafood supply chain, HU worked with Accenture, which published a report titled “Exploitative Labor Practices in the Global Shrimp Industry” in 2013, and with EJF, which issued a report called “The Hidden Cost: Human Rights Abuses in Thailand’s Shrimp Industry” that same year.

Another important type of research for HU is supply chain tracing. HU, for instance, funded a critical project in which Verité examined 25 commodities to identify those that were most heavily implicated in forced labor. In that project, Verité also explored key attributes of commodity supply chains—whether they are fragmented or concentrated, and whether a given commodity reaches consumers or business customers. It was this work that led HU to make the seafood industry a primary area of focus and to concentrate initially on the seafood industry in Thailand.

## THE USES OF ENGAGEMENT

In the second step of its framework—*engagement*—HU undertakes initiatives that increase awareness of an issue or build pressure on companies or governments to take action related to that issue. The foundation does so through a variety of means: shareholder activism, lawsuits, lobbying legislatures or government agencies, advocacy campaigns, and so on. Funding the *Guardian* investigations was a prime example of engagement. Bishop notes that in sponsoring that project, HU was able to catalyze a bigger investment on the part of *The Guardian*. Editors at the newspaper used HU funds to support its reporting on the Thai seafood industry. “But they put in many times as much of their own resource,” she says.

For *The Guardian*, the partnership with HU involved more than financial support. “We put terrific editors and reporters on this [investigation],” says Rachel White, director of philanthropic and strategic partnerships at *The Guardian*. “But what led to the success of the project was the partnership with HU and their willingness—without intruding on editorial independence—to highlight some things that they’re seeing that contribute to the story.” White notes that HU’s funding came with no strings attached, but she emphasizes that both parties in this kind of relationship must clearly define their roles and responsibilities. “There’s caution on all sides about maintaining that separation of ‘church’ and ‘state,’” she says.

HU also collaborates with other partners to raise awareness of human trafficking. It has funded efforts by EJF to produce reports and video segments that document abuses in the global seafood industry, for example. EJF, says Marcum, has “been incredibly influential” in creating “irrefutable” proof of those abuses.

Another form of engagement that HU practices is advocacy. Through its policy department, the foundation develops opinion articles that promote specific government policies, and it cultivates relationships with senior government officials. In addition to conducting its own advocacy work, HU works in collaboration with other organizations. “We can maximize impact with policy makers if we do things collectively,” says David Abramowitz, vice president for policy and government relations at HU. Helping to fund and staff ATEST is one way that HU promotes collaborative engagement. (ATEST played a lead role in pushing the US State Department to maintain a Tier 3 designation for Thailand in the 2014 TIP report.)

In its advocacy work, HU largely concentrates on engaging with the US government. “We’ve done some engagement with foreign governments, but it hasn’t been the focus of our efforts,” Abramowitz explains. “As a US-based philanthropic organization, our model has been to get the United States to push for things.” He notes that this type of public engagement can be particularly effective: “Thailand is much more likely to listen to the US government than to a US-based civil society organization.”

## STEPS TOWARD ACTION

Along with shining a light on the relationship between slave labor and the global seafood trade, HU aims to develop resources that will help companies make ethical purchasing decisions. That’s the impetus behind the third step in the HU framework: *action*. As part of this step, the foundation has funded efforts to increase the supply of seafood that is untainted by slave labor, as well as efforts to make it easier for companies to check the origins of seafood that they buy.

In 2013, for example, the foundation supported Fish 2.0, a competition initiative launched by Manta Consulting to help responsible companies expand by connecting them with potential investors. HU’s support, combined with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, made it possible to integrate social metrics into the Fish 2.0 competition. “The idea is to help grow the number of sustainable seafood businesses worldwide that are both profitable and socially and environmentally responsible,” says Jain.

HU also supports Project Issara, an initiative launched by Anti-Slavery International to tackle human trafficking in Southeast Asia. Project Issara offers assistance to migrant workers who experience labor abuses or who are vulnerable to trafficking. In addition, the project works with corporate buyers of seafood to initiate and enforce zero-tolerance policies on forced labor, and it works with suppliers to help them meet labor standards.

Another form of action supported by HU involves the development of tools that make information about supply chains more accessible and more transparent. The foundation provided a grant to the Sustainability Incubator, a Honolulu-based company, to fund a team of experts who created a software tool called the Labor Safe Screen. “That would never have happened without HU, because it took a lot of time and expertise,” says Katrina Nakamura, founder

ON HOLD: A Cambodian migrant worker finds a moment of rest at the Port of Songkhla, Thailand.

of the Sustainability Incubator. (Early this year, the company joined forces with Resiliensea.) With this tool, users can enter the name of a seafood product, and the tool will indicate which parts of their supply chain are at risk for poor working conditions.

