My Environment, My Work

Bangladesh Action Research Group 10

June 2024

Theme: My environment, my work

Country: Bangladesh

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

Organisation: Terre des hommes (Tdh)

Facilitator: Mushtari Muhsina

Documenter: Nusrat Sharmin

Suggested citation

CLARISSA (2024) *My Environment, My Work*, Bangladesh Action Research Group 10, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: **10.19088/CLARISSA.2024.021**

Table of Contents

Figures

Tables

1. About the Action Research Group

Table 1.1: Key details

Action Research Group (ARG) name	ARG-10
Theme of ARG (issue being worked on)	My environment, my work
Start date	6 June 2022
End date	1 October 2023
Starting participants (N=total)	Males = 4 Females = 6 Children with disabilities = 0 Children currently working = 8
Ending participants (N=total)	Males = 4 Females = 4 Children with disabilities = 0 Children currently working = 4

Source: Author's own.

1.1 Background/introduction

The Child Labour: Action-Research-Innovation in South and South-Eastern Asia (CLARISSA) programme uses Action Research (AR) to understand the dynamics which drive the worst forms of child labour (WFCL), and to generate participatory innovations which help to shift these underlying dynamics and mitigate their worst effects.

Through 13 Action Research Groups (ARGs) in Bangladesh and 12 groups in Nepal, the programme is generating a rich understanding – particularly through children's lived experiences – of the complex underlying drivers of harmful work and working children and their employers are themselves defining, piloting and evaluating their own innovative actions that aim to increase children's options to avoid WFCL.

2. The story of the ARG

Figure 2.1: River of life
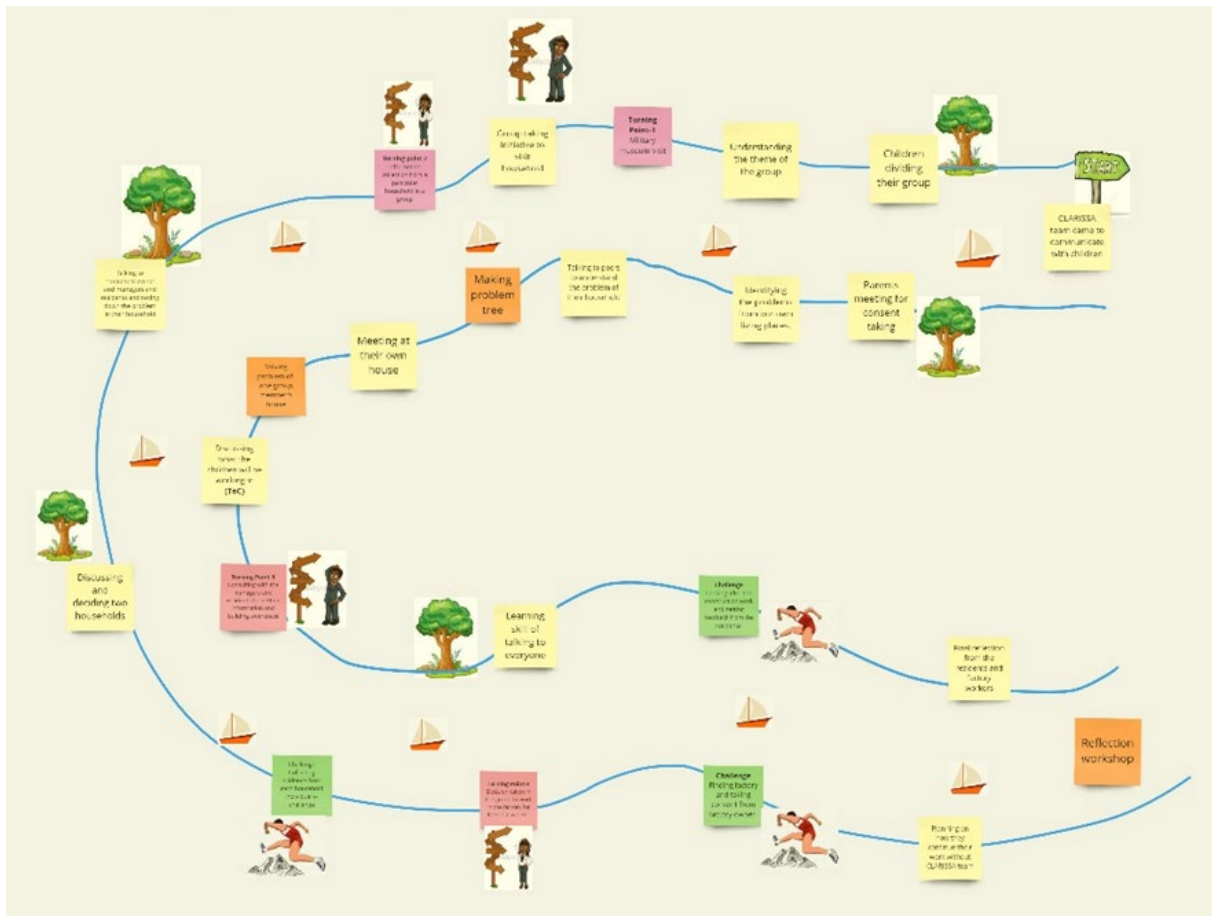
Source: Author's own.

