



Children Re-enter the Worst Forms of Child Labour Despite Participating in Training and Skills-Oriented Programmes

Nepal Action Research Group 4

June 2024

Theme:	Children re-entered into WFCL despite participating in training and skills-oriented programmes provided by non-governmental non-profit organisations
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CLARISSA (Child Labour: Action-Research-Innovation in South and South-Eastern Asia) is a large-scale research programme on the worst forms of child labour. It aims to identify, evidence, and promote effective multi-stakeholder action to tackle the drivers of the worst forms of child labour in selected supply chains in Nepal and Bangladesh.

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1. About the Action Research Group

Table 1.1: Key details

Action Research Group (ARG) name	ARG re-entering after skills training
Theme of ARG (issue being worked on)	Children re-entered into WFCL despite participating in training and skills-oriented programmes provided by non-governmental non-profit organisations
Start date	17 February 2022
End date	16 August 2023
Starting participants (N=total)	Males = 2 Females = 9 People with disabilities = 0 Children who are currently working = 11
Ending participants (N=total)	Males = 2 Females = 4 People with disabilities = 0 Children who are currently working = 5

Source: Author's own.

1.1 Background/introduction

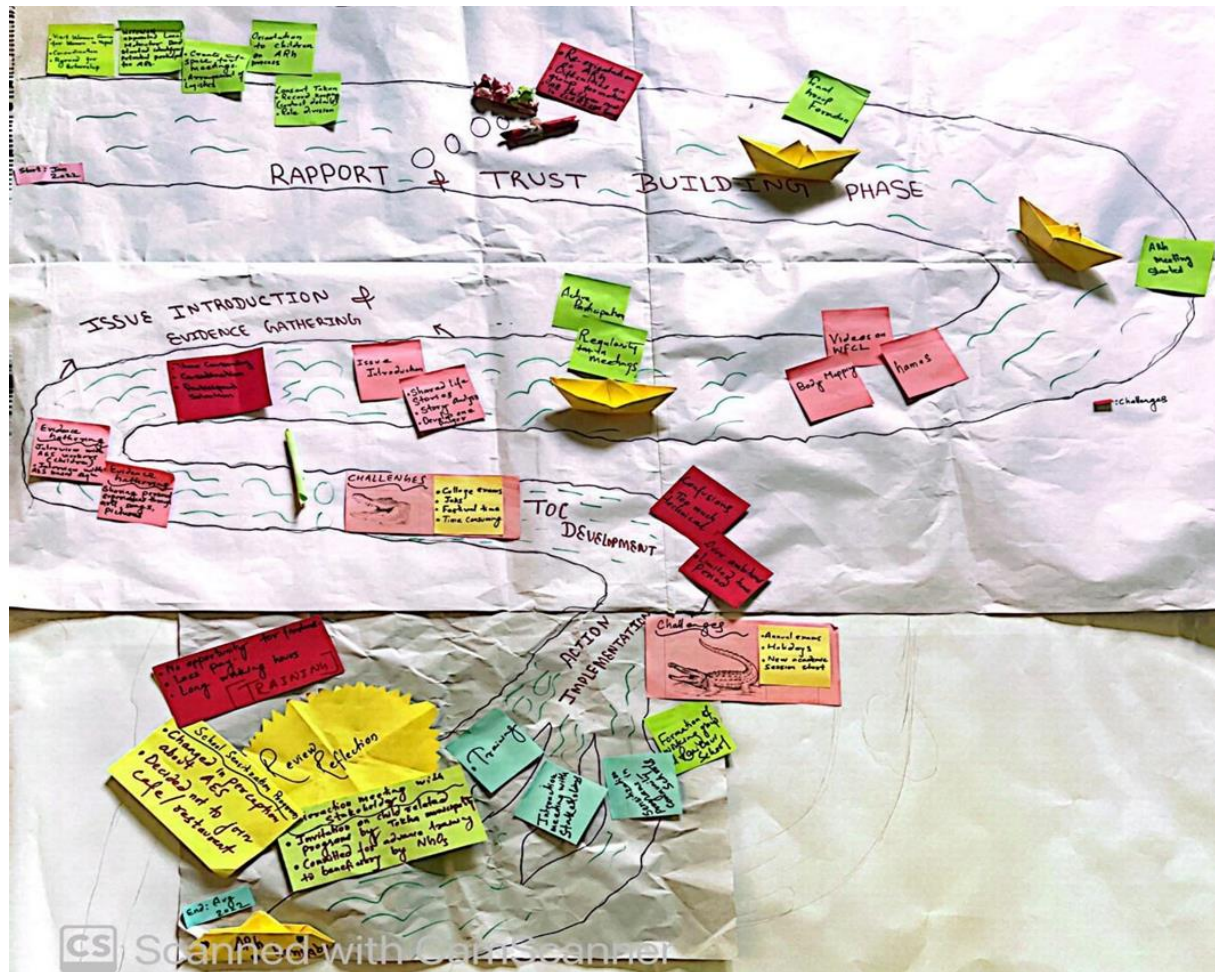
The **Child Labour: Action-Research-Innovation in South and South-Eastern Asia (CLARISSA)** programme uses Action Research to understand the dynamics which drive the worst forms of child labour (WFCL), and to generate participatory innovations which help to shift these underlying dynamics and mitigate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