In a more ambitious effort to sponsor the creation of tools for improved business practices—in the seafood industry and elsewhere—HU is now working to launch a labor rights impact investment fund that will help enterprises scale up effective solutions. “Grant funding can create interesting ideas,” says Marcum. “But to take them to the next level often requires taking an equity position and a board seat.”

### THE RIGHT BALANCE

The HU framework reflects the foundation’s complex relationship with private sector companies. In that relationship, activism and collaboration co-exist. HU’s partnership with *The Guardian* exemplifies a certain kind of activism. But the purpose of grants to organizations such as Verité, Fish 2.0, and the Sustainability Incubator is to enable collaboration with companies that want to change their supply chain operations. This approach, according to Marcum, derives from HU founder Pierre Omidyar’s belief in the power of the marketplace. “We believe that companies need to be held to account at times,” says Marcum. “But from the beginning, we’ve seen our role as one of being a bridge between companies and NGOs.”

In an approach that uses both carrots and sticks, the stick of activism still plays an important role. Activism, of course, can prompt companies to take action. After publication of the *Guardian* series, for example, several supermarkets moved to join Project Issara. “Campaigning is hugely important,” says Solitaire Townsend, cofounder of Futerra, a UK-based consultancy that advises companies on sustainability issues, including issues related to labor conditions. “Without shining that light, it can be difficult to get changes from executives.”

Yet the attitude at HU differs greatly from the one that prevailed in the nonprofit sector a couple of decades ago. In the 1990s, as the pace of globalization accelerated, antagonism between the social sector and the corporate sector increased as well. People at nonprofits and foundations were uneasy with the role that companies played in driving climate change, sweatshop conditions in factories, and other global problems. Since then, the relationship between civil society and the private sector has shifted dramatically. Many nonprofit leaders now believe that collaboration can be an effective way to bring about changes in corporate behavior. At organizations like HU, moreover, people have come to see that solving complex problems such as human rights abuse often requires private sector involvement.

Of course, the balance between activism and collaboration is not an easy one to strike. Activism that targets corporate brands, for instance, can backfire by making companies wary of even trying to adopt socially responsible practices. “You know that your best efforts will give you 80 percent compliance, which is better than everyone else, but you still have a 20 percent risk,” says Richard Stavis, president and CEO of Stavis Seafoods, a Boston-based seafood company that certifies its vendors. “It ends up being so dangerous to your reputation that you almost have to shy away from doing good work.”

HU leaders acknowledge this tension. The foundation has to be careful not to go too far in supporting activism, lest it forfeit the ability to work in certain countries or with certain corporations. Yet activism remains a core element of its grantmaking strategy. “Access is really important for us, but we also don’t want to be too soft,” Marcum says.

Many NGOs lack either the inclination or the capacity to act both as activists and as corporate partners. But those two types of organizations can work together. “There are these symbiotic relationships,” says Daniel Diermeier, dean of the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and an expert in the interaction of business, politics, and reputation management. “You have radical NGOs that keep up the pressure and moderate ones that work with companies to implement changes to business practices.” It’s a matter of blending “inside” and “outside” tactics, he adds.

HU, because it is a grantmaker, has the advantage of being able to harness the resources and capabilities of a wide range of nonprofits. In its work to eliminate human trafficking in the global seafood supply chain, HU can support grantees of both types—advocacy and media groups that work to raise awareness of labor abuses, and organizations



## SSIR ONLINE

Visit [ssireview.org](http://ssireview.org) to learn more about the effort to combat human rights abuse in the Thai seafood industry.

- ▶ “Sold to the Sea: Human Trafficking in Thailand’s Fishing Industry” video
- ▶ “How Workers Are Being Driven to Suicide” video

that engage pragmatically with companies to bring about changes in supply chain operations. “We fund across the spectrum—from groups like the International Labor Rights Forum, which are on the ‘name and shame’ side, to Verité, which has corporate partners,” Marcum says. From her perspective at *The Guardian*, White observes that HU is pursuing an efficient division of labor. “There’s an interplay between the role of good, independent journalism and the call to action that it creates,” she says. “So we can do a big story on [slavery in] Thailand, and Humanity United can pick it up and advocate for reforms.”