2.1 Creation of the ARG

Terre des hommes (Tdh), through CLARISSA's Thematic Research Team (TRT), facilitated geographic information system (GIS) journey mapping in Bangladesh. Twenty-five children, 11 boys and 14 girls participated in this process using digital tools to map out a typical day in their lives, including their journeys between home and work, their work, and any other parts of their day. The CLARISSA design for Action Research included three Action Research groups focusing on the findings from this journey mapping, which was part of the thematic research agenda of CLARISSA. As such, the Terres des Hommes Participatory Action Research team organised meetings with a number of potential children from the community. Community Mobilisers (CM) from the CLARISSA Social Protection (SP) team played a crucial role in identifying and inviting children, leveraging their strong connections within the community. Through snowball sampling, children already involved in CLARISSA assisted in identifying and inviting other children to participate. Before extending invitations, the team provided a brief overview to both parents and children about the group's purpose. Invitations were extended only to those parents and children who expressed interest. Since the children who had participated in the CLARISSA journey mapping were already engaged in the CLARISSA Children's Research group and other PAR groups, the team sought new members. After compiling a list of names, the team invited the children to a meeting, where they explained the CLARISSA project, themes (or issues) that had resulted from the GIS journey mapping exercise, and other ARG themes derived from the CLARISSA life story analysis process. During this meeting, the team assessed the children's interest, and although initially, 11 children expressed interest in joining this group, and working on the theme/issue of 'My environment, my work', five of them later cited concerns about managing meeting times and ultimately declined to

participate. The Tdh team then proceeded to the field to look for more children and finally, four more children were added to the team which made the total number 10.

Children's interest in the issue and their availability were crucial factors in selecting members for this group. Another consideration was that children might face salary deductions from their employers if they participated in group meetings, this prompted some children not to join the group. The team also anticipated a high dropout rate.

2.1.1 Meetings to introduce children and their parents to the ARG process

Before conducting the first meeting, the team organised a gathering with children and their parents to inform them about the ARG process and get their written consents. During this session, the team provided information about Tdh, CLARISSA's objectives, a brief overview and background of the issue selection process, the operational procedures of the group, the reasons behind choosing children as participants, and the potential community benefits to be derived from group activities. The team also obtained consent. A risk assessment was conducted with the parents, discussing possible safeguarding concerns. However, as a strong trust and rapport had already been built within this community through CLARISSA's other interventions, innovations, and active presence, there was no serious concern expressed by parents.

2.1.2 Initial meetings

The primary objective of these initial meetings was to acquaint the children with the role and responsibilities they would undertake in the group while simultaneously fostering trust and rapport and conducting evidence gathering. Considering the project's timeline, the team recognised the need for this group to progress efficiently. However, drawing insights from the experiences of facilitating other neighbourhood ARGs, the team decided to carry out evidence gathering and the trust and rapport building process simultaneously. The facilitation team had observed and learned from other ARG facilitation processes that engaging children in certain activities improved trust and rapport not only among group members but also between the facilitation team and the children.

2.1.3 Theme/issue introduction

The team and the children discussed the roles and responsibilities of group members, codes of conduct, how the group would function, established essential guidelines, and addressed safeguarding matters. The facilitation team, fostering an environment of encouragement and motivation, engaged children in conversations and decision-making during the meetings. Children expressed difficulties attending meetings on Thursdays due to factory rules of deducting salary for two days if absent on a Thursday. Finally, Tuesday was decided upon as the preferred day to meet for most.

Children preparing posters highlighting group rules.
Credit: Nusrat Sharmin © CLARISSA

To introduce the issue, the CLARISSA team provided a detailed description of the GIS journey mapping process. Children also shared their perceptions of home and workplace environments, highlighting safety concerns. In group discussions, children identified unsafe aspects of their home environments and envisioned what a safe environment would look like for them. As preparation between meetings, children were given tasks such as brainstorming what they liked and did not like about their homes and envisioning what an ideal living situation would be.
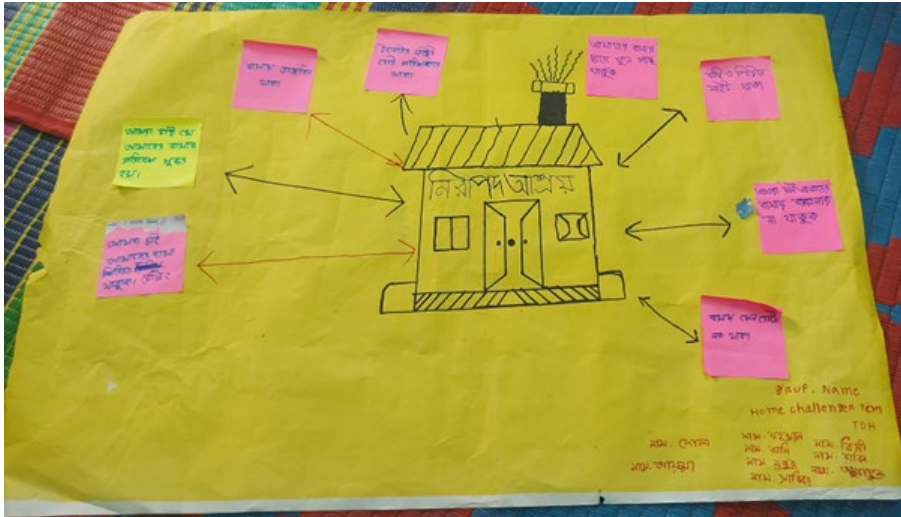
Dream home drawn by a child.
Credit: Nusrat Sharmin © CLARISSA

This approach aimed to keep the children actively thinking about the group and issues associated with the issue, gradually enhancing their sense of ownership of the issue.

2.1.4 Rapport- and trust-building

The process of building rapport and trust within the ARG involved two dimensions: among the participants and between the participants and the staff team. To address these aspects, the team implemented various strategies, including activities to foster mutual understanding, group work, collective evidence gathering, interactive games, crafting and drawing sessions, and holding meetings outside the typical setting.