Children re-entered into WFCL despite participating in training and skills-oriented programmes provided by non-governmental non-profit organisations

2. The story of the ARG

Figure 2.1: River of life



Source: Author's own; workshop diagram produced by the group.

2.1 Creation of the ARG

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 (issues) for subsequent engagement through Participatory Action Research (PAR). ARGs were then established to work on these issues. These were subsequently validated by children working in the AES.

This location was selected for an ARG as it is a major entry point for buses from different parts of Nepal. The issue for this ARG was 'Children re-entered in WFCL despite participating in training and skills-oriented programmes provided by non-governmental non-profit organisations'.

Children re-entered into WFCL despite participating in training and skills-oriented programmes provided by non-governmental non-profit organisations

CLARISSA partnered with Women Forum for Women in Nepal (WOFOWON), a local NGO focusing on women in the adult entertainment sector, and local motivators, alongside the CLARISSA team, identified potential participants in January 2022, resulting in a total of 14 group members. These children then received an induction into the CLARISSA programme, the Action Research process and previous processes that had identified the issue. None of the children in this group had previously been involved in the CLARISSA programme. Consent was collected and the group was formed in February 2022, comprising 11 children (two boys and nine girls).

2.2 Rapport- and trust-building

Formal meetings officially began in March. The group created a Facebook Messenger group to facilitate communication and arrange meeting dates. The rapport- and trust-building phase of the ARG commenced with a series of engaging activities to make children feel connected and to build the foundations for a secure and cooperative group atmosphere. The children watched a music video related to WFCL and completed a body-mapping exercise. The latter was a significant turning point for group bonding. Each child contributed to a full-body sketch of a fictitious 17-year-old girl working in a dance bar. The exercise allowed them to empathise with her experiences. Likewise, a Path of Aspiration exercise further built-up trust, as children envisioned their aspirations, obstacles, and supporters. Similarly, the Day in a Life exercise allowed children to share their feelings as they went about their daily activities, including their journeys to work. Orientation on child safeguarding was also provided to the group. Mutual respect, confidentiality, consent, and safety within the group were reinforced as guiding principles.

2.3 Issue introduction and evidence-gathering

2.3.1 Issue introduction

In the issue introduction phase, two participants from the CLARISSA children's research group (CRG) were invited to the ARG, both of whom had previously participated in the life story analysis process. They shared their experiences from the analysis and described the process of creating mini system maps from each story to trace children's pathways into WFCL, identify key issues, and construct a big system map based on all these findings. They also assisted ARG members in developing their own mini system maps. The group was then asked to articulate the key issues they had identified focusing on their group issue, and reasons why children re-entered the AES, and WFCL, despite having received training from NGOs.

The group members identified factors such as attraction towards higher earnings, inefficiencies of NGO support and training, insufficient and untimely monitoring, and not providing mentoring as reasons that pushed children back into the AES.

Preventive measures were suggested, including ensuring no losses when providing business support, establishing economic backup plans, and preparing for unforeseen challenges in the future. Furthermore, group members expressed their thoughts on the training provided by organisations. GC4M17 raised the potential for child rights training to open doors to careers for children as field trainers in child protection.

