CLARISSA
Child Labour Action Research Innovation in South & South Eastern Asia

WORKING PAPER 8

SUPPLY CHAINS, THE INFORMAL ECONOMY, AND THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOUR

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ABOUT THIS WORKING PAPER

As a cohort of people, 'children in work' have become critical to the everyday functioning of diverse supply chain systems. This Working Paper considers diverse commodity chains (leather, waste, recycling and sex) to explore the business realities that generate child labour in its worst forms. A review of the literature finds that occurrence of the worst forms of child labour (WFCL) in supply chain systems is contingent on the organising logics and strategies adopted by actors in both the formal and informal economies. Piecing together the available evidence, the paper hypothesises that a supply chain system is sensitive to the use of WFCL when downward pressure to take on business risk cannot be matched by the economic resilience to absorb that risk. Emergencies and persistent stressors may increase risk and reduce resilience, shifting norms and behaviour. There is a need for further work to learn from business owners and workers in the informal economy.

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The Child Labour: Action-Research-Innovation in South and South-Eastern Asia (CLARISSA) is a consortium of organisations committed to building a participatory evidence base and generating innovative solutions to the worst forms of child labour in Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Nepal.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AES adult entertainment sector

CLARISSA Child Labour: Action-Research-Innovation in South and South-Eastern Asia

IDS Institute of Development Studies

ILO International Labour Organization

NGO non-governmental organisation

SDG Sustainable Development Goal

SME small- and medium-sized enterprise

UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund

WFCL worst forms of child labour

Section 1:

INTRODUCTION

1 INTRODUCTION

When children go to work, they usually serve a supply chain of some description. When looking across all the varied sectors in which children work, one can observe the diverse, dynamic, and evolving nature of supply chains. They present as complex systems that require an understanding of the interconnections and interdependencies that combine and recombine to generate opportunities for children to work. Very little about the socioeconomic reality of supply chains is linear, despite the imagery that the term 'chains' conjures in our mind's eye.

Through scoping studies in leather supply chains in Bangladesh, the fishing and waste recycling sectors in Myanmar, and the adult entertainment sector in Nepal, the Child Labour: Action-Research-Innovation in South and South-Eastern Asia (CLARISSA) programme has begun to operate within the complex socioeconomic realities of supply chains. This has resulted in:

- **a broader understanding of supply chains to include 'human chains' – chains of supply where the child is the commodity being traded;**
- **a specific interest in the worst forms of child labour (WFCL), with an understanding that the push and pull factors which generate child labour in its worst forms may be distinct from the dynamics influencing child labour more generally;**
- **a high-level theory of change, which connects incidence of WFCL to informal spheres of supply chains.**

This Working Paper pieces together available evidence about supply chains, the informal economy, and WFCL to map potential links and pathways between business realities and experiences and the prevalence of WFCL. It conceptualises a more detailed theory of change in the form of a systems map to inform the programme's thematic research agenda.

1.1 An interest in the supply chain system

As with the study of other complex systems, it is the nature of the supply chain system – its structure and dynamics – that we want to understand. Essentially, what can we learn about the way business happens in supply chains that teaches us something about WFCL?

Table 1 shows the key focal areas of the CLARISSA programme, which informed the scoping for this Working Paper. We see that the sectors and the nature of the work are very different. But we also infer that the different supply chains share similar elements: they are made up of tangible things – markets, factories, places of work, transport hubs, shops, products – connected by intangible things like history, worldviews, context, and culture. The supply chains that trade leather are very distinct from the human chains that use children in the trade of sex, but they may also share aspects of their structure (e.g. social norms, places of work) and dynamics (e.g. market prices, power asymmetries) that make a supply chain system susceptible to WFCL. These less visible forces that characterise the supply chain system may be similar across different commodity lines, including human chains.

This Working Paper uses the diverse supply chains of the CLARISSA programme as a basis for exploring the structure and dynamics of supply chain systems. It is based on a literature review of these commodity lines, predominantly within South Asia and Southeast Asia. Given the limited number of studies that have looked at how business is done in supply chains from the perspective of WFCL, the review occasionally refers to research that has taken place in other regions and with different commodities, such as the processing of sugar cane in Latin America. This is especially the case when research and practice had something to say about how supply chain systems have evolved into socioeconomic entities that use WFCL.

1.2 A focus on the informal economy

In its scoping studies in Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Nepal, the CLARISSA programme discovered that WFCL are often 'hidden' from view in informal workplaces, illegal sectors, and dangerous work practices. This evolved a research focus towards the micro and small-scale entrepreneurs who operate largely within the informal economy, but who intersect with global supply chains and supply domestic markets.

Combining definitions from the International Labour Organization (ILO) and academia, Lines *et al*. (2016) suggest that economic informality can be described by five core concepts:

- **the informal economy – which covers all enterprises, workers, and activities operating outside of legal regulatory frameworks;**

Table 1: Worst forms of child labour in the CLARISSA programme

	Worst forms of child labour in the CLARISSA programme		
Type of WFCL	Conditional WFCL – work activities and conditions	Conditional WFCL – work conditions	Unconditional and conditional WFCL
Location	Bangladesh	Myanmar	Nepal
Supply chain	Leather	Fish and waste	Human
Work activity	Tanning, liming, fleshing, dehairing	Dry fish sorting, grading, drying fish	Dance bars, restaurants, hotels
	Dying and drying	Fishing among migrant workers	Sex work
	Cutting of leather and threads	Waste-pickers	Information technology (IT)-based sex work
	Fixing sole with the upper – glue and chemicals		
	Cleaning and salting		
	Sewing		

Source: Author's own.

- **the informal sector – which refers to production and employment in unregistered businesses;**
- **informal institutions – socially shared rules about how to do business, which fall outside the regulatory ambit of the state;**
- **informal markets – organisational arenas where labour, goods or services are traded outside of formal frameworks;**
- **informal employment – which is employment outside of labour protection regulations, either in formal or informal enterprises.**

From the CLARISSA scoping studies, we add one further concept to explore economic informality and WFCL in this Working Paper:

- **informal access to work – through kin relationships and labour intermediaries.**

1.3 A focus on child labour in its worst forms

The ILO's definition of WFCL sets international standards. This definition includes slavery, debt bondage, compulsory labour, armed conflict, child prostitution, hazardous labour, illicit activities, and any other work likely to damage the health, safety, and morals of children (Avis 2017). According to the ILO (ILO-IPEC 2013), hazardous work by children includes:

- **exposure to physical, psychological or sexual abuse;**
- **work underground, underwater, in confined spaces or at dangerous heights;**
- **use of dangerous machinery, equipment or tools, or heavy loads;**
- **use of hazardous substances, temperatures, noise levels or vibrations;**
- **long hours, or night work.**

Reviewing the list for the purposes of this Working Paper, we interpret that child labour becomes one of the worst forms according to the **type/sector of work** (e.g. trading sex), the **work activity** (e.g. use of dangerous equipment, heavy loads), the **conditions of the work** (e.g. long hours, work underground, exposure to abuse), and the **impact of the work** (e.g. damaging health) (see Figure 1).

What the ILO definition makes clear is that child labour can automatically become WFCL depending on the

sector. The sex industry, illicit industries, and armed conflict are recognised as unconditionally bad for children.

However, the definition also makes clear that it is possible for employment in any sector to become WFCL by virtue of its precarious nature. In these instances, activities, conditions, and health impacts are what determine whether child labour becomes a worst form. In these instances, WFCL is conditional on the characteristics of the work.

1.4 Research questions

The overarching goals of this Working Paper are to identify **where** we have evidence on supply chains, the informal economy, and WFCL in South and Southeast Asia and **what** the evidence says.

In a review of the literature, I have sought to answer the following questions:

- **What supply chain dynamics influence how and where WFCL exists within them?**
- **How do we identify whether a supply chain is at risk of engaging WFCL?**
- **What is known about supply chain interventions which are effective in reducing WFCL?**

I discuss what the literature says about the key dynamics, interdependencies, and enablers that organise the priorities and behaviours of stakeholders in the informal sphere of supply chain systems. I bring together the findings in a more detailed theory of change in the discussion, and suggest future research opportunities.

Figure 1: Factors determining when child labour becomes one of the worst forms

Source: Author's own.

Section 2:

METHODS

2 METHODS

The research informing this Working Paper was a desk-based exercise carried out in November 2020.