Children in the group playing together.
Credit: Nusrat Sharmin © CLARISSA

In pairs, children explored likes, dislikes, family backgrounds, and favourite things, enhancing their confidence in communication. A trip to a museum, along with participants from other ARGs, community mobilisation groups, and children's advocacy groups, provided an opportunity for children to strengthen their bonding. Additionally, as part of that visit, learning about other groups' activities through performances and creative presentations encouraged increased participation within the group. According to the children, this day-long programme played a significant role in building rapport and trust.

Group activities related to the issue and evidence gathering sessions, where children could contribute independently or in pairs, strengthened trust among the members. Interactive games, drawing, and crafting not only solidified their bonds but also established a robust rapport with the facilitator and documenter, who actively participated in these activities with them. Overall, the combination of these approaches created a positive environment conducive to building strong relationships and trust within the group.

2.2 Evidence gathering

When the children initially engaged in group work to identify unsafe issues in their living spaces, they struggled to recognise many problems as the situation of their home environment was normalised to them. The connection between their own living conditions and the issue of the group was not immediately apparent to them. However, as they began collecting evidence from different perspectives and angles, their understanding of the significance of their group issues improved. This evidence-gathering process served as an eye-opener, making them more aware of the issues in their living environment. Subsequently, they felt a heightened sense of urgency to address these problems, demonstrating a newfound motivation to work on the identified issues.

Children collecting evidence.
Credit: Nusrat Sharmin © CLARISSA

One child said:

> *We were trying to avoid those problems at first by saying that these are the daily scenarios from our neighborhood. How this could be addressed as problem? That time, we could not express our thoughts and we could not explain anything, what can we do then? We identified our problems during this activity.*

Another child said:

> While working in this group and after collecting the data, we all used to meet and discuss ourselves and assess the problem. We are living in a distressful and unfavourable environment, but we could not understand their issue or problems. We understood the severity of problems when we started talking to many others about their problems and the effects on their daily life. Then we thought that it helped us to deepen through our work and we should collect more data. It is important that we act on these issues.

Children repairing the holes in the washroom door.
Credit: Nusrat Sharmin © CLARISSA

The evidence gathering process also helped children to express themselves within the group. For instance, one girl talked about the small holes in the shared bathroom walls which were a great concern to her, but which she had been earlier cautious about discussing. After data collection and hearing other people's stories she became more comfortable and confident in sharing. Moreover, this sharing pushed the group members to take a small action **before ToC development phase**. After listening to the girl, the children expressed empathy and they collectively repaired the holes.

2.2.1 Evidence from their own lives

After a meeting in which the children struggled to recognise the risks they faced in their own buildings, they devised a plan to observe their residences and note down likes and dislikes regarding them. The intention was to share these observations in the next meeting. However, the observations yielded nothing significant. It could be inferred that either the children didn't feel comfortable sharing in the group yet, or that the problems were normalised for them. Nevertheless, as subsequent meetings progressed, they started opening up and sharing their problems within the group.

2.2.2 Evidence from their peers

Unable to identify unsafe factors through their individual observations, the children decided to talk to their peers about the issue. These discussions with peers really helped the children connect more with the issue. They began to understand the real impact of an unsafe living space on children's lives. Each child engaged in conversations with two to five peers, exploring the risks in their respective living environments. The findings were then discussed with the team, fostering a collective learning experience among the children.

2.2.3 Evidence from other house/building observations

Building on the evidence from their peers, the children decided to extend their observations to specific buildings, aiming to identify risks for children. They scheduled a date between meetings, and some of them visited the buildings, engaging in conversations with residents. However, not all of the children participated in every visit. Through conversations with residents, they gained insights into the actual conditions of the buildings. It became apparent that residents lacked the courage or resources to invest in improving their living spaces. Although many risk issues were shared, they seemed normalised and common to the residents.

2.2.4 Evidence from a single building

Recognising that not all children participated in all building visits and that they had different understandings of living space challenges, such as boys not being fully able to realise the safety issues faced by girls, the team devised a task that was a bit like a competition. The children were divided into two groups and tasked with visiting a single house and identifying unsafe elements through observation and conversations with the residents. Additionally, a question and answer session was planned for the building. The group that could identify more and provide accurate answers was selected as the winning group. The team's familiarity with the building enabled them to pose in-depth questions, prompting the children to think more deeply. This competition played a crucial role in bringing the children to a common understanding platform.

2.3 Key findings from evidence gathering

Key findings from the evidence gathering process were:

- **Low prioritisation of safe living conditions.** Community residents do not prioritise safe living conditions; instead, they prioritise low house rent – even if the living conditions are substandard. Residents are unwilling to invest money or efforts in improving their living spaces.

- **Exploitation by building owners and managers.** Building owners and managers take advantage of residents' lack of awareness and unity. With limited housing options, residents who complain about problems are often told to leave. A lack of resident awareness and unity gives the building owners very little incentive to renovate or address issues.

- **Gas shortages in buildings.** Gas shortages, particularly in the morning, are a prevalent issue in every building, leading most families and children to purchase breakfast from outside (as they can't cook at home). This practice, common in the community, results in health problems and imposes an additional financial burden on families. It causes delays in having breakfast, affecting children's punctuality at work or school. Financial constraints are highlighted as a major barrier, with one child expressing: '*We don't have enough money to buy.*'

- **Sanitation challenges.** Sanitation is a critical concern, particularly for girls. Issues such as a lack of toilets, gaps in walls and doors, an absence of doors, toilets shared by both males and females, and slippery floors pose alarming risks to the well-being of residents. Boys and men peek through gaps and remove curtains from doors. People fall on slippery floors, resulting in injuries.

