



**Learning from life story collection and
analysis with children who work in the
worst forms of child labour in Nepal**

CLARISSA LEARNING NOTE 2

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Table of Contents

Contents	Page No.
Learning Summary	2
Building rapport and trust with children	2
Applying child-centered tools and approaches	2
Facilitating participatory processes during a time of disruption	3
Working with external researchers	3
List of Abbreviations	4
Introduction	5
Safeguarding and Ethics	5
Compensation for the participation of children	5
COVID-19	5
Life story collection and Analysis	6
1. Life story collection	6
1.1 Planning and Preparation phase:.....	6
2. Implementation phase	6
2.1 Life story collection	6
2.2 Story Analysis.....	9
3. Key learning about the methodology and process of implementation	10
3.1 Building rapport and trust with children.....	10
3.2 Applying child-centered tools and approaches.....	11
3.3 Facilitating participatory processes during a time of disruption.....	12
3.4 Working with External Researchers.....	12

Learning Summary

The CLARISSA Nepal team collected and analysed 400 life stories of children and young people engaged in or affected by the worst forms of child labour (WFCL), particularly in the “Adult Entertainment” sector in Nepal, which includes children working in Dohoris (restaurants playing folk music), dance bars, spa-massage parlours, khaja ghars (tea/snack shop) and guest houses. Stories were also collected from children in CLARISSA’s focus neighbourhoods, children in this category include street connected children and those working in transportation, party palaces, domestic labour and construction sites. Of the 400 stories collected, 350 were collected by adult researchers and 50 were collected by children themselves. This note shares our learning through the process, around the following themes:

Building rapport and trust with children

Rapport building with community members and gatekeepers is an important first step in gaining trust to engage children in programme activities. Initially, interactions with organisations working with children, as well as with key individuals or ‘gatekeepers’ such as schoolteachers; focal persons/active community members; parents and other relatives are critical for the team to develop understanding about the children’s context and also to share information about the programme with the various community members.

The process of community rapport building needed a different approach for children working in the AES and for children in AES neighbourhoods (but not working in the AES). Because children engaged in the AES sector are highly mobile and not located in one community, rapport building with individuals was needed. Whereas children in the focus neighbourhoods but not working in the AES, especially those living in squatter settlements, were more likely to belong to one particular community, this enabled the team to deliver more group rapport building activities.

Trust does not develop immediately. Multiple engagements are required - trust building is a process that evolves through time. Children expressed different forms and levels of trust in the CLARISSA programme and processes at multiple stages of delivery.

Applying child-centered tools and approaches

Well planned and prepared child-friendly methods, tools and approaches are crucial for facilitators to engage with children in an equitable way.

The integration of feedback mechanisms throughout life story collection processes (individual feedback and analysis through group reflections) supported the creation of safe spaces for participating children to express their thoughts and feelings. This also helped CLARISSA facilitators to ascertain the level of understanding and engagement of children, and as such to adapt programme methodologies as needed.

A flexible approach to the timing of activities and venue selection, to suit the needs of participating children, contributes to creating safe spaces and making the participatory process effective.

During story collection, facilitators encountered different forms of trauma expressed by children. Working with a service provider to receive psychosocial first aid (PFA) training was an effective way to build team skills to adopt standard assessments and to support children, including through referrals. Programme staff psychologically affected by children’s trauma accessing their own psychosocial support is also essential.

Facilitating participatory processes during a time of disruption

Employing a flexible and adaptative approach to programme delivery was essential, as the COVID –19 context required the shifting and adjustment of operational plans. Moving capacity-building on-line, for example through virtual trainings and webinars, enabled the team in Nepal to stay connected to the programme as a whole, and supported knowledge and skills growth that could then be applied in the field.

Continuous engagement with children, even when COVID disrupted programme activities, was essential, and ensured children’s ongoing interest in engaging with the programme.

Working with external researchers

Working with external researchers helped with meeting story collection targets and efficiency. However, at times CLARISSA team members needed to undertake repeated coaching of external researchers in order to ensure consistency in programme approaches and processes. Bringing in a new researcher in the middle of the life story collection process requires their orientation, and therefore takes up a significant amount of staff time. It is also important to note that outcomes can vary if the programme process / methodology is not fully owned by all involved.