2.1 Research activities

Research activities comprised the following:

1 **Identification and review of key documents and reports** from the CLARISSA scoping phase, including evidence-based reports, theories of change, workshop outputs, and supply chain mapping documents.

2 **A rapid review of existing literature**, including Boolean searches of academic studies on JSTOR, ScienceDirect and Google Scholar, using the search terms 'child labour', 'Asia', 'supply chain', and 'informal'. Following a screening of 308 abstracts from the JSTOR and ScienceDirect searches, and a review of the first five pages of Google Scholar searches, 129 articles were identified for abstract review. This review process led to the identification of circa 60 articles for full review. Sometimes these articles referenced other studies and research worthy of follow-up.

   To capture evidence from the key organisations, alliances, and networks working on WFCL, a rapid search of key terms was entered into Google. This included data reports by ReliefWeb, a scan of UNICEF's MegaMap on Child Well-being Interventions (UNICEF n.d.), and a search of child slavery and Asia in the Slavery Research Library on The Freedom Fund's website (The Freedom Fund n.d.).

3 **Meetings and key interviews** to direct the literature review from field experience. I joined a number of meetings with the CLARISSA programme, and held two separate meetings with Mr A K M Maksud and Peggy Hermann, who have worked on supply chain mapping in the leather sector in Bangladesh. These sessions explored and 'tested' the relevance of emerging research findings to direct thinking.

2.2 Limitations

This was a rapid review of existing literature. It goes broader rather than deep, seeking to identify some of the core dynamics of supply chains that cause WFCL, which are similar across different supply chains and self-similar at different scales within a supply chain system.

While the author was mindful of the focal areas of the CLARISSA programme (the leather sector in Bangladesh, the waste and recycling sectors in Myanmar, the fishing sector in Myanmar, and the adult entertainment sector in Nepal), the papers cited in this review are skewed towards understanding the garments and leather sectors in Bangladesh, (1) because more has been written about them than the other sectors in Nepal and Myanmar; and (2) because the focus of this paper is on supply chain dynamics, and the leather sector in Bangladesh represents an established but highly complex network of manufacturing and production.

In some cases, the arguments may feel under-nuanced from the perspective of a particular supply chain context (e.g. urban poverty) or set of actors (e.g. girls). While this paper is focused on identifying attributes and dynamics that are similar across different supply chain contexts, it is my view that supply chains are rooted in place – and thus all the cultural, historical, and social complexities of a locale. They do not float, untethered; they reside in and around the neighbourhoods and homes that children grow up in. Where this Working Paper stops, conversations within the CLARISSA programme continue, especially to identify interlinkages with neighbourhood dynamics and social norms that explain pathways in and out of WFCL within specific contexts.

Section 3:

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT WFCL AND THE INFORMAL ECONOMY

3 WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT WFCL AND THE INFORMAL ECONOMY

3.1 Unseen instances of WFCL

Much of WFCL in the informal economy remains unseen in global and national data sets. In 2018 the ILO estimated that 61 per cent of the world's workers earn their living in the informal economy, amounting to 2 billion workers worldwide (ILO 2018b). Despite the vastness of the informal economy and the central role it plays in the livelihoods of billions of households and families, work informality is not used as a category for data collection and data analysis on WFCL.

Table 1 (Section 1.1) identified how ILO definitions suggest that WFCL can be 'unconditional' according to the sector (e.g. sex trade) or a specific activity (e.g. dancing in an unregulated bar), but it can also be 'conditional' on the work activity, the conditions of work, and the impact of the work. These definitional boundaries are particularly important when it comes to identifying WFCL in the informal economy. Researchers have observed that work in the informal economy is often more precarious, stressful, and physically impactful than work in the formal economy (Benach and Muntaner 2007; Muntaner *et al.* 2010). Some of this work may not present as hazardous without a much deeper understanding of children's experience of work (Prentice *et al*. 2018).

3.2 The need for spatial and temporal analyses

Researchers have found that precarious work is unequally distributed across global supply chains (Benach and Muntaner 2007). It is more likely to be done by women, lower-skilled, and subordinate workers, defined by structural social positions such as class, ethnicity, and immigrant status (Muntaner *et al*. 2010) – and, in the case of child labour, age.

A review paper looking at work and health inequalities highlights a number of studies showing that child labourers are exposed to behavioural, psychosocial, and physio-pathological pathways leading to physical and mental health problems (Muntaner *et al*. 2010).

Some of the pathways from work to health are additive, so it is not just the fact that children are working, but that they experience hazardous working conditions (e.g. exposure to chemicals, extreme weather, repetitive work, heavy workloads, dangerous equipment) **in addition** to stressful working environments, where they are coerced, subject to physical force, restricted in their movement, and live in fear (Muntaner *et al*. 2010). Field data from the CLARISSA programme have shown how working in a tea shop or fish market – which does not by itself equate to sectors or activities that constitute WFCL – becomes child labour in its worst forms if children are working long hours in a hostile workplace setting without breaks (Constant *et al*. 2020).

Other studies have shown correlations between child labour and long-term development issues (Fassa 2003), although it is difficult to disentangle the effects of child labour from the effects associated with poverty (Muntaner *et al*. 2010). This is because the long-term physiological repercussions do not appear in current statistics on child labour and they are not captured by health-care professionals when an adult presents with a health condition (Eijkemans, Fassa and Facchin 2005). Very recent research systematically monitoring working conditions and health among sugar cane workers found that heavy workloads, combined with sun and heat exposure over long hours, are related to high rates of kidney disease among men in young adulthood (Glaser *et al*. 2020). Ill health forces the next generation of young workers into the fields. This emerging evidence has direct implications for children working in hot conditions stretching and drying skins in the leather supply chain and potentially for children working in fishing villages in Myanmar. From a conceptual and methodological perspective, the Glaser *et al*. (2020) study illustrates how the sector, conditions, activities, and health impacts can all interact to make work especially harmful to children.

Following a review of health and safety in the garments sector in Bangladesh, Prentice *et al*. (2018) argue that we need to think temporally and spatially about the health and wellbeing of workers. While this study focused on adult workers, its recommendations for a more granular and experiential exploration of precarious work are relevant. Extrapolated to WFCL, the authors argue for:

- **a temporal understanding of worker health and wellbeing to understand how garment work fits into and shapes the prospects of a child's life trajectory;**
- **a spatial understanding of worker health and wellbeing informed by local meanings of 'decent work' and a child's own experiences and interpretations of what threatens their health, and what may enhance their wellbeing.**

This is supported by Muntaner *et al*.'s (2010) argument that we cannot understand the demand pattern of child labour without constructing detailed spatial and temporal analyses.

New methodologies are being developed to increase the sophistication of data systems to identify issues in supply chains. Within supply chain management, the legal concept of 'chain of custody' is being used to trace the provenance of the products we buy (ISEAL Alliance 2016). It creates a chronological documentation of all the people who have come into contact with an item, including when and where. Similarly, academics have designed a methodology to trace accidents and deaths associated with specific products (Alsamawi *et al*. 2017). However, neither methodology has been applied to tracing incidences of WFCL in global value chains, especially as they extend into the informal economy.

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Section 4:

MAKING SENSE OF SUPPLY CHAIN SYSTEMS

4 MAKING SENSE OF SUPPLY CHAIN SYSTEMS

Supply chain systems have evolved into complex, multi-scale networks of producers, suppliers, and buyers, which span formal and informal economies (ILO *et al*. 2019). Even within smaller supply chain systems where children are the commodity, the human chains can be highly complex, characterised by diverse networks of family, friends, business owners, intermediaries, brokers, money-lenders, and local power-holders.

Arguably, this increased complexity has made supply chains invisible to the individual actors who play critical roles within the system. Large global brands struggle for control over production in the more remote tiers of their supply chains (Quak 2020), especially when it comes to monitoring working conditions (Alsamawi *et al*. 2017). And the child in work has little influence over their work conditions, even though as a cohort of people 'children in work' have unwittingly become critical to the everyday functioning of supply chain systems. The effect is that people are powerless because they are unable to 'see' the dynamics of the system that structure their choices and their points of influence.

This section explores what we can learn about how supply chain systems function and interact with formal and informal economies to improve our understanding of WFCL.