- **Health impacts on girls and women.** Girls and women limit their water intake to minimise the need for frequent toilet use due to inadequate facilities. This practice contributes to health problems, including urinary tract infections (UTIs). Workplaces also lack proper facilities, with no separate toilets for men and women.

- **Safety hazards for children.** A lack of railings on stairs and rooftops poses a significant safety risk for children, leading to frequent falls. Rainwater leakage into buildings and bathrooms cause health issues. Injuries resulting from frequent falls on stairs affect work attendance and result in salary deductions for children.

- **Migrant residents and lack of responsibility.** Buildings house mostly transient populations of residents who all come from different places and consider building conditions to be the responsibility of the owner. Owners prioritise profit without addressing the well-being of the (often temporary) inhabitants.

- **Inadequate lighting.** Common spaces like corridors, kitchens, toilets, and landings lack sufficient lighting. Insufficient lighting in common areas poses health risks for children, contributing to injuries. Darkness is further compounded by some residents' reluctance to keep lights on, fearing police raids due to illicit activities such as drug use (some men in the community).

2.3.1 Key decision on specific issues to tackle

After evidence gathering and internal group discussions, a shared understanding of the issue emerged, and the group expressed a strong desire to address the identified issues. To further analyse the data,

the children conducted a problem tree analysis, allowing them to brainstorm and conduct potential issue identification. This exercise laid the groundwork for their thoughts on implementing effective interventions. Subsequently, during a day-long Theory of Change (ToC) workshop, the group formalised their ideas and pinpointed specific issues to concentrate on.

The ToC workshop commenced with a comprehensive review of the gathered evidence. The children divided into three groups to revisit their findings, ensuring a thorough examination of the identified challenges. This collaborative process aimed to refine their understanding of the issues and establish a solid foundation for developing their Theory of Change. The groups looked at:

1. Problems in buildings.

2. Children's experiences in relation to problems in their buildings.

3. Causes behind problems.

Each group presented their ideas and then the whole group highlighted the causes and consequences of an unsafe living place. They identified 12 causes of an unsafe living environment for the children of North Gojmohol.

Children preparing their ToC together.
Credit: Nusrat Sharmin © CLARISSA

The dream scenario or goal was presented as: 'Children are living safely within their homes and experiencing a beautiful environment in Gojmohol'. Then the children worked to identify things that would make them believe that children from the community were living safely and peacefully. After identifying these aspects, they determined what actions they could take to achieve a situation that eliminates their identified causes of problems. Here, they discussed and debated with each other, shortlisting the causes. They deliberated on these causes and identified seven issues to address:

- Due to financial crises, residents are not fully aware of the impact of the building on their children.

- House owners are not willing to spend money on the upkeep and improvement of the buildings.

- Lack of unity among residents.

- Owners are not aware of the problems within the building.

- Parents are unaware of children's lack of comfort and safety in their living places.

- Single male residents' behaviour impacts on families and children.

- Drug users and dealers are only interested in concealing their identity, leading to them removing lights from the stairways.

When they were discussing steps to address these causes, children lacked confidence in resolving financial crises, the conduct of single men, and drug dealing activities. However, they believed that undertaking some renovation work with low-cost materials could serve as inspiration for both residents and building owners to take further initiatives. They considered collecting contributions from residents and community leaders. Due to the perceived risks associated with existing power dynamics within the community, they decided to exclude the issue of drug dealing activities from their list.

After extensive discussion, the children settled on three initiatives to tackle the issues and improve living conditions for children in their community: awareness-building, renovation and establishment of and dialogue with stakeholders. **Their ToC statement was:**

> *If home and work environment of children can be promoted to be safe and less hazardous with collective initiatives from different stakeholders and if the home environment of the community members can be developed or changed by repairing and preventing the household risks and problems through a behaviour change process, then children are less likely to fall in financial, physical, mental crisis at home and workplace which would be resulted in building children's self-confidence in their lives.*

2.3.2 Key decision on actions the group took

According to the previous discussion, children consolidated the seven issues into three main concerns:

- House/building owners are not aware of children's living conditions.
- Residents lack unity to raise their voices.
- Residents and building owners are unwilling to spend money on improving the building.

This consolidation streamlined their focus and facilitated a more targeted approach to addressing critical issues. At this point, children also started thinking about the workplace environment. One girl, who was working in a leather factory, was suffering as a result of unsafe washroom facilities. She proposed that,

> *Most of the time, we are staying in our working place. So, it is also our living place, and if we don't think about it, children's safety would be incomplete. In some of our factories, there is no good toilet or separate toilet, no pure water for drinking.*

Another girl said:

> *Sometimes we get injured, but there are no first aid facilities to support us.*

Initially, boys declined to engage in this issue. Children were split into two groups regarding factory conditions. Boys were less aware that the unhygienic washroom environment was a factor in health problems. The situation gradually improved when the boys and girls started to discuss how to fix their problems. They arranged two to three meetings informally at one child's house, and when they visited the factory and met with the factory manager and worker, the boys' perceptions changed, in light of the real scenario. So, more action plans were added in this phase.

As discussed earlier, the children decided on three strategies to tackle these challenges. They felt the problems could be best addressed by taking the following actions:

- Creating awareness.
- Renovation and establishment.
- Dialogue with stakeholders and seeking external support.