The full cost of human resources for, or management of, PAR process is challenging to forecast unless detailed field-level planning is conducted. Given unpredictable changes in context, such as the COVID 19 pandemic, ongoing reflection and learning about resource needs is needed to support adaptive management.

List of Abbreviations

AAR	After Action Review
AES	Adult Entertainment Sector
CH	Child Hope
CSC	Consortium for Street Children
CWISH	Children-Women in Social Service and Human Rights
CLARISSA	Child Labour: Action-Research-Innovation in South and South-Eastern Asia
FCDO	UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
LSC&A	Life story collection and analysis
NAW	Narrative analysis workshop
PAR	Participatory action research
PSA	Psychosocial first aid
Tdh	Terre des hommes Fondation
VOC	Voice of Children
WFCL	Worst Forms of Child Labour
WHO	World Health Organisation

Introduction

Child Labour: Action-Research-Innovation in South and South-Eastern Asia ([CLARISSA](#)) is a consortium programme funded by the UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and is led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in collaboration with Terre des hommes Foundation (Tdh), Child Hope (CH) and the Consortium for Street Children (CSC).. In-country partners in Nepal are Voice of Children (VOC) part of the CH family, Children-Women in Social Service and Human Rights (CWISH) part of the CSC network, and Tdh Nepal.

As the first step of systemic action research, the CLARISSA programme in Nepal collected 400 life stories of children and young people engaged in the Worst Forms of Child Labour (WFCL) within Kathmandu Valley. Life stories collected were from children and young people either engaged in the Adult Entertainment Sector (AES) or living in selected neighbourhoods. Among the 400 stories collected, 50 were collected by children and 350 were collected by CLARISSA (adult) researchers. These stories were then collectively analysed by children and young people in a series of four workshops, to identify core themes for subsequent engagement through Participatory Action Research (PAR). This participatory and child-centred approach supports children to gather evidence, analysing it themselves and generating solutions to the problems they identify (Burns et al 2021).

This note focuses on our learning from working with the children and young people CLARISSA engaged during the life story collection and collective analysis process. It builds upon children's feedback and the teams' own reflections on the process. CLARISSA learning about WFCL in Nepal is not included in this learning note as it will be published in a forthcoming CLARISSA Research and Evidence Report.

Safeguarding and Ethics

CLARISSA team members followed rigorous safeguarding and ethics protocols, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, throughout the story collection and analysis process. risk assessment and mitigation plans included the identification of psychosocial support available to child participants, ensuring safe venues for story sharing, and taking consent from children and guardians. Furthermore, to maintain the confidentiality of children and young people participating in the process, any personal or identifiable information was anonymised with a unique code and stored in a dedicated location with access only by specific team members.

Compensation for the participation of children

After analysing the context and needs of participating children, a rationale for cash compensation for children participating in LSC&A activities was developed by the CLARISSA team and approved by the CLARISSA Consortium. The rationale was prepared in consultation with children, young people, their guardian(s) or gatekeepers, and relevant consortium colleagues. Children received a stipend of 350 rupees per day to cover their travel and food expenses whilst engaging in story collection and other processes.

COVID-19

Life story collection was conducted between August 2020 and May 2021, and the four collective analysis workshops were conducted between August 2021 and October 2021. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic required adaptive methodologies, such as holding virtual meetings during the preparatory phase to coordinate with children.

Activities and workshops conducted in-person during the implementation phase adhered to the WHO and national public health guidelines at the time.

Life story collection and Analysis

The CLARISSA life story collection and analysis process included the following steps (for detail of the steps please see Figure 1):

1. Life story collection

1.1 Planning and Preparation phase:

The first step was to undertake virtual capacity building of the CLARISSA Nepal team in areas such as safeguarding and participatory child-centred approaches. Given the pandemic situation, rapid situational analysis of focus children and young people plus coordination with and orientation to AES organizations about the CLARISSA programme was carried out virtually.