4.1 Two distinct organising logics

A review of the literature reveals that formal and informal economies have different organising logics. This means that the tangible and intangible elements of supply chains – like places of work and attitudes to work – are negotiated by different rules and governance systems, depending on whether a business activity takes place in the formal or informal economy.

Table 2 compares the organising logics of formal and informal economies within supply chain systems. Lead firms operate in the formal economy, using international standards, partnership agreements, legally binding contracts, and formal rules of engagement to influence the behaviour of suppliers (Nadvi 2008; Soundararanjan and Brown 2016).

Table 2: Comparing the organising logics of formal and informal economies within supply chain systems

Formal sphere	Informal sphere
Communication in written agreements	Face-to-face communication
Professional relationships	Personal relationships
Institutional trust	Personal trust
Legally binding contracts	Verbal agreements
Loans from banks	Credit from friends and money-lenders
Vertical dependencies	Mutual dependencies
Global standards	Locally defined norms

Source: Author's own.

By contrast, the organising logic of the informal economy is entirely different (Prentice *et al*. 2018; Soundararanjan and Brown 2016). It is an area of supply chain systems typically negotiated by face-to-face communication, socially defined norms, horizontal relations (e.g. family or friends), mutual dependencies, and personal trust (Etzold *et al*. 2009). Extensions of credit run through these value chains, creating mutual dependencies and coordinating activities (see Section 5.3). To complicate the picture, ownership of small businesses can be diluted across many individuals, as in the adult entertainment sector in Nepal.

Trust is important for business across a supply chain system, but it is more personal in the informal economy, affected by relational attributes and connections between small and unregistered businesses. Trust in social networks can determine who gets to do business and who gets to work. For example, systemic trust tethered to the cultural festival Eid-ul-Azha reduces power asymmetries in market entry in the leather sector, resulting in an increase of leather intermediaries brokering trade between businesses (Strasser 2015). In its scoping studies, the CLARISSA programme has found that employers hire children through extended kinship networks, including through parents, neighbours, and peer networks (Constant *et al*. 2020). Often, the decision to engage children is about helping out extended family by finding employment for a child who has migrated to the city from the village.

The informality with which people access work in the informal economy has much in common with research on social capital and social networks in the formal economy. This shows that who we are connected to can structure the opportunities available to us (Putnam 2000; Woolcock 2001; Halpern 2009). Social network analyses also suggest that social networks act as containers of customs and social norms, which determine how people relate to and behave with one another. They function as a basis for shared identity and sources of support and advice (Gilchrist 2000, 2001; Gilchrist and Kyprianou 2011; Morris and Gilchrist 2012). Given the power of 'social proof' to validate behaviour in social networks (Cialdini 2003, 2009), the sorts of advice and support exchanged between actors may affect the extent to which WFCL becomes normalised within communities and neighbourhoods.

Ultimately, this means that two distinct governance regimes interact to shape use of children as pivotal actors in supply chain systems (Nadvi 2008). To paraphrase Soundararanjan and Brown (2016), the attentional, cognitive, emotional, and motivational drivers of behaviour are not homogenously experienced by buyers, suppliers, subcontractors, and micro-entrepreneurs alike. In particular, the organising logic of the informal economy places greater emphasis on the role of social networks and relational systems for understanding how and where WFCL show up in supply chains.

4.2 Important interdependencies

In research and policy, the informal and formal economies are typically presented as two independent systems, with businesses 'upgrading' and workers 'graduating' from one to the other. For example, the involvement of economies in supply chain systems is presented as 'a necessary step for transitioning economies' (Amin 2016) and, to the individual workers, 'a liberating experience and pathway to social mobility' (Prentice *et al*. 2018). As Prentice *et al*. (2018) are astute to point out, these geo-political narratives are neither accurate nor liberating.

In reality, formal economies depend on informal economic activity (Marx 2018). They interact as 'open' systems where behaviour in one part of the supply chain system (e.g. a lead firm) affects behaviour in another part (e.g. a micro-entrepreneur) and vice versa. This literature review explored these interdependencies from the perspective of WFCL. It reveals how the formal economy has an indirect role in creating opportunities for child labour in supply chain systems through stigma, intentional informalisation, and proximity.

Workers in the sex trade are typically working in unsafe environments in the informal economy because the trade of sex is not sanctioned socially or legally, despite considerable consumer demand (Jana *et al*. 2014). Waste-pickers are part of the informal economy because their work is stigmatised by society (WIEGO 2020), and their contribution to waste management in neighbourhoods is not integrated into supply chain management (Holm 2020). For example, solid waste management within leather tanneries in Bangladesh has been intentionally informalised, resulting in the use of practices harmful to public health (Strasser 2015).

Operating outside the spotlight of regulations and standards, labour in the informal economy is cheaper to pay for, but it is also more precarious, stressful, and physically impactful than work in the formal economy (Benach and Muntaner 2007; Muntaner *et al*. 2010). Studies have shown how employment in the informal

economy – including the labour-intensive garment work in factories, workshops, and homes – depletes working bodies with long-term repercussions (Prentice *et al*. 2018). It is not easy for children engaged in WFCL to ascend to work in the formal sector as they grow older (Basu and Tzannatos 2003), suggesting that entry into WFCL exacerbates poverty and reduces social mobility (ILO *et al*. 2019). As an illustration, the CLARISSA scoping research found that in the adult entertainment sector (AES) in Nepal:

> *Most of the minors working in AES do not have adequate skills and other experience so they are left with no other options than to continue working in AES. They start their work from AES, get trapped and rarely get other employment opportunities.* (Lamsel, Sharma and Bhujel 2020: 13)

Decisions about how to do business in the formal economy directly increase vulnerabilities. A recent review of modern slavery in supply chains found that forests, reefs, coastal environments, and protected areas are destroyed by people labouring informally. The depletion of natural environments then increases the level of vulnerability within enslaved communities to further precarious work (Gold, Trautrims and Trodd 2015).

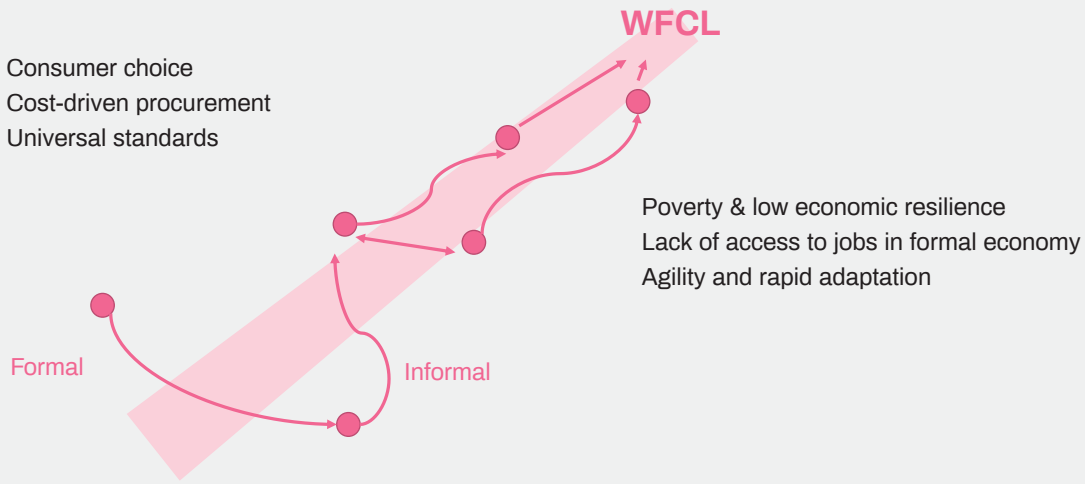
In some cases, it is the proximity of the informal economy to the formal economy that may itself be a driver of WFCL. For example, the CLARISSA programme is learning that within the adult entertainment sector in Kathmandu, children move in and out of legal and illegal work. This means that children's pathways into WFCL are non-linear and highly diverse. There can be movement in and out of employment in the formal and the informal economies, and sometimes children work concurrently in both. For example, children may work in dance bars and casinos, which are part of the formal regulated sector, but within the same building or very close by there is an opportunity to trade sex.

