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**Geography for Schools**

**Lecture Series**

Blood Bricks: Untold Stories of Modern Slavery and Climate Change from Cambodia

Author: Professor Katherine Brickell

**Summary points from activity**

Explain what factors have led to modern slavery in Cambodian brick kilns.

* The research demonstrated that there is no singular factor causing modern slavery in Cambodian brick kilns. There are multiple factors at work, many of which are *structural*.
* **Climate change**. Cambodia is consistently identified as one of the most climate vulnerable countries in the world. This status derives not only from the heightened climate risks its population faces in the form of floods and droughts, but also the lack of capacity to adapt and respond. 70% of its rural populace rely on agriculture that is heavily sensitive to climate change. The impacts of repeated ecological shocks and climate change have a detrimental effect on production, and farmers lack state support for mitigation and adaptation to counter this.
* **Predatory microfinance** has taken hold rapidly in Cambodia and with scant regulation of the industry, household debt has spiralled. Farmers take on debt to pay for the costs of everyday life as well as buy pesticides and costly irrigation to farm in a changing climate.
* **Lack of affordable health services**. Illness can drive a family into serious debt to cover costs. There is no NHS in Cambodia, and citizens must pay for their own healthcare.
* **Corruption and weak rule of law** means that laws against exploitative labour have little impact on the ground.

Assess the different ways in which Blood Bricks demonstrate the economic and environmental interdependence of the contemporary world.

* In a small number of kilns, owners purchase pre-consumer garment waste to fuel their kilns. This waste comes from Phnom Penh’s garment industry. The garment waste connects the lives of debt-bonded brick workers to global capital and UK consumers, this time in the form of well-known fashion retailers. Labels found among garment fragments on brick kilns included those of British firms (e.g. Marks and Spencer’s and George at Asda).
* Clothing commonly contains toxic chemicals including chlorine bleach, formaldehyde, and ammonia. Heavy metals, PVC, and resins are also commonly involved in dyeing and printing processes. Garment burning leads to streams of thick, black, tar-like liquid oozing from the rear of kilns. Workers and their families report numerous respiratory health problems believed to be linked to the polluted atmospheric conditions. The gaseous emissions from kilns also have the potential to contribute to climate change.

Evaluate why climate change is a human rights issue.

* The research showed that some Cambodian farmers who are unable to earn a living from agriculture as a consequence of climate change, are compelled to work in brick kilns. In Cambodia, they are sites of contemporary forms of slavery. Modern slavery is a crime and a fundamental human rights violation.
* As the effects of climate change become more severe over time, this is likely to increase the risks of modern slavery as people are driven to migrate away from rural areas and work under exploitative labour conditions.

“*Climate change is a human rights issue not only because its devastating impacts affect the enjoyment of human rights, but also because it is a man-made phenomenon which can be mitigated by governments.*”

* Kumi Naidoo, Secretary General of Amnesty International, 2019