The next step included the identification of areas or clusters of AES venues, (based on a high concentration of AES and high involvement of children in these venues). Risk assessment and mitigation plans were developed for work in each cluster. Local AES-based organisations and existing support mechanisms for children and young people in WFCL were also mapped, Story collection tools and documentation templates were developed including a consent form, personal information sheet, story documentation template and storyteller's feedback form. The criteria for storyteller, story collector and story analyser were developed. The selection criteria was finalised as children and young people engaged in AES or focus neighbourhood based WFCL (e.g. working in transportation, party palaces, domestic labour and construction sites) or affected by either issue. The age criteria decided upon was aged below 18 (with the exception in some cases of slightly older survivors of AES and up to 25 years for persons with disabilities).

An operational plan detailing the numbers of stories to be collected from each cluster (area) and sectors (type of work) of AES and Neighbourhood was prepared – taking into account the lock- down situation.

2. Implementation phase

This phase was designed in the following sections:

2.1 Life story collection

2.1.1 Adult-led life story collection process

2.1.2 Child-led life story collection process; and

2.1.3 Piloting and mini-After-Action Reviews (AAR)

2.2 Life story analysis/collective analysis of life stories.

2.1 Life story collection

2.1.1 Adult-led life story collection process

Identification of children and young people¹ as storytellers and consent taking:

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- (a) **AES-based:** The CLARISSA team established coordination with local organisations working with children engaged in the AES to identify potential children to participate in story collection. The team then contacted those children and shared information about CLARISSA and assessed children’s level of interest and willingness to share their stories.
 - (b) **Neighbourhood-based:** The team coordinated with local organisations working with potential life storyteller children engaged in work in focus neighbourhoods. This includes establishing contact with community focal points in squatter settlement areas and coordination with organisations that work with community schools.
 - (c) **Snowballing:** storyteller children from both AES and ‘neighbourhood’ groups referred their peers, friends, or relatives to the programme as potential storytellers.

Children referred by local organizations or community focal persons for story collection process were contacted either by telephone or in-person and given information about the programme and story collection process. Children, along with their parents/guardians/relatives, were given a programme induction by CLARISSA staff so that they could understand the story collection process and make informed decisions around their participation. For those who showed interest, informed consent was then taken from either their parents, guardians, or relatives or, when that was not possible, (because children did not live with their family) from the local organisations that had referred them as potential participants.

The collection of life stories was implemented by a team comprising pairs of one facilitator and one documenter. Story collection took place in a safe venue in a local setting – either the VOC office or CWISH office based on the choice of the storyteller. Facilitators asked a range of encouraging, clarifying, and deepening questions to the children to support them to tell their stories. Each story was written down by the documenter, and audio was also recorded if the storyteller gave his/her consent for this. 350 life stories were collected between August 2020 and February 2021.

2.1.2 Child-led life story collection

To deepen the participatory nature of the process and to test it in the context of children engaged in WFCL, some children were trained in story collection and supported to collect the life stories of other children. In total, children collected 50 stories, taking on the role of facilitators and documenters.