Similarly, the CLARISSA programme is finding that the formal and informal economies are also closely bound together in the leather sector in Bangladesh. One factory may operate within the formal economy to engage with domestic and international buyers, but also employ children in the informal economy to meet their contractual obligations to suppliers in the formal economy. The use of children in the informal economy through subcontracting is not limited to 'upstream' industries (e.g. growing crops, cattle-rearing); it also intersects with 'downstream' suppliers and processors close to final production. For example, CLARISSA's work mapping the leather supply chain identified 107 processing steps, 103 of which involving children in the manufacture of leather gloves, shoes, moneybags, jackets and belts (see Tables 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 in Moktadir and Bashar 2021). Researchers observed that children's involvement was spread across the supply chain, rather than being clustered around specific supply chain activities. WFCL were found in mechanical processes (e.g. cattle-rearing, drying, selling, slaughtering, bone-crushing, transporting crust leather), chemical processes (e.g. washing of raw skin hide, preserving skin hides), and supporting processes (e.g. transporting and trading wet blue leather).

Often, it is the same people organising work in both economies (Strasser 2015). The places of work – e.g. a leather processing factory or dance club – can also overlap. In these cases, the proximity of the formal to the informal makes it relatively easy for children to access more precarious work.

Figure 2 depicts formal and informal economies as open, interacting systems in the production of WFCL. It is a graphical representation of the literature just mentioned to emphasise the point that WFCL is not solely an informal economy issue, even if this is where it is most frequently found in supply chain systems. In fact, decisions in the formal sector are directly implicated. Figure 2 hypothesises that the decision taken by a business or a household to engage with WFCL is the result of a series of interacting forces residing in the formal and the informal economies, which all serve to narrow choices.

Figure 2: Formal and informal economies as open, interacting systems in the production of the worst forms of child labour



Source: Author's own.

For example, decisions about what is desirable in the formal economy (e.g. consumer choice) are often dependent on the capabilities of the informal economy (e.g. adaptation of processing techniques to meet demand) and vice versa. The dynamics influencing actors in the informal economy (e.g. poverty, low economic resilience) are reinforced by ways of doing business and approaching issues like WFCL in the formal economy (e.g. cost-driven procurement, the use of universal standards), just as the dynamics influencing the shape of work in the informal economy have roots in growing inequalities and lack of access to jobs in the formal economy (Muntaner *et al*. 2010). Interdependencies between formal and informal economies are important dynamics producing and reproducing WFCL in supply chain systems, which need to be understood more deeply if we are to reduce use of children.

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Section 5:

STRATEGIES AND BEHAVIOURS IN SUPPLY CHAIN SYSTEMS

5 STRATEGIES AND BEHAVIOURS IN SUPPLY CHAIN SYSTEMS

This section looks at the everyday functioning of supply chain systems, exploring how business gets done. The literature review identified four strategies and behaviours which make it easier for WFCL to be used in supply chain systems: the transfer of risk; the practice of subcontracting; the extension of credit; and rapid rates of adaptation in the informal sector.

5.1 The transfer of risk

In 1985, Michael Porter introduced the idea of a value chain with his best-seller, *Competitive Advantage: Creating and Sustaining Superior Performance*. The book identified the human resources (HR), procurement, technological development, and infrastructure activities that organisations could leverage to minimise risk and drive competitive advantage in their supply chains. Following this evolution of thought, it was no longer competitive for a business to have a supply chain; a company had to find a way to add value to raw materials as those raw materials progressed through production, manufacturing, and related processes into a finished product (Horner and Nadvi 2017).

As the economy became more globalised, trade more polycentric, and supply chains more layered (*ibid.*), the concept of the global value chain was developed to coordinate inter-regional actions and relationships across producers, middlemen, suppliers, and lead firms. In search for value added, extractive business practices in supply chains have become commonplace. It is considered both acceptable – and desirable – to outsource negative impacts on human wellbeing and environmental wellbeing to other people and geographies. As Martin Rich (2020: 22) puts it, in *The Business of Wellbeing*: 'The more you outsource externalities, the better you do financially in today's system. If companies outsource all harm you never have to account/pay for it.'

In all this outsourcing, supply chains have become a conduit for transferring risk from one business to another (Quak 2020). As global value chains establish linkages with hubs of source materials and manufacturing processes, risk is transferred into local economies through increasingly complex, diverse, dynamic, and evolving supply chains (Koberg and Longoni 2019). Through the manufacture of products for larger suppliers and enterprises and through the recycling of waste materials (WIEGO 2015; Egels-Zanden and Merk 2014; Horner and Nadvi 2017), small business entities become part of much larger supply chain systems. As such, micro-businesses, single households, family networks, and children can become key actors in supply chain systems.

Table 3 summarises what the literature says about the key pressures facing micro and small enterprises interacting with global value chains and their strategies for managing the risk (Strasser 2015; Egels-Zanden and Merk 2014; Lamsel *et al*. 2020). It shows how small-scale entrepreneurs are dealing with squeezed price points, long payment periods, and volatile order sizes (Strasser 2015). Small-scale entrepreneurs often live on the edge of poverty. They are often independent actors with limited access to safe credit, who have little bargaining power about the sorts of contracts they accept (Egels-Zanden and Merk 2014). And because the work they do is low-skilled, competition to win work is high, increasing the pressure people are under to take whatever work they can get, even if contractual demands are unreasonable.

An interesting observation in the literature is that market expansion does not transmit greater security along the supply chain. As the fishing trade has grown in South Asia, researchers have documented how businesses have reduced operating costs by enlisting children (Chantavanich, Laodumrongchai and Stringer 2015). A survey of 595 deckhands in 2012 from Thailand, Cambodia, and Myanmar working in four coastal provinces in Thailand found that 33 of those surveyed were aged 17 or younger, and 7 of those were younger than 15 years of age (Chantavanich *et al*. 2015). The majority were from Myanmar and just over two-thirds reported working somewhere between 17 and 24 hours a day. So, as demand at the consumer end of global value chains increases, working conditions do not necessarily improve. The trend can be the other way: the more markets expand, the greater the risk they transmit into local economies.

Table 3: Pressures facing small-scale entrepreneurs in supply chain systems, and their strategies for managing risk

Pressure on small-scale entrepreneurs	Risk management strategy employed
Low price points	Drive costs down by subcontracting/outsourcing
Long payment periods	Reduce/minimise costs as much as possible, including by subcontracting and adapting processes
Volatile order sizes	Link to a local lead firm to stabilise demand Subcontract piecemeal labour to peers and less-skilled manufacturers, including children
Limited access to safe credit	Establish lines of credit Access business loans (sometimes via brokers)
Low capacity and skill	Prioritise risky but capital-providing transactions, including use of new processes
Poverty-related stress	Coerce workers to work for longer Access household credit/loans

Source: Author's own.

5.2 The practice of subcontracting

Subcontracting is the process by which a business outsources manufacturing, processing or servicing. It is commonplace in supply chain management practice, but under-explored in research on WFCL.

Table 3 (in Section 5.1) highlighted how small-scale entrepreneurs often subcontract to deal with low-cost margins and volatility in order sizes. The practice of subcontracting is widely assumed to increase the use of WFCL in supply chains, because auditors do not reach all the informal places of work in their assessments. The practice also protects small-scale entrepreneurs from the pressures of global buyers and standard-setting organisations (Strasser 2015).

The scoping phase of CLARISSA has reported that lead international firms in the leather and garments value chains threaten to move supply to other countries if local manufacturers cannot meet the price point (Maksud pers. comm. 2020). Suppliers do not want to lose contracts, so they take the order. For example, a domestic supplier may take an order for 5 million trousers, even though the government-registered and monitored factory can only make 1 million within the allotted time frame. The domestic supplier will then subcontract the remaining 4 million trousers to micro and small entrepreneurs working in unregulated workplaces. In interviews with lead domestic suppliers in the leather supply chain in Bangladesh, domestic suppliers have explained that they cannot terminate contracts with domestic suppliers using WFCL because only 6 per cent of their production is in-house (Strasser 2015). To terminate contracts with producers employing children would expose the business to too much risk because it would mean that they would not be able to meet the suppliers' order requirements.

The practice of subcontracting also introduces space for intermediaries to assume 'knowledge roles' in supply chains. For example, Strasser (2015) found that business entities known as 'buying houses' or 'buying agents' who procure locally to sell into export markets may prevent small-scale entrepreneurs from exchanging information with foreign buyers, so each party effectively remains captive to the intermediary.