To achieve their goal, they initially selected two buildings and one factory. They selected the buildings according to their size, population, and the seriousness of the problems with living conditions. One child said,

> *We chose these two as the population of these buildings is very high, and their washroom conditions are very poor. If we could support them, there will be lots of children who will benefit from this.*

They attempted to arrange visits to several factories and finally identified one factory in which the owner and managers were very cordial towards them. Moreover, this factory has a vast open field where workers, including children and women, work all day under the sunlight. They dry and dye leather outside, with no protection for their skin or heads. There is no toilet on the premises, and workers have to go home or to nearby neighbours to use the toilet. As such, the children selected this factory for taking actions.

2.3.3 Creating awareness

The children started with awareness building. According to one of the children:

> To me, creating awareness is the most important thing that we could initiate without funds. The people of this community are not aware of their health and hygiene; they are not sensitised regarding children's well-being. All the unsafe things are very normal to them.

Another child said:

> The residents have no unity among each other, and the building owners and managers take advantage of this. So, we must make them aware of how unity could solve many problems.

Initially, there was a debate about the best method to raise awareness. Some children proposed drama, but others did not like this approach. They eventually decided to arrange a courtyard meeting to target:

- Building residents;
- Building owners and managers;
- Factory workers;
- Factory owners and managers.

2.3.4 Awareness sessions with residents and building managers

The group arranged several meetings with house managers and residents to raise awareness. Men, women, and children were present in those sessions. At first, children explored their living conditions and their lived experiences with their existing conditions. The discussion points were:

- Whether people feel the need to improve their conditions;
- How can people contribute to or participate in the improvement process;
- Getting united to negotiate with building owners;
- Health and hygiene issues;
- Being sensitive to children's problems and needs regarding living places;
- Encouraging being gender-sensitive, showing respect to each other.

Awareness session arranged by the children.
Credit: Nusrat Sharmin © CLARISSA

Before arranging those sessions, children discussed their session plan and their roles and practiced what they would say. One child reflected:

> At the first meeting with the residents, we were not so confident. We were afraid that the adults would not give importance to our words. But surprisingly, we saw the residents were very much welcoming to address their problems, and they were eager to solve these.

Another child said:

> We practiced how to talk. You (facilitator and documenter) also guided us. That helped us to be more confident to talk and manage people. Now we are enjoying talking with the people. After renovation, they are giving more importance to us.

The children also arranged meetings where building residents and managers were present together. These helped to build relationships between residents and managers. Children only met with one building owner separately. The other owner did not live locally.

2.3.5 Awareness session with factory workers and factory owner and managers

Children arranged several awareness sessions with factory workers, owners, and managers. The discussion points were:

- Problems faced in their workplace;
- How to resolve these;
- The role of owner, managers, and workers in mitigating challenges in the factory;
- Gender sensitivity regarding toilet use;
- Health and hygiene.

Meeting with factory owners and managers.
Credit: Nusrat Sharmin © CLARISSA

2.3.6 Renovation

As a financial crisis and a lack of willingness among residents and owners were identified as problems, children decided to renovate unsafe toilets, bathrooms, roof railings, stair railings, slippery floors, water supply points, and lighting systems in two selected buildings, using the CLARISSA innovations budget.

After securing the funds from the innovation pot, the children became more confident in taking these actions. One child expressed:

It is not a solution to take the initiative from our side, but if they start to benefit from these renovations, the residents would be more aware and inclined to improvements of their living conditions. They could negotiate better with the owners.

Children visiting an open space with factory owner.
Credit: Nusrat Sharmin © CLARISSA

Children wanted to establish a low-cost toilet in a building, but they could not manage the space for it. However, they secured space from the owner of a selected factory. They established a toilet with a bathing place with the support of the Innovation fund, as workers expressed the need for a place to shower after working all day under the sun. The owner agreed to cover utility bills, such as water and electricity.

One of the children said,

> *When we decided to work in the factory, we explored the problems faced by the workers, especially children and female workers who need to abstain from going to the washroom for peeing, which is horrific, as they don't have access to the nearest toilets or there are only 2-3 toilets owned by the factory, and they don't allow outsider workers there.*

2.3.7 Dialogue with stakeholders and seeking external help

Children identified building owners, community leaders, and government representatives in their community as stakeholders. They engaged with community leaders to address the issues and sought assistance to continue their work without CLARISSA's support. They also approached a few building owners to discuss improving living conditions, but the effectiveness of these discussions was limited, as the owners did not allocate much time. The children did not organise a dialogue with government representatives, considering it the responsibility of the community and lacking confidence in obtaining benefit from such an interaction.

2.3.8 Additional actions

Children arranged a first aid box and medicine supplies for the workers in the building. This idea was suggested by the factory owner. Children also secured a commitment from the owner and the managers to refill the medicine as needed for their workers. Additionally, they provided gloves and masks to the workers and raised awareness about their usage, especially during the process of colouring leathers, as recommended by the owner.

2.3.9 What did the group learn from the actions and what were the results of those actions?

From the actions undertaken by the children, several valuable lessons were learned:

- The group realised that implementing significant structural changes in the old buildings of the area posed difficulties. The structures were not robust, making extensive renovations potentially harmful or even destructive. Certain renovations, such as for toilets and bathrooms, were challenging for construction workers. The installation of roof railings was difficult due to the nature of the construction material (brick).

- Some residents still lacked sensitivity regarding safe living conditions. The process of building awareness and changing perceptions requires a considerable amount of time, particularly in a low-income community where individuals are primarily focused on managing their livelihoods.