### THE QUEST FOR CONFIRMATION

The fourth step in HU’s framework is *confirmation*. The foundation recognizes the need to track whether working conditions in the seafood industry are actually improving. For HU, this is likely to prove the most challenging part of the process. Complex industrial supply chains are notoriously difficult to monitor. In the textile sector, for example, high-profile sweatshop scandals during the 1990s led to new codes of conduct and to the auditing of labor standards in supplier factories. Despite those reforms, however, serious problems persist in that industry—as the collapse of the Rana Plaza factory building in Bangladesh in April 2013 made all too clear.

Marcum acknowledges that for this phase of its work HU must develop new ways of operating. Tracking where each seafood product originates and verifying that human rights abuses played no part in bringing it to market will require different kinds of expertise and a different level of commitment. “Traceability, chain of custody, certification—all these things are very technical, and I don’t know if we have the in-house capability to figure out which solutions are going to be the most appropriate,” Marcum says.

Even so, there are systems and tools that can support confirmation, and HU will be pursuing some of them in the coming years. One option is to build on environmental certification platforms (such as the one that MSC oversees) by incorporating assessments of labor conditions into the certification process. Communications technology promises to make monitoring easier as well. “It allows for a constant stream of information from the workplace, as opposed to a single snapshot,” says Marcum. Using cell phones, for example, workers can anonymously report whether they have been paid or where they are encountering health and safety risks in their workplace.

### A WIDER NET

Even as HU continues its work to eliminate human trafficking and forced labor in the Thai seafood industry, the foundation is looking to apply what it has learned in that effort to other varieties of modern slavery. Much of that work will take place within a different organizational structure—one that will provide new sources of funding.

In 2013, HU joined with two other groups that have a special interest in combating slavery—the Legatum Foundation and the Walk Free Foundation—to launch the Freedom Fund. Each partner put \$10 million into the fund, and the fund supports initiatives

that aim to fight human trafficking across a broad range of industries and countries. HU and its partner foundations hope to attract \$100 million in additional funding by 2020. Now that HU and other organizations have significantly raised awareness of human trafficking, the time may be ripe to bring in “more sustainable sources of funding” to help confront that scourge, says Mia Newman, who leads HU’s seafood-related work at the Freedom Fund. “To date, we’ve felt quite lonely in the field,” she adds. “Other private donors have not been looking at this issue.”

As HU embarks on the fourth and most difficult part of its Four-Step Framework—the confirmation step—the foundation will need all of the help it can get. Marcum suggests that the added funding and increased human capital that the Freedom Fund can provide will enable HU to accelerate its work both in the seafood industry and in other areas. “The hope is that we can be even more ambitious if we’re able to work with other people,” he says. “We’re using our ideas and our strategic thinking, and we can amplify those [assets] with additional donor dollars.”

Other people, for their part, can glean lessons from what the HU team has achieved over the past half-decade. Lisa Rende Taylor, director of Project Issara, argues that HU’s targeted strategy for combating modern slavery—its decision to select one industry for its initial work—has largely paid off. “At first, people on the ground were wondering why they were focusing on this one thing, because a lot of the systemic issues that make labor trafficking a risk in seafood supply chains are ones that you see in any other industry,” she says. “But we’ve been able to go much further in addressing pervasive trafficking issues by using the seafood industry as an entry point.”

At the center of HU’s work in this area has been its dual commitment to activism and collaboration. Its investments in projects like the *Guardian* investigation have helped raise public awareness of serious human rights abuses in the global seafood industry, and as a result companies have recognized the need to take action. Through other grants, meanwhile, HU has promoted the creation of tools and practices that will help those companies to engage in ethical sourcing. “HU can take credit for ushering the issue into the seafood space in a way that the industry could handle,” says Nakamura. “Without HU, this issue would have hit the US and UK industries completely unaware and unprepared.” ■

### NOTES

- 1 Kate Hodal, Chris Kelly, and Felicity Lawrence, “Revealed: Asian Slave Labour Producing Prawns for Supermarkets in US, UK,” *The Guardian*, June 10, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2014/jun/10/supermarket-prawns-thailand-produced-slave-labour>; and Felicity Lawrence, “Thailand’s Seafood Industry: A Case of State-Sanctioned Slavery?” *The Guardian*, June 10, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2014/jun/10/thailand-seafood-industry-state-sanctioned-slavery>
- 2 US State Department, “Trafficking in Persons Report 2014,” June 2014, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/226844.pdf>
- 3 Kevin Grace, “Why We at Tesco Are Not Boycotting Thai Fishmeal Suppliers,” *The Guardian* website, June 20, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jun/20/tesco-boycotting-thai-fishmeal-farmers>