When researchers mapped the information flows between buyers, suppliers, and manufacturers in a supply chain for making upper leather for shoes, they depicted information flowing one way from international or local buyers to the manufacturer, who then sent information to chemical

suppliers, wholesalers, and raw hides suppliers (Moktadir and Bashar forthcoming). There are no direct information flows between buyers and processors and manufacturers subcontracted by the lead manufacturing firm.

Intermediaries, and the lack of information flowing around a supply chain system, are consequences of subcontracting, but are also important mechanisms for obscuring and perpetuating the use of WFCL between businesses and between buyers and suppliers.

5.3 The extension of credit

Ethnographic studies of trade in the informal economy have highlighted the role of credit and debt in enabling business to take place. With limited access to safe credit (e.g. loans from banks), micro-entrepreneurs and small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) establish lines of credit to enable trade to happen (see Table 3, Section 5.1). These loans are not without risk and the associated stress that accompanies living and trading by them.

Haugen (2017: 321–2) calls supply chains structured by lines of credit 'beholden value chains', explaining that:

> *A strong sense of vulnerability prevails among manufacturers, suppliers and traders, and is increased by the lack of enforceable quality standards and volatile macro-economic environments.*

Credit lines enable a business transaction, but in so doing, they transmit risk across product stages and geographical space. In her ethnographic study of jewellery supply chains between China and Ghana, Haugen (2017) found that at any one time, all actors in the supply chain can be owed money. The sequence of credit begins with Ghanaian traders asking Chinese suppliers to defer payments until the traders have resold some of the goods they order. The suppliers defer payments to manufacturers, who delay salaries to people working in the factories. In other supply chain systems, it is intermediaries who facilitate market transactions with credit. Research mapping beef, sheep, and goat food systems in Nairobi found that cattle transactions are often mediated by brokers, who purchase animals on credit and sell them at a higher price (Alarcon *et al*. 2016).

In general terms, it seems that credit is preferable to loans because interest rates are not applied. Extensions of credit are promises of payment, which are delayed a matter of hours or days to bridge the timing of future income (Constant *et al*. 2020). This highly personal and relational way of doing business is not so commonplace among business-to-business transactions in the formal economy (Battersby, Marshak and Mngqibisa 2016). But credit can switch to debt in cases where individuals, households or businesses cannot make payments (*ibid.*).

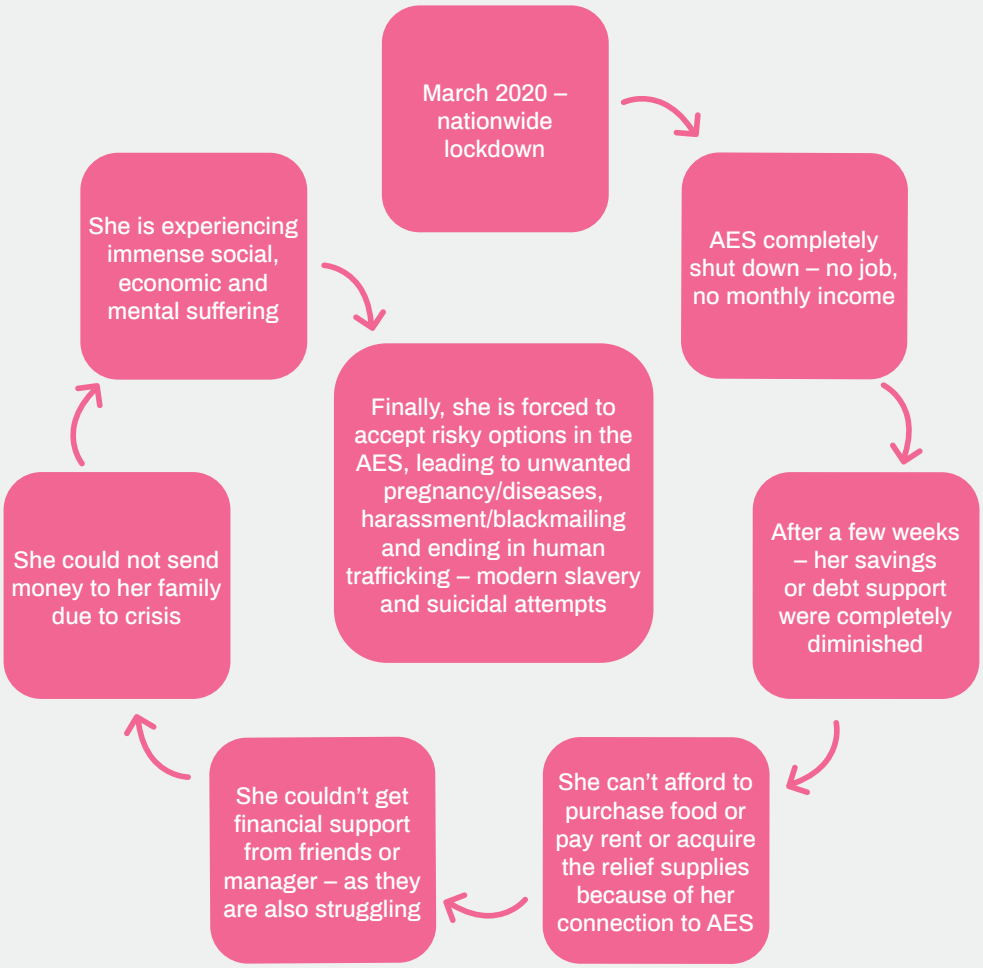
CLARISSA researchers have mapped the typical pathway for a young woman from COVID-triggered lockdown to the decision to get work in the AES in Nepal (see Figure 3). Running through this narrative is the limited savings and credit options available to self-employed people in the informal economy. When savings get depleted or access to safe credit is exhausted, individuals are forced to try out more risky options. This pattern may be particularly pronounced in sectors that use indebted labour like fishing in rural communities (Molland 2019). In Myanmar, interviewees of the CLARISSA programme declared that 'all families have debts' and the existence of debt in conjunction with an emergency – such as a death, injury or ill health in the family – co-existed with WFCL (Constant *et al*. 2020). Other research has found that parents pledge themselves or their children against loans for undefined lengths of time when they cannot pay back loans. These arrangements can be difficult to identify in supply chain systems because they get masked under familiar business mechanisms like loans and contracts (Gold *et al*. 2015).

5.4 Rapid rates of adaptation in the informal sector

'Autonomous adaptation' is a term that has been applied to the informal economy to describe local action by individuals, households, groups, and enterprises in response to constraints and opportunities they face (Seballos n.d). Business practices in the informal economy can be habitual (e.g. the way things have always been done to short-cut transaction costs) but they can also be spontaneous responses to the labour demands that global supply chains create (Etzold *et al*. 2009).

Within the adult entertainment sector in Nepal, the increasing demand for the engagement of children in sexual services has been related to a growing urban population engaging in a more consumer-based economy (Lamsal *et al*. 2020). During the COVID-19 lockdowns, venues in the sector closed, but services soon resumed virtually through IT-based sex work. In Bangladesh, supply chain analysis is revealing four or five locally adapted methods for every stage of leather processing.

Figure 3: Mapping a typical pathway of a young woman into the adult entertainment sector (AES) as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic



Source: © Malla (2020).

Sometimes it is a lack of technical capacity to respond to international conditions that necessitates more informal arrangements for staying cost-effective (von Hagen and Alvarez 2012).

Taking an asset-based view of the informal economy, we can see that in many significant ways it is more diverse and flexible than the formal economy. It is entrepreneurial in nature, and it does not have hoops to jump through to pivot and re-think strategy. It relies on tacit knowledge transfer, fuelled by people's energy and commitments to one another, unsupported by industry standards and legal requirements. This is not to overlook how difficult it is to work in the informal economy, but it recognises the incredible resilience and ingenuity that exists within and between the 2 billion workers who earn a living by it.

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Section 6:

EMERGENCIES, SUPPLY CHAINS, AND RESILIENCE

6 EMERGENCIES, SUPPLY CHAINS, AND RESILIENCE

During the research for this Working Paper, the world was living through COVID-19, which caused large-scale disruption of supply chain systems and job losses. The ILO has estimated that 195 million jobs globally will cease to exist as a result of the pandemic (Clarke 2020). COVID-19 has affected business and consumer demand for products, and fluctuations in demand are transferred into reduced production in supplier networks. As Susan Lund, partner at McKinsey Global Institute, recently reflected:

> *We've spent 25 years creating these incredibly complicated, complex global supply chains. And they were designed for cost and efficiency, but without really a thought to what could go wrong along the way.*
> (Lund 2020)

As a result of COVID-19, lead firms are investing in supply chain recovery and economists are thinking more proactively about supply chain risk and resilience in a post-COVID world. With the combination of trade tensions, natural disasters, cyberattacks, and health pandemics, industry experts predict that lead firms in supply chains will expect to see disruption to their production lines for 1–2 months every 3–4 years (*ibid.*).