- The experience highlighted the significant knowledge gap within the community, hindering people from becoming aware of the conditions of their living places. The importance of awareness building and sharing knowledge on good hygiene practices emerged as a crucial aspect of behaviour change.

- The children realised the power of unity in achieving their goals. Their strong group bonding played a pivotal role in accomplishing outcomes. However, making the residents unite was challenging, especially in a larger building.

- The children learned how to be resourceful and active in creating a safe living environment, even with limited resources. Their initial action, conducted with a minimal budget in one of the group member's houses, demonstrated the potential impact of small-scale initiatives.

- The children experienced a change in their own behaviour, learning how to make their homes safer. This newfound knowledge empowered them to motivate others to do the same.

- The interaction with the factory owner altered their perception of factory management. The children discovered that expressing demands logically and negotiating effectively could garner positive responses. The factory owner's supportive attitude toward the children served as a valuable lesson.

One child shared in the reflection session:

> *After learning so many things from our work, we could guide people who want to renovate things or wish to develop their living conditions. Now, we know how to work and how to communicate with people like contractors and workers.*

It is necessary to consider that the children have taken actions, and the group's time constraints should be considered before assessing the outcomes. The issue that the children are addressing is normalised and has a strong relation to economic crisis and awareness. Improving these two causal factors is challenging within the short time frame. Despite all the challenges, children could see some positive impact of their work. They mentioned that the overall safety condition of the two buildings where renovation work has been done has improved. Children and adult workers from the ground floor factory of a building, where one toilet became usable after renovation, reported that now they do not need to wait for long. One female worker said,

> *Before, we needed to stand in a queue on the second floor as there is no usable toilet on the ground floor, but now we can use this toilet. It is so relieving for us.*

The residents of these buildings became more aware and sensitised about their living conditions. One of the building residents cleaned their dirty roof after getting motivation to do so from the children. Some residents who could not join in with cleaning work gave money towards snacks. Unity among the residents has increased. One building resident raised their voice to the owner to renovate the unusable cooking place after getting guidance and motivation from the children. The owner also became sensitised, and the cooking place has now been renovated, an eyeopener for all stakeholders.

Building managers became inspired to keep their building clean and safe. In another building, the manager prepared a schedule and allocated the names of residents to clean toilets regularly. Residents are following the schedule and cleaning toilets and bathrooms.

The children in the group also reported some personal changes. All the children are doing additional cleaning tasks in their buildings after joining the group. One child said:

> *Before, my house used to be cleaned by the dwellers every week. Now, I proposed to clean it every day, and it is working.*

Other community people also gained awareness and inspiration to raise their voice to get benefits from the owner. In one building where no renovation work has been done, residents raised their voice to the owner to renovate their toilets and cooking place.

Factory workers also became comfortable with the newly established toilet. One child said:

> *We are children. Sometimes we do not get any scope to use any toilet. There was no common toilet for us. The several toilets there were the personal toilets of some managers. They do not want to give us scope to use. Now, nobody could scold us for using this toilet.*

2.3.10   Transition beyond CLARISSA

Children collectively decided that it is not possible for them to do renovation works, but they are willing to continue awareness building. They will try to raise awareness among their peers, neighbours, and relatives about the benefits of a safe and clean living space. Children expressed their concern about whether the community people would respect them without CLARISSA support. As such they hope to seek support from the members of the nonviolent communication practitioner group. This is an adult group facilitated by the CLARISSA Social Protection team, whose members include influential individuals from the community who are willing to help them get access to any building.

Children emphasised personal-level contributions the most. One child said:

> *We will try to clean our environment, and we need to change ourselves first. If we see any kind of waste in the roads, we will try to make others aware. I am trying to keep my friend aware.*

The working children are similarly committed to improving their working conditions. One child said:

> *The supervisor always scolds us for not working properly, washrooms are slippery and not clean, factories don't have a separate washroom for male and female workers, holes on the toilet door, no lights in our houses – I want to change all those problems by discussing with them with the help of others.*

Children also committed to continuing the group and staying in touch with each other. One child said in the reflection workshop:

> *We will try to be unite as a group, and we have worked to change the environment of our house. We will try to explore solutions for small problems in the community.*

3. Reflections from the facilitator/documenter

It was observed that interactive activities like group work, games, and creative activities such as art and craft had a great influence in building rapport and deepening trust with the children. In the early stages of this group, the children did not open up much, likely due to shyness, but gradually, they started to engage in the processes. Informal meetings in different places, and evidence gathering within the group rather than individually proved to be an effective strategy to build trust and rapport among children, as well as with the facilitator and documenter. Trust building was not a single process for this group. From the very beginning, the group started trusting different types of activities, and even after the first meeting, they began evidence gathering through which trust building was ongoing. Engaging children with different activities was very effective in boosting enthusiasm among them. Having the same aged children in the group strengthened the group bond. As the children shared common interests and their topics of conversations were often similar, it was easier for them to become friends with each other.

Participating in the ARG process led to children becoming more critical and analytical in their thinking. Different forms of evidence gathering and analysis helped to accelerate their process. Rigorous evidence gathering helped to open up children's thinking on the issue. At first, they could not relate to it but after collecting stories from their peers and neighbours, they became closer to it. Boys needed extra efforts to understand issues like unsafe sanitation systems.

This group took some small actions before developing their ToC, which was very motivating and inspiring for them. Undertaking small actions in their group member's house made them confident enough to think that they could achieve their goal together. A learning is that children need to be involved in some activities all the time to build collective confidence.

The increased awareness among children is significant for their entire lives. They started to practice cleaning and building awareness activities, which is a lifetime achievement for them. Their power of managing and negotiation has also increased.