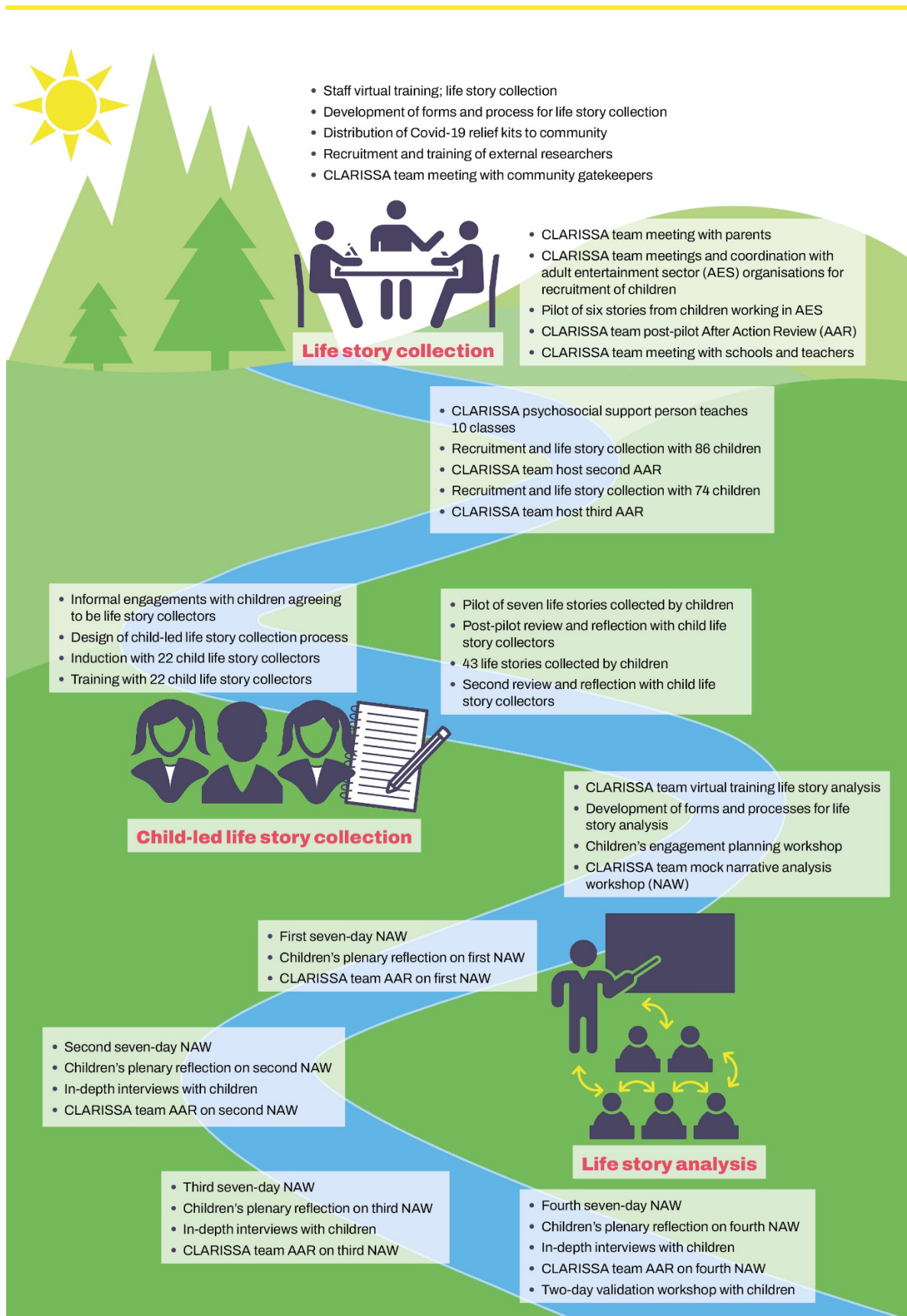
For the selection of children as story collectors, CLARISSA facilitators contacted those children who had expressed interest in participating in further CLARISSA activities while they were story tellers in the adult led life story collection phase. They were informed about the child led story collection process and then received four days of residential training. Their parents, guardians, or relatives and employers allowed them to participate, and training was timed so as not to clash with no school examinations etc. The only additional criterion for life story collector children was that children had to be over 14 years of age, in order to be able to respond to the potentially upsetting and sensitive nature of the stories they would be collecting.

A total of 22 children participated in four days of residential training on the life story collection process. During the training children planned a timeline, decided the number of stories they would collect, selected their team members, and decided by mutual agreement who would be the facilitators and who the documenters. A mentor from the CLARISSA staff team was assigned to each pair for coaching and ongoing support. The children collected stories from their peers, relatives and other children working in the WFCL in coordination and with support from CLARISSA facilitators.

2.1.3 Piloting and mini-After-Action Review

In both adult-led and child-led life story collection, a pilot process was followed by a mini 'After Action Review' (AAR) to learn from the experience, discuss challenges and decide areas for improvement. This step was integrated to ensure meaningful learning and to facilitate identification of essential adaptations in the process.

Figure 1 - A journey of CLARISSA activities generated in a collective analysis workshop, using the river of life tool.



2.2 Story Analysis

400 stories were analysed in four narrative analysis workshops (100 stories per workshop) which took place between August and October 2021. Participatory analysis was conducted by

children who had provided their stories (storytellers), and those who had collected stories (story collectors), as well as new children and young people (story analysers). Induction sessions and training were provided to the participants. The participant selection followed the same steps and criteria as with storytellers and story collectors (see above), followed by consent taking. Given the risk of re-traumatising when reading their own or peers' stories, participants from the 'neighbourhood' group analysed the stories of children from the 'AES' group and vice versa. This also reduced the risk of identification of individual children in the stories as well as avoiding children analysing their own stories.