The ramifications of COVID-19 on supply chain systems are yet to be properly researched, but shocks of this kind are likely to have implications for WFCL. Initial research seems to point to a concurrent increase in pressure within households and within business units. At the household level, researchers are reporting a 30 per cent increase in domestic violence since the COVID-19 outbreak (Meester and Ooijens 2020). Within business units, CLARISSA's situational analysis in Nepal is reporting that owners of AES establishments are suffering from stress and anxiety (Lamsel *et al.* 2020). News reports suggest that exports of leather goods declined by 22 per cent in Bangladesh. As a result, tanneries closed and businesses targeted children as cheap labour (Afroze 2020).

A 2016 review by the Child Protection Working Group raised concerns that we do not know enough about how emergencies act as triggers that push supply chain systems and households towards WFCL. For example, flooding in Cambodia and a tsunami in Sri Lanka did not have a significant impact on WFCL, whereas recurrent emergencies and economic shocks have resulted in use of WFCL in other cases (Enyon 2018). These findings suggest that the effects of emergencies are context-specific and path-dependent. Enyon (2018) emphasises the importance of understanding the process of living through an extreme event, writing that 'there is little information available on responses during different phases of an emergency' (*ibid.*: 16).

The psychological literature suggests that emergencies affect an individual's physiology (e.g. the surge of adrenaline and cortisol) and decision-making. The sphere of our concern narrows around the immediate threat and we adopt a simpler mode of information processing to help focus on the critical issues (Steiner, Nussbaumer and Albert n.d.; Kowalski-Trakofler, Vaught and Scharf 2003). The more stressed and fatigued we become, the poorer the decisions we make. We are unable to restore balance and instead we lose our capacity to restore and remain resilient (Mariotti 2015).

Within communities, emergencies also trigger different behaviour. Social support is thought to moderate the impacts of vulnerability by conferring resilience to stress (Ozbay *et al.* 2007). In socio-ecological terms, social safety nets help us to sustain and reform the capacities to absorb, anticipate, and adapt to disasters (Haworth *et al.* 2016). However, it is possible that when an emergency becomes chronic or when the scale of an emergency is so large as to reduce the economic resilience of every household in a community, a different set of common belief systems about survival and support are triggered. What is considered an acceptable strategy within a household or business unit may shift as actors are exposed to different levels of risk.

Resilience analysis and measurement has recently become interested in the existence of thresholds, and the influence of crossing thresholds for systems shift (Resilience Alliance and Santa Fe Institute 2004). Applied to the issue of WFCL, a resilience threshold would be conceptualised as a line which, once people are living over it, means they are much less likely to resort to WFCL in the future. Resilience thresholds have been used to take a multidimensional approach to identifying escape from poverty (Scott, Hillier and Underhill 2014) alongside resilience to shocks and stressors (d'Errico *et al.* 2019). In these examples, economists are seeking to identify critical resilience thresholds below which households are unable to absorb negative effects of a changing climate.

While a conversation about risk and resilience is happening among lead firms and their consultants in the formal economy, this review could not find many examples of work underway to support small-scale

entrepreneurs to forecast future supply chain shocks and opportunities. Take, as one example, the growing momentum around circular economy approaches to assist countries – and large corporate entities – to meet requirements under the Paris Agreement protocols.

A circular economy approach will radically transform the way we do business in supply chain systems globally and locally (Fletcher and Tham 2019; World Economic Forum 2014). Within the leather sector, lead firms know that more than 90 per cent of their ecological problem exists in their supply chains. As a response, they are forecasting widespread technological innovation that will perfect leathers made from vegetables and food waste streams (Goldsworthy, Earley and Politowicz 2019). Tanneries as they currently exist in Bangladesh will become obsolete (Outrage and Optimism 2020), at least for the export market. The risk is that the supply chain system is overhauled to meet environmental imperatives, without considering the lived experiences of adults and children working in the informal economy.

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Section 7:

REDUCING THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOUR IN THE INFORMAL ECONOMY

7 REDUCING THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOUR IN THE INFORMAL ECONOMY

CLARISSA's current theory of change communicates the intention to focus on collaborative action between parents and guardians, children, supply chain stakeholders, and national and local stakeholders (Apgar and Snijder 2020). Some of the action research inquiries will be grounded in neighbourhoods and some will work with and in supply chains. The aim of country-specific engagement plans is to decrease the number of children in WFCL. This section will link this starting theory of change to existing approaches to eradicating WFCL, exploring what can be learnt about sensitive intervention points for change.

7.1 Standards and compliance approaches vs locally derived solutions

There is a creative tension in the literature about the relative value of universal standards and locally derived solutions for tackling complex supply chain issues such as WFCL. Evidence does not suggest that standards and compliance approaches are effective at shifting business practices in the informal economy. For example, we know very little about how standards impact actors – especially workers, but also small-scale entrepreneurs – further down the supply chain (Nadvi 2008). And this knowledge gap is significant given that target 8 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) calls for an end to child labour in all its forms by 2025, including small enterprises and family businesses (ILO 2018a).

In his study of the leather sector in Bangladesh, Strasser (2015) found that a social enterprise adopted different standards for its foreign customers compared to its domestic ones. They subjected export producers to more monitoring against the Fairtrade standards and ignored their responsibility under this standard to empower poor domestic producers. The CLARISSA scoping studies identified that there are approximately 700 inspectors for 7 million economic establishments in the leather sector in Bangladesh, which equates to 1 inspector for every 10,000 businesses. Labour inspectorate funding in Nepal was $6,000 in 2016 and $4,000 in 2017 (Refworld 2017). This quantitative lens illustrates the challenges facing standards and compliance approaches in effecting change.

Within the sugar cane industry, the non-governmental organisation (NGO) La Isla Network has worked with the San Ingenio rum factory in Nicaragua for over a decade. They have found that change is very hard to come by using auditors (Glaser pers. comm. 2020) because – as other studies have found – they rarely act independently of their sponsor's interests and audits are rarely unannounced (Crane *et al.* 2019). Even when the factory is alerted to cases of WFCL, the fines issued to recruiters did not fundamentally change behaviour. To limit the extent to which children are hidden in chains of subcontractors, the factory has moved to a model where it has a direct contract with every sugar-cane grower. This has shortened the supply chain, removed a role for intermediaries, and reversed informalisation of the supply side.

The power of lead firms to organise and structure value chains has been a core assumption in global value chain approaches, but it ignores the variety of network forms that govern how knowledge is transferred and how decisions are made (Nadvi 2008; Horner and Nadvi 2017). As explored in Section 4, the informal economy has a different governing logic to the formal economy. Where legally binding, written agreements between parties define the way businesses interact in the formal economy, the use of international standards – abstracted from people and context – makes sense. International standards culturally 'fit' the legal and financial frameworks that organisations in the formal economy use to do business together. However, in the informal economy, formality is subservient to the relational and the particularities of local context. The implication is that approaches that work to enable change in the formal economy may be limited in their scope to galvanise energy and collective action in the informal economy.

In 2006, Nike eventually pulled its production from the football supply chain in Sialkot, Pakistan, following a decade-long multi-stakeholder programme of intervention on child labour. One reason cited for the lack of an effective form of governance was the failure of global actors and local producers to take ownership of the child labour standards agenda (Nadvi 2008). Efforts to shift the traditional organisation of Shea traders in Burkina Faso towards direct sourcing to meet international standards have found the complex hierarchical structure of intermediaries difficult to change over time (Venturini *et al.* 2016). In a similar vein, a study of informal sector recycling in developing and transition countries suggests that the integration of informal waste recycling practices into formal waste management systems cannot be based on a 'universal' model; local context and conditions need to be considered (Ezeah, Fazakerley and Roberts 2013).