Following the discussion, a one-pager document was developed to facilitate group members' understanding of the core issue within the ARG group. The primary objective behind creating this document was to enable them to understand why the issue had been introduced. The one-pager document focused on key aspects such as how children enter the AES, the obstacles and challenges they face after entry, and the involvement of NGOs, as well as the reasons behind children going back into the AES despite NGO training.

The group had a discussion on their experiences of the WFCL and the evidence presented in the one-pager. GC4M17 identified some common issues: children entering the AES due to economic difficulties, family problems, peer influence, and discontinuation of education. GC3F18 highlighted a finding in the one-pager about girls who had received training from non-profit organisations rejoining the AES due to training leading them to sectors with lower earnings than in the AES. Lastly, GC11F17 said that, having entered the AES following abuse, societal perceptions are of the AES as being associated with abuse and exploitation. The discussion that followed focused on how AES workers were subjected to abuse and labour exploitation, suggesting that most individuals did not enter this sector by choice.

2.3.2 Evidence gathering

To collect information on the group's issue, group members gathered evidence in the form of stories, conversations, poems, etc. Personal lived experiences related to the issue were shared by the group members. During the discussion on evidence gathering, group members provided insights into their own experiences and those of their friends. GC2M16 communicated his experience through a rap song and talked about how his friend had entered the AES due to economic problems. He explained that although a non-profit organisation had provided training support to him, his friend couldn't quit his AES job due to his attraction towards the AES venues. He also highlighted that he personally hadn't received any training support from any organisations. GC10F18, a *dohori* singer in the AES, said that she pursued this profession because of her interest in it. She observed that some people enter the AES as it promises higher earnings than skills-based training jobs, and she personally had followed a dream of becoming a *dohori* singer. GC16M16 talked about his peer who had received tailoring training but had returned to her previous job in a club, as she earned more as a dancer than she could in any other sector. GC1F18 told her own story, explaining that despite receiving educational support from a non-profit organisation, her family's poor economic circumstances compelled her to continue working in the AES. She believed that she was still learning some skills in this field, which could potentially support a future career in hotel management.

The group had a discussion on how to prevent children from re-entering the AES. GC2M16 suggested providing support to children's families and implementing programmes that focus on improving the livelihoods of the families. In relation to whether evidence gathered was sufficient and how additional evidence could be obtained, the group members' ideas included conducting surveys, data collection, utilising both primary and secondary sources, conducting interviews with individuals working in the AES and interviewing AES-based non-profit organisations that provide training.

Orientation followed on interview methodology and considerations. GC11F17 suggested focusing on participants who had relevant experience working in the AES and had received support from non-profit organisations before returning to the AES. When discussing age criteria for the potential respondents, GC3F18, GC4M17, and GC11F17 collectively suggested an age limit of 20, with a slightly higher limit of 24 for individuals with disabilities. Additionally, GC11F17 emphasised the need to brief respondents about the programme's objectives before conducting interviews. GC4M17 initiated contact with representatives from three non-profit organisations, namely Shakti Samuha, Biswash Nepal, and WOFOWON.

The group agreed to conduct five interviews with AES workers, three interviews with AES-based non-profit organisations, and one focus group discussion with AES workers. The group encountered challenges in finding suitable respondents for the interviews, however, as minors working in the AES frequently work both day and night shifts.

2.4 Findings and discussion from the interviews

The group successfully completed five interviews with minors working in the AES and three key informant interviews with non-profit organisations Shakti Samuha, WOFOWON, and Bishwas Nepal; however, because of time limitations and challenges they decided not to conduct the focus group discussion. The findings from interviews were as below:

- Interviews highlighted shortcomings in the training provided by non-profit organisations;
- Interviews also uncovered instances of child marriage, linked to a return to the AES;
- It was found that individuals were re-entering the AES due to insufficient income from jobs related to the training they had received; and
- Many girls return to the AES to fulfil responsibilities to support their families (most interviews indicated that children were re-entering the sector primarily due to financial problems affecting their families, rather than being driven by addiction or a desire for the environment).

The group members who were actively involved in conducting the interviews also shared their realisations. GC11F17 expressed a desire for more diverse answers from the non-profit organisations about their efforts to prevent children from returning to the AES, as the responses seemed somewhat common (i.e. the support they provide being project-based and therefore short lived).