Workshops consisted of four main activities: developing small system maps, clustering themes, developing big system maps and identifying issues for action research. Documenters used documentation templates to capture the process of each day.

3. Key learning about the methodology and process of implementation

3.1 Building rapport and trust with children

Rapport building is a key in initial step towards trust building. Meetings with individuals within organisations working with children in WFCL in the AES and the focus neighbourhoods, plus representatives from community schools, other focal persons/active community people and with parents and relatives is an important way to create necessary connections. If local stakeholders have a good understanding and acceptance of the programme's intention, they then provide support by creating an enabling environment for the children to participate. Through organisations, schools and focal persons, a significant number of children were connected to the CLARISSA LSC&A process. Children linked into CLARISSA through an AES-based organisation were also supported with a COVID-19 relief kit, which helped to build rapport with them (as they were struggling to cover their basic needs during this crisis period).

The CLARISSA team invested significant time in rapport building with all participating children during the initial phase of LSC because they had to engage in ways that were convenient for the children. Activities included playing games, sharing meals, facilitators sharing their own life experiences etc. Building on relationships and maintaining informal communication throughout the process via telephone or social media helped the trust building process by ensuring that children felt connected to the programme and staff members.

All trust building activities were planned and facilitated according to each participant's age, individual personality and prior engagement in the CLARISSA programme. Those children who were already inducted into the programme from previous participation were more open to sharing their opinions. Younger children enjoyed activities such as games, drawing and dance. For children and young people who were not open in initial meetings or were hesitant to speak in the first few meetings, the team engaged with them individually through informal activities.

An important aspect of rapport building is managing the expectations of children from the beginning of the process. Facilitators receive requests from children to find them a job, or to support with education or food. While such requests were expected, facilitators had to respond in a way that navigated these expectations. One of the approaches taken was to reiterate the CLARISSA objectives to the children clearly throughout rapport building activities.

The process of trust-building does not end at a single one point of time or happen over a single engagement. Indeed, multiple engagements may be required. It is critical to set aside significant time for trust-building activities -whether we engaged through AES-based organisations or through a community/school focal person. Trust-building with adults was mostly done by

sharing information about the CLARISSA programme, while trust building with children involved doing things actively with them, such as playing, drawing and dancing. Furthermore, giving children the freedom to withdraw from the process at any time adds confidence and gives them power over decision making, which helps to build trust.

Trust leads to creating a safe space for children to share their stories and experiences and, later in the PAR processes, to share their ideas for solutions. Individual rapport building is more effective and leads to developing stronger trust than rapport built through group activities only. Trust is relational, and it is not only about the relationship between the facilitator and child but sits within a wider social network including parents, caregivers, and gatekeepers (key decision-makers in a child's life). This requires paying attention to both individual relationships and broader networks of trust.

Children expressed different levels of trust at multiple stages of the process. For example, some were more comfortable sharing their stories with children of the same age and similar working background. Others mentioned being at ease when sharing with unfamiliar children from different contexts (as they trusted them more to maintain confidentiality). Some children were more comfortable sharing stories with adult facilitators, especially on sensitive topics such as sexual abuse and exploitation, as they feared that their peers and acquaintances might breach their confidentiality. Communicating about these personal preferences and ways in which trust is understood by individuals early in a process can support building effective strategies.

3.2 Applying child-centred tools and approaches

Preparation of child-friendly methods, tools and approaches is crucial to ensuring that all children can be engaged equitably. The practice of facilitators' journaling coupled with reflection sessions during the story analysis workshops allowed the discussion of challenges faced in relation to group dynamics and enabled teams to identify solutions to address them. For example, this helped with dealing with children who were either very quiet or very loud, or children who were distracted. It also helped identify safeguarding or psychosocial needs and with making referrals in a timely fashion.