Meta studies of factory audits suggest that 'health and safety' is one area where codes and monitoring have made a measurable difference to people's working lives, but ethnographers who have worked in the garment industry across South Asia for many years argue that regulations fail to take account of the full spectrum of pressures that come from working under globalised production regimes (Prentice *et al.* 2018). For example, fast fashion requires that workers labour for long hours at a fast pace, while low wages mean that workers struggle to buy nutritious food for themselves and their families. International standards may be more effective when considered as part of more systemic approaches to tackling child labour, including tackling some of the root causes of poor working conditions (Locke, Qin and Brause 2006) and wider economic forces within the global economy.

7.2 Working with business units and entrepreneurs

The CLARISSA programme's evidence-mapping in Myanmar found few examples of industry interventions to prevent WFCL focused on the supply chain (Yunus 2020), which was also the case for this literature review.

In particular, the review was interested to find examples of interventions seeking to make adjustments to the business context and wider socioeconomic environment that push supply chains towards sensitive regions for WFCL. This might look like a systems-level intervention where new socioeconomic architectures are built around small-scale entrepreneurs so that the pressures and shocks that supply chain systems present are minimised. Or it might look like a supply chain-level intervention to strengthen economic resilience to supply chain triggers of WFCL.

The Green Economy Coalition (Mohamed 2020) is one organisation proactively looking at how small enterprises operating in the informal economy can get a stake in the transition. Through a dialogues programme in seven countries, the Coalition is looking to co-create a new financial and policy architecture around small and informal enterprises, which supports self-organisation, looks at financing of small businesses, and strengthens capacities to adapt.

From his experience coaching entrepreneurs to move away from use of WFCL, Chris Pienaar recommends working across the supply chain to effect change within it (Pienaar pers. comm. 2020). So, within a given supply chain, identify those players who are passionate about eradicating WFCL and take one lead international or domestic buyer, a couple of medium-sized players (e.g. lead supplier and manufacturer), and four or five micro-entrepreneurs. An action-research process then begins to explore what favourable business environments would look like for all actors to thrive in their engagement with global supply chains, without relying on WFCL.

Interventions that focus on specific workplaces and workers' conditions tend to take place with adults, not children. For example, interventions to improve relations between employee and employer have ameliorated the effects of precarious work (Benach and Muntaner 2007), but the ethics and implications of applying this approach to child labour have not been explored. This perhaps reflects the difficult normative terrain that surrounds child labour. Difficulties notwithstanding, children in precarious work comprise a significant cohort of actors in supply chain systems, yet they have no collective voice and no representation.

7.3 Area-based approaches

In Section 3, the literature suggested the importance of understanding the spatial dimensions of WFCL in order to understand the dynamics influencing its use. Area-based approaches are considered good practice in tackling WFCL (ILO 2018a; Ribhu and Pearson 2008) because they are thought to:

- **go beyond the supply chain to address all the push and pull factors driving WFCL within a given geographical area;**
- **prevent children moving from one supply chain to another, or slipping into more hidden forms of child labour, which correlate with a worsening of work conditions and poorer life outcomes (e.g. health);**
- **engage and coordinate the multiple stakeholders directly implicated in and affected by WFCL, including government officials, industry bodies, international buyers, domestic brands, employers, recruiters, traffickers, worker organisations, children, parents, and civil society.**

Early evidence from the CLARISSA programme seems to show that children move between supply chains in an effort to find work – but that available work options are structured by the neighbourhoods they live in. An obvious risk of area-based approaches is that the supply chain – or the most problematic aspects within them – moves

location; in that case, the effect is displacement rather than overall reduction of WFCL.

The strongest place-based initiative found by this review was community-run. Over a 10-year period (1992–2011), numbers of sexually exploited children reduced from 25 per cent to 2 per cent in India's Sonagachi red-light district (Jana *et al.* 2014). The median age of sex workers also increased from 22 to 28 years. The programme combined implementation of self-regulatory boards and community vigilance with microcredit and educational programmes for children of sex workers. The community-based organisation represented more than 65,000 workers distributed over 49 branch committees covering an estimated 85 per cent of sex workers in West Bengal. The systematic screening of newcomers into the red-light area was far more effective than police identification, and the timely case management allowed the community-based initiative to distinguish between children, unwilling adults, and willing adults. Connection with services allowed a person's age to be identified where it was disputed. The use of routine screening is based on learnt experience from the domestic violence movement: it removes the stigma associated with trading sex and creates safe spaces for children to access support when they are ready to.

From a business perspective, it is interesting to note that these screening initiatives are not about removing the sex trade altogether; they are about reducing the number of children and unwilling adults involved within the supply chain. In this instance, there was less direct engagement with business owners of establishments promoting the trade of sex and more of a focus on creating a structure and a process that allows sex workers to make the district child-safe.

Section 8:

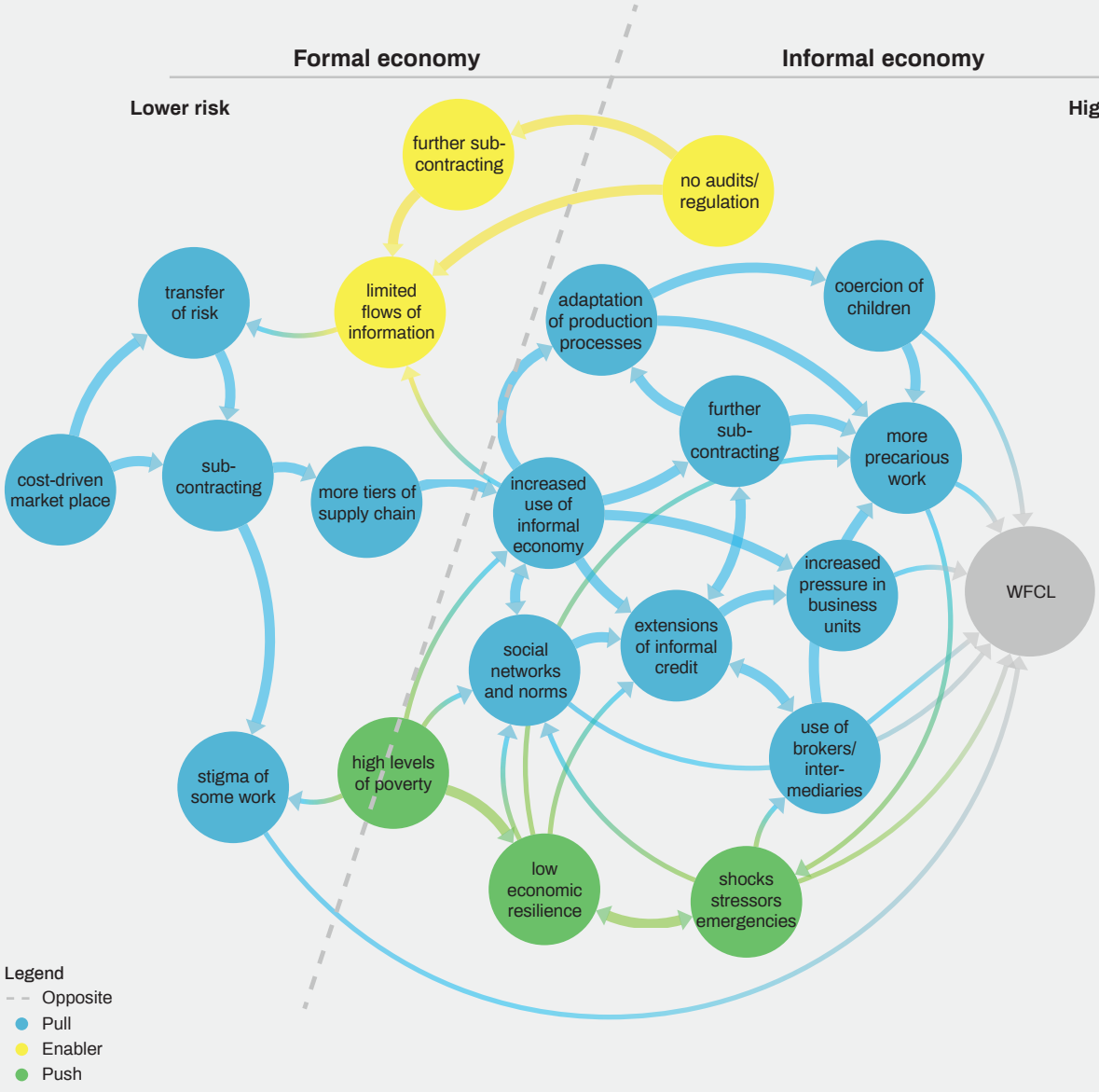
DISCUSSION

8 DISCUSSION

This Working Paper has pieced together fragmented evidence from supply chain systems that enable the manufacture of products, the management of waste, and the trade of human beings in Asia. It shows that however complex supply chain systems have become, the occurrence of WFCL is neither random, nor occurring in isolation. It may show up more frequently in the informal spheres of the economy, but its presence is path-dependent and contingent on the dynamics and strategies employed by actors to manage risk, in both the informal and formal economies.