During the analysis of evidence generated through the interviews, GC11F17 highlighted an interesting observation. She noted that, compared to a traditional nine-to-five office job, the AES job appeared to be less stressful. However, the workers in the AES seemed unaware of the exploitation and abuse they faced, highlighting a lack of awareness about their own circumstances.

2.5 Theory of Change (ToC)

The group ToC was developed based on all the evidence and what was considered doable in the given timeframe. They decided to address their issue by sensitising vulnerable children, by sharing their lived experiences and also the evidence that they had gathered. They finalised three actions as below:

Action 1: Group members collectively decided to conduct sensitisation at community schools where children from low economic background studies were seen to be at risk of entering into child labour. The main objective of the programme was to sensitise school children of the risks of the AES, pathways of children into the AES (and consequences). The group planned to conduct this action at four community schools. Some of these schools were attended by group members. While planning these events, group members had a discussion around whether to conduct the programme at community schools or at private (English-medium) schools, but they decided upon community schools because the students at these schools are from marginalised families and more vulnerable and high-risk.

Action 2: Sharing findings with local stakeholders such as AES-based organisations, NGOs working in AES locations, police, municipal offices, AES business owners (*dohori*, dance bar, spa/massage venue, and *khaja ghar* owners). Children aimed to share their findings and their own experiences with stakeholders to encourage exploring possible solutions to addressing issues.

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Action 3: Training based on needs and interests of children. The group identified that training to ultimately support them to get good jobs is critical. Training in barista work, cooking, and graphic design were identified as more desirable than in more traditional areas such as sewing.

2.6 Actions

2.6.1 School sensitisation

The group conducted its first action at Manohar secondary school. A total of 55 school students from grades six to ten attended. In Ranibari school, students from grades five to eight attended, along with the school principal and teachers (to enable them to support vulnerable children in their school. The school requested additional sessions.

After the school sensitisation programme, three of the ARG children were linked into the VOC cyber safety programme and undertook further awareness-raising at other community schools, for example Rani Devi school.

Group members also came up with a plan of creating a working group at Rani Devi school consisting of school children, teachers, and ARG children. The purpose was to oversee the attendance of school students, identify any challenges faced by children from within their families or at school, and provide support accordingly. A team was made comprising five ARG members, three teachers, and three school students from the child club. To date, the working group has also conducted a menstrual hygiene session with 90 school children, which was a good opportunity for ARG children to enhance their skills.

The school sensitisation programme was successful in creating greater awareness about the AES amongst students, which might contribute to preventing minors from entering the AES. The majority of school children were found to know very little about the AES:

I have seen some known faces there. At Rani Devi school, there were some children working in domestic labour and some children working in khaja ghars. I think we have reached 95 per cent of the target. There were potential children for WFCL. This programme definitely supported raising awareness of that and also helped prevent children from entering WFCL.

(GC11F17)

Regarding the changes they felt after implementing the action, GC9F18 said that her mother always asked her what she used to do in her ARG meetings and after conducting the sessions in schools, she could tell her mother about it and about her new confidence speaking in front of an audience. After hearing about the programme, her mother felt proud of her and wanted to see photos. GC4M17 said that he has developed skills to interact better with children and bring them into the session. GC2M16 said that he felt respect from the school students and felt like an adult. GC13F18 said that she was never interested in becoming a teacher before, but now wanted to be one. GC11F17 said that she can speak confidently in front of a large audience and wanted to explore other such opportunities (she then became involved in a VOC cyber safety programme where she had to orient school students about cyber safety). A teacher from Rani Devi school also asked her to conduct the social studies class if she was interested. She said that that she has been involved in other programmes before but only CLARISSA had made her feel like a real part of the programme.

2.6.2 Interaction with local stakeholders

The ARG group conducted an interaction programme with local stakeholders to share their evidence-based findings and to engage with the community. They planned an event and invited the ward president, AES-based non-profit organisations, child club representatives, police

officials, women and children in the community, the department of the municipality, the local child protection officer, and AES business owners. As well as sharing their issue and findings they used the event to explore potential initiatives that they could pursue in collaboration with local municipalities and civil society organisations (CSOs).