The integration of participant feedback mechanisms in both LSC and in analysis gave children the opportunity to share their feelings and opinions openly. Feedback was obtained from individual storytellers using feedback forms during life story collection and during plenary feedback sessions in narrative analysis workshops. Children reported that they felt heard and showed high motivation when expressing their thoughts during these sessions. Furthermore, this also helped facilitators to understand how children were engaging in sessions and whether any additional support might be needed. In our experience, open-ended questions are better than closed or multiple-choice questions, which we found produced generic feedback, and it is best to mix multiple methods for feedback.

It was important to respect children's time and choice of venue when agreeing the setting for story collection. The team worked outside standard office hours to facilitate this. Furthermore, children had different levels of comfort when it came to who they shared their story with. In some cases, children preferred sharing their stories with a facilitator of the same gender, while in other cases the opposite was true. Asking the storyteller about their preference was very important. There were also adjustments made during the analysis workshops. For example, children working in the AES usually sleep during the day, making it hard for them to participate, and requiring more break times being built in. Overall, having a flexible approach to time, venue selection and facilitation contributes to creating safe spaces for children.

Several children participated in more than one workshop and recommended peer-to-peer support and providing a comfortable space to enable new participants to interact with existing

ones. Returning participants helped to explain processes to their peers and this peer-to-peer learning was considered highly valuable by facilitators.

The CLARISSA team encountered cases of psychological trauma while collecting stories from children and in response these children were supported in the short and medium-term with counselling. Children in need of long-term psychosocial support were referred to specialist organisations working in mental health. The mapping of referral services ahead of engagement was critical to responses being robust and timely. Furthermore, training CLARISSA facilitators on psychological first aid enabled psychological trauma to be dealt with appropriately without putting children at risk of further harm. It was also important to provide mental health and psychosocial support to CLARISSA colleagues.

3.3 Facilitating participatory processes during a time of disruption

Working with flexibility made it possible to revisit programme plans with ease and to make necessary adjustments as required – for example by the changing nature of the COVID-19 context. Carrying out a situation analysis (by telephone) in the initial phase of the COVID-19 period, helped us to understand the context of AES venues and workers employed there. Developing a detailed operational plan for a pandemic scenario, both with and without a lockdown, for LSC&A, including pre-assessment of the risks of gathering children together, helped the team to minimise the risk to children and colleagues. The team also developed a plan to support children who tested positive for COVID-19 during and after the process by making provisions for PCR and antigen test before and after workshops.

Within the team it was essential to come together regularly to discuss and reflect on approaches, tool development, and operational plans. This created a platform for communicating programme updates, priorities, and work plan details as well as agreeing responsibilities amongst team members. It further helped to create rapport and establish team connections in a situation of lockdown. Alternative types of capacity-building sessions, such as webinars and virtual training, supported the team to stay connected to the wider programme across the CLARISSA consortium and helped them further enhance their knowledge and skills.

For participant identification, approaching local organisations working with children in the AES and in focus neighbourhoods, community focal people and snowballing was an effective way to start the LSC process when there was no possibility of making in-person visits. Testing for COVID-19 before and after in-person workshops aided trust building amongst parents and carers, who then allowed children to participate in the seven-day residential workshop. Parents/guardians and children were well-briefed about the training beforehand and gave informed consent.

We found that the length of the period between the collection and analysis of stories, and how regularly children were engaged with during this period, affected their participation. All activities were halted due to the COVID-19 lockdown which resulted in a break in children's engagement with CLARISSA - leading to some children dropping out of the process for example because they changed their job or phone number. During the collection process, 17 children with a disability shared their stories, but due to subsequent communication lapses only three of them were part of the later collective analysis process. It is clear that if children and young people are not engaged regularly it is difficult to retain them in the programme. Intentionality in ongoing communication is important during times of disruption.

3.4 Working with External Researchers

The involvement of external researchers to support the LSC process was an intentional methodological adaptation. However, at times CLARISSA researchers had to provide

additional, ongoing support to maintain consistency of approaches and processes. Given external researcher's previous engagements in other, more formal research projects, at times they showed some tendency to fall back on their views. Repeated orientations and follow-ups helped maintain quality and consistency.

The additional cost of human resources or management in any PAR process is challenging to forecast unless in depth field-level planning is conducted. Given unpredictable changes in context, such as the COVID 19 pandemic, ongoing reflection and learning about resource needs should support adaptive management.

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