Using the evidence presented in this Working Paper, Figure 4 conceptualises a more detailed theory of change about supply chains, the informal economy, and WFCL. It is presented as a systems map of the pull factors (blue circles), push factors (green circles) and enabling factors (yellow circles) that generate WFCL in supply chain systems. The evidence in this Working Paper relates most directly to the pull factors. These can be thought of

Figure 4: A systems map of the pull factors, push factors, and enabling factors of the worst forms of child labour in supply chain systems



Source: Author's own, using **kumu.io**.

as core functioning dynamics of supply chain systems that are similar across different sectors, and which raise the risk profile of any supply chain systems generating WFCL. But these pull factors do not operate as a 'closed' system, impervious to reinforcing dynamics in the socioeconomic system that push people towards WFCL. So, where push factors (green circles) and enabling factors (yellow circles) seemed particularly important for augmenting or sustaining the pull dynamics in the supply chain and informal economy, links are included in the map. Arrows in the map assume relationships between elements. One-way arrows hypothesise causality – for example, where one behaviour leads to another. Where causality is not clear, or where the research suggests a bi-directional relationship, links between elements have arrows at both ends.

In the systems map, the formal economy is presented as being on a continuum with the informal economy. This refers to the findings of Section 4, which show that the presentation of formal and informal economies as two independent 'closed' systems in policy and practice is limited for tackling WFCL. The dichotomy is useful up until a certain point: both economies have different organising logics, and these organising logics create different starting points for identifying the dynamics underpinning use of WFCL in each. But the literature also reveals how a dichotomy obscures our understanding of interdependencies, and specifically how behaviour in one part of the supply chain system (e.g. a lead firm) affects behaviour in another part of the system (e.g. a micro-entrepreneur), and vice versa.

The assignment of a risk profile to the formal economy (lower risk) and informal economy (higher risk) in the systems map represents a key perspective offered in Section 5: that supply chains are a conduit for transferring risk to the least resilient actors in the system. Supply chains are not 'safe' socioeconomic entities for small-scale entrepreneurs, households, and families. This raises the possibility that WFCL shows up in supply chains when the downward pressure to take on risk cannot be matched by the economic resilience to absorb that risk. At this point, regions of a supply chain become more sensitive to the use of WFCL.

The key strategies and behaviours in supply chains that push the system towards use of WFCL are discussed in Section 5 and represented in the central dynamics of the wider systems map. It illustrates how more tiers of a supply chain lead to increased use of the informal economy, or work is subcontracted to vulnerable individuals because it is stigmatised. Once a supply chain is operating in the informal economy, business transactions are governed by a different organising logic, which is highly networked and relational.

To manage the risk that is channelled through these business-to-business arrangements, three main strategies are used: further subcontracting; extensions of informal credit; and adaptation of production processes. Extensions of informal credit often accompany the subcontracting process and co-exist with the use of brokers and intermediaries. It is not clear from the literature whether the subcontracting and extensions of credit structure the existence of intermediaries, or whether the intermediaries create the conditions for subcontracting and extensions of credit. For the moment, the systems map shows this relationship as bi-directional.

Figure 4 suggests that the business strategies are a response to risk, and they propagate further business pressure. It is stressful when managing lots of smaller suppliers to meet a contract or when at risk of defaulting on credit agreements (Haugen 2017). In some cases, the coercion of children to work longer hours or to work with harmful chemicals may present as the only way to get business done.

The conceptual links between strategies to cope with supply chain risks and WFCL could be strengthened by studies that take an ethnographic and social dialogue approach to evidence the causal pathways between supply chain design, risk and pressures, strategies among small-scale entrepreneurs, and WFCL. An informal economy perspective – which learns from the business realities and perspectives of owners and workers in the informal economy – should be a central tenet of this research agenda. Referring back to some of the data gaps identified in Sections 3 and 4, an informal economy perspective would be strengthened by studies that can analyse interrelationships spatially (e.g. urban neighbourhood context) and relationally (e.g. structure and dynamics of social networks).

Section 6 hypothesises that emergency situations elevate risk and reduce resilience in supply chain systems. While the specific links between emergencies and supply chain strategies (e.g. subcontracting, lines of credit, adaptation) have not been explicitly researched, recent complexity economics research into the ecology of leverage suggests that credit and debt amplify the implications of shocks (e.g. sudden price drops, loss of work) on behaviour. Debt can force actions to be taken, and the higher the debt ratio, the quicker actors adopt destabilising strategies like

selling assets (Thurner, Farmer and Geanakoplos 2011; Poledna *et al.* 2014).

What it has not been possible to identify from the existing literature or the systems map presented here is how socioeconomic and cultural risks and vulnerabilities combine with market pressures and other exogenous factors (e.g. natural disasters, migration) to influence WFCL. It is possible that different market pressures and household pressures, from the minor to the major (e.g. from change in price of raw materials to ill health or collapsed supply chain) have different implications for use of WFCL as an adaptive response, depending on the residual resilience and/or latent potential within the individual, household or community to respond without needing to engage children. For example, we do not have economic analysis to explore the types of credit and the level of credit thresholds that augment the risk of WFCL in supply chain systems.

By calculating resilience thresholds, we can inform and enable dialogue between small-scale entrepreneurs and lead international and domestic firms about what needs to change, in terms of the design of supply chains, for the informal economy to reduce prevalence of WFCL. This may include financial mechanisms, such as insurance and assurances, to de-risk supply chains. The data could be used to promote greater upward accountability in supply chains. This way, aspirations around WFCL are not singularly crafted by businesses and NGOs residing in the formal economy, but reflect a reciprocal appreciation of the assets and opportunities that reside in the formal and informal spheres of the supply chain to tackle WFCL.

The systems map (Figure 4) points to three enabling factors which sustain use of WFCL in supply chain systems: poor-quality data; limited flows of information; and no audits or regulation. Where we cannot 'see' WFCL or the dynamics augmenting its use, we cannot concretise the problem, and this prevents change from happening. Circling back to the overview provided in Section 3, the lack of sophistication in the data collected on WFCL goes to the heart of debates about 'Whose reality counts?' in the design and accountability of our socioeconomic systems (Chambers 2012). Supply chain management is the home of logistics: companies need to know what stock they have, on what shelf, in which factory, at any given time of the day. These capabilities sit at odds with large and persistent data gaps on incidence of WFCL. If a research agenda on informal economy perspectives and resilience thresholds could be accompanied by spatial and trend data on WFCL, then all actors in the system – businesses, governments, NGOs, families – will be in a much stronger position to identify hotspots and track progress.

As a final reflection, it is worth noting that this review found few examples of studies and programme documents writing confidently about how to make change happen. The sector is good at presenting models and approaches to articulate the ultimate goal of eradicating WFCL but its analysis of the problem context and how to operate within it is less sophisticated. As an example, a multi-stakeholder approach is generally considered good practice, but it is difficult to glean from reports what has been learnt about how a diverse array of actors and dialogues should be combined in a process of change. And there is very little evidence of practitioners working with power asymmetries or in ways that proactively engage with resistance.

Given the emphasis within the CLARISSA programme on action research, and the significant attention to detail in design and in process learning, it is well positioned to map out the key design elements, points of process, and causal pathways that reduce WFCL in a supply chain system. This will be a valuable contribution to the existing literature and should help accelerate progress towards achieving SDG 8, which calls for an end to child labour in all its forms by 2025, including within small enterprises and family businesses.

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CLARISSA works by co-developing with stakeholders practical options for children to avoid engagement in the worst forms of child labour in Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Nepal.

The participatory processes which underpin the programme are designed to generate innovation from the ground which can sustainably improve the lives of children and their families.

The programme's outputs are similarly co-designed and collaboratively produced to enhance local ownership of the knowledge, and to ensure that our research uptake and engagement strategy is rooted in the direct experience of the people most affected on the ground.