Some children were not gender-sensitive at the early stage, which is a common trait in this community. One boy expressed his unwillingness to talk with the girls directly, but gradually he also became respectful to the girls. When they gave each other the opportunity to work together and share, they became more respectful to each other. This mutual respectfulness is very important to work beyond CLARISSA. The CLARISSA team assigned different roles to children from the beginning. The roles included co-facilitator, co-documenter, food distributor, responsibility for cleaning, communication, etc. In every meeting, roles were distributed to children. It made children feel more responsible for the group, and they also enjoyed their roles. Even when they held separate meetings or activities without the CLARISSA team, they used to take notes.

Engaging in the ARG process with working children enhanced facilitators' and documenters' capacities, fostering personal and professional growth. Interacting with these children developed heightened empathy and understanding of their challenges and resilience. The process refined communication skills, emphasising accessibility and comprehension.

Working with a diverse group broadened facilitators' cultural competence, enabling navigation of diverse ways of life. The process prompted critical self-reflection, challenging biases and fostering inclusivity. Collaborating with children underscored the importance of teamwork, enhancing effective collaboration. Emotional elements, like building trust, was found to be crucial, creating a safe environment for expression. The process installed patience and flexibility, adapting approaches to unique needs, deep understanding on safety and sanitation. Witnessing positive outcomes fostered celebration and acknowledged the resilience of the children. In summary, the AR process enriched skills and emotional intelligence, fostering holistic development into personal growth beyond the professional realm.

3.1 Challenges faced and mitigation strategies

Throughout the process, the group members and the CLARISSA team faced some challenges. Together, they overcame these challenges by pooling their strengths. The significant challenges were:

- **Difficulties in theme/issue introduction.** As all the children were new to CLARISSA activities and none of them had participated in Journey Mapping, theme introduction seemed challenging.

At the early-stage children could not realise the importance of it in their lives. They did not feel motivated to engage in the group. Rigorous evidence gathering helped them understand the theme/issue well. This understanding helped them feel enthusiastic about the group and also motivated them to take actions.

- **Lack of gender sensitivity among boys.** At first, boys did not realise and agree with some of the problems raised by girls. They tried to deny the issues, and at the early stage, boys were not willing to make friends with the girls. Sometimes when they saw the girls, they avoided them and did not talk to them. When a girl discussed this issue in a meeting, one of the boys replied:

I do not like to mix with girls. My family also advised me to avoid girls.

Gradually, when they started to participate together in fun activities and evidence gathering, their relationships improved, and their understanding of the issue became more aligned.

- **Difficulties in finding a factory and residential building for ARG actions.** It was very challenging for the group to manage building and factory owners to obtain their consent. Children could not get access to enter some factories to talk with managers and owners as there was a fear of non-governmental organisation (NGO) work among factory authorities. To give access raised concerns in owners' minds about losing ownership of that space. Children needed to meet and talk several times to manage these fears.

- **Delays in taking actions and frustrations.** Getting permission from building owners took time. Building managers were the medium between children and the owners and carrying out conversations with owners seemed difficult for the children. Moreover, finding a contractor for renovations took a long time and children were getting frustrated waiting for progress. During that time, the facilitator and documenter kept them busy doing a survey in their selected buildings, so that they didn't feel idle, and group coherence did not decrease.

- **Rumours of increased rent after renovations.** After the completion of the renovation work, some residents claimed that the owner increased their house rent. They blamed the children for this, creating tension among children and also among residents. However, after talking with more residents and discussions between building managers and residents it became clear that the decision to increase rent was made before the renovation work, and it was related to the increasing electricity and gas costs, and it had no relation to the renovation works.

- **Safeguarding of girls.** Girls did not feel safe visiting buildings and factories without boys, as there were concerns about their safety. Inside the buildings it was normally very dark.

Proud moments.
Credit: Nusrat Sharmin © CLARISSA

Managing space for establishing a new toilet in a workplace was a surprising and happy moment. It really gave the children extra confidence and a sense of pride.

Children were initially very shy talking in the group, even in front of the CLARISSA team. Despite this they organised several awareness sessions and meetings with residents, managers, and owners. They facilitated the discussions very well and community people appreciated them for their initiatives. The children gained extra value in the community.

After being inspired by the ARG children, residents successfully negotiated with a building owner for the renovation of the cooking space, and this moment was very significant for the children. According to one of the children:

> *It was not an easy task to fulfil demands from owners in this community where nobody wants to spend a single penny for the living place. How our motivation works for making residents unite, that is a wonderful thing.*

4. Reflections from the children

A final learning and reflection workshop was arranged with the aim of revisiting the journey of the action research group and gaining insights into challenges, turning points, and personal capacity building throughout the process. Children openly discussed their collective strength in trust and ownership-building processes. Their thoughts on positive changes beyond CLARISSA were also discussed according to their strengths and challenges.

River of life prepared by the children.
Credit: Nusrat Sharmin © CLARISSA

4.1 Trust tool

A trust tool exercise was conducted two times within the group: once when they were 7 months into their group (before taking action) and again at the end (during the reflection workshop when they were 10 months into their group). In the first workshop, children collectively pointed out that they were at level 4 of the trust tool, as they believed that the group relationship had improved, maintaining a friendly atmosphere. However, during the last workshop, they believed they had reached level 5.

The children highlighted improved communication and understanding, emphasising a positive shift in trust levels through open dialogues. Positive changes in some individuals, especially two boys, contributed to the perceived increase in trust. The acknowledgment of group dynamics and the analogy of the group being like a body demonstrated their understanding of unity and mutual support. One child said:

> *We are like a body. If one of our body parts does not work properly, we take support from other body parts. There is nothing to be ashamed of.*

The group's ability to address challenges collectively, resolve conflicts, and trust in each other's strengths further solidifies their sense of trust. They also considered external factors, like community perceptions, and made consistent efforts to stay connected, reflecting a commitment to maintaining relationships. The unanimous decision to place themselves at level 5 reflects a positive outlook, indicating that their relationships have deepened, and they now see each other as friends who share each other's lives.

4.2 Ownership tool

In relationship to a 'feeling of ownership over the group' tool, the children rated themselves at level 4 on the scale. They demonstrated a strong sense of ownership and autonomy in their collective actions and decision-making processes. The group expressed a clear understanding that the decisions and actions taken were primarily their own, rather than enforced by the facilitator or documenter. One child said:

No one in this group ever thinks that they are being left out. We all feel that we are important.

Another child expressed in the reflection session that:

This group is ours and the decisions were made by us. They (facilitator and documenter) did not force us.

In a 'feeling part of the group' exercise, the children rated themselves at level 4. Their sense of ownership extended to feeling an integral part of the group. Children emphasised that no one in their group felt left out, feeling that the group fostered a strong sense of unity and importance for each member. Some children claimed that even quieter members are recognised and valued equally. One quieter member upheld this and said:

They all give me importance. If I am not coming to the meeting, they come to visit my house, meet my mother, and tell her to send me to the meetings. If they did not feel me, they would not do.

The children's sense of ownership and camaraderie within the group became evident through informal interactions outside of meetings, involving activities children undertook for the group without the facilitator and documenter being present. Furthermore, changes in their personal lives, such as organising cleaning in their buildings and their increased negotiation skills with their building authorities, reflect the importance they attached to the group's issue.

4.3 Turning points

In the reflection workshop the group pointed to four turning points throughout their journey. These were:

4.3.1 Turning point 1: Visit to military museum

Before going to the museum, relationships within the group and with the CLARISSA team were not that intimate, and there was a lack of trust. Children were nervous and fearful that they did not have an interest in working on the issue. After going to the museum, meeting other ARGs, receiving care, talking with each other for a long time, spending time together, and doing a stage performance, the group members started to own the group, and closeness developed within the group members. Children also gained trust and a sense of safety with the facilitator and documenters. One child said:

We did not have trust in each other earlier, but visiting the museum was effective for creating a bond. We did a stage performance there, and at that moment, we chatted a lot. Then we arranged 4-5 meetings at our own place, which clearly improved our relationship.

Another child expressed:

Before visiting the museum, we were thinking about why we are going, what will happen. But after coming back from the visit, we were so relaxed, and we relied on Apu (facilitator and documenter). Even when we saw the drama performance by another ARG on child marriage when every group performed something innovative on their issue, it increased our interest in doing group work and working for the community.

Immediately after visiting the museum, children arranged a meeting in their own place without the CLARISSA team, which also increased their trust in each other.

4.3.2 Turning point 2: Data collection

During the evidence-gathering process, the children began to feel empathy for other children who were experiencing difficulties with their living environments. They realised the depth of the problems that exist in their neighbourhood, and they started to understand the reality of its impact. As a result, the facilitation team planned a group activity to identify unsafe elements in a single household, dividing the children into two groups based on gender. This event was also mentioned as a turning point by the children, as they visited households together and developed a shared understanding of the unsafe living conditions. One boy said:

> This group work opened my eyes to the problems faced by the girls.

Another girl said:

> After learning from others, I really began to think about children's risks, especially how girls cope with unsafe toilets and bathrooms. I can't imagine a bathroom without a door.

Moreover, the children thoroughly enjoyed the data collection, which further strengthened their relationships. One girl said:

> At the moment of data collection on specific buildings, we talked with each other, we planned how and from which house we need to collect information, who will go where, etc. So, this activity created scope to spend some time together and have a chit chat.

4.3.3 Turning Point 3: Reconstructing trust between boys and girls in the group

Children were split into two groups in relation to the work they did on factory conditions. One group was not working well. Boys were not accepting that unhygienic washrooms could cause health problems at first and were also accusing the girls of not trusting them. This situation gradually improved when the group started to sit together and discuss how to fix their problems. They arranged several meetings informally at one of the children's houses, and when they then visited the factory and met with the factory manager, their perception changed. In a reflection workshop, one boy said:

> When we met the factory manager, he said that working in a group is the ultimate strength to achieve anything, which struck us the most. We realised that we did wrong with the girls. They are visiting the factory and households alone. We need to support them. We believe in ourselves as a group, and our friendship got stronger. The trust was shaky somehow in the group members; it was rebuilt after this incident.

4.3.4 Turning Point 4: Consulting with building managers and residents

Talking with outsiders was challenging for the children. When they were planning to survey buildings and residents to understand the conditions (how many toilets, how many rooms, how many families, how many children, number of disabled children, etc.) and hold meetings to raise awareness of the benefits of a safe environment for children the group members were nervous and lacked confidence. They did not have much prior knowledge about the building and did not believe that adults would listen to them. Before talking with the community, group members practiced giving presentations, which enhanced their confidence, and they gained the courage to speak with and present to residents. They discovered new problems as a result of their discussions, for example that the building urgently needs rooftop railings, as children have fallen from the roof. One of the children said:

> We learned to speak in front of others from Apu (the group facilitator). Apu gave us the scope to talk with the community people. They were with us, but they encouraged us to talk to them. When talking with the residents, we realised the problems and discovered a new issue about railing.