Reflecting on the event, group members highlighted the significance of their findings related to derogatory attitudes towards AES workers and societal perceptions of women in general. They noted the mixed attitudes of the audience, with some displaying support and others expressing criticism of the AES. Overall, they had concerns about stakeholder engagement but were pleased with their interest in group findings, particularly those that had come from the body-mapping exercise.

Reflecting on what they had learned, group members mentioned learning patience, especially during challenging discussions, and the importance of active listening. They were surprised to find that some people in powerful positions were unaware of the situation of children working in the AES, and were judgemental of AES workers (appearance and clothing). This highlighted the need for more awareness-raising and advocacy in relation to the sector. As a result of interactions with local stakeholders, on the whole, group members gained recognition. The Tokha Municipality expressed a willingness to coordinate further with the group and to involve them in future efforts related to AES children.

2.6.3 Skills-based training

A needs assessment of interested children was undertaken. A total of 19 children (five boys and 14 girls) were selected for training. The CLARISSA team visited various training centres and drew up a Memorandum of Understanding between the selected centre and VOC. Training on IT, barista coffeemaking and cooking/catering was then provided to the children as per their interest. Internships after training was also provided to children.

3. Reflections from the facilitator/documenter

Working with these children engaged in the WFCL gave us an opportunity to understand the dynamics of their lives. The children in the group were all from the same background and had all been involved in the AES, which made them humble and non-judgemental. The timeline for the ARG was always made clear, which prepared the children for its closure after 18 months. This has made it easier for us to handle all the emotion around it closing. We have learned that every child has potential and that if a supportive environment is created, then even children in the WFCL can contribute to change.

3.1 Challenges and mitigations

Retaining the active participation of all children and young people within the group was a challenge. Some working children could only meet at weekends or in the evenings due to their work commitments. Examinations caused some further scheduling issues. Contacting group members without mobile phones was challenging.

To address these challenges, the team scheduled to accommodate group members' exam schedules and a local motivator (who worked in the AES) helped with follow-ups and communicating with group members.

In cases where past issues regarding sexual abuse perpetrated by teachers had restricted sensitisation activities in a school, group members who were ex-students of that school took an initiative to meet with the school and clarify their objectives, and ultimately got permission for organising their activities there.

3.2 Proud moments

Visit to the Royal Palace Museum: All the children were taken on a visit to the Royal Palace Museum. This supported group bonding and trust building.

Gallery walk: This event brought together all the PAR groups in Nepal. Children got the opportunity to share their group work with the other groups and with the wider CLARISSA team. This motivated the children.

4. Reflections from the children

A final review reflection was conducted with the group members. They developed a road map of their ARG journey showing (for example) some participants leaving the group along the way, ToC development, school sensitisation, meetings with local stakeholders, and skills training to children in WFCL. On reviewing the whole journey they had taken they felt satisfied, saw themselves as change makers, and felt pleased to have empowered other young people.

The children reflected on the fact that the group number was much reduced by the end (after 18 months). They reflected on how the group had developed from shy strangers to a very tight knit group.

I now feel this group is like my family.

Our bond grew stronger day-by-day because we all came from the same sector and had similar experiences. We weren't judged.

One challenge was time management because some of us worked during the day, some at night, and some attended college.

I got the opportunity to learn from different ARGs and CLARISSA children's research group. We had the opportunity to share and learn from fellow colleagues or peers. Also, I got an opportunity to be a peer educator.

After the interaction programme with the local government, we got more exposure. If any organisation comes to work on the AES, Tokha Municipality has asked ARG children to coordinate with that organisation or team.

After the sensitisation for schools programme, children felt that they were seen as leaders.

4.1 Challenges in conducting the school programme

Initially, children planned to conduct sessions in four schools but in the end only managed two schools because of time constraints, annual exams and other factors, and therefore children could not meet their target.

4.2 Reflections from children on the delivery of training to children in WFCL

Group members reflected that even when children get training from NGOs, finding suitable job opportunities remains difficult, due to a shortage of good jobs and due to their ages. They suggested that the training might be more beneficial when they become adults, as immediately finding a job after training was uncertain because of age limitations. Children also reflected that some job opportunities did exist but were low paid and had long hours. For instance, after completing a barista coffeemaking training, a child received a job offer with long hours and low pay. This supported their general observations about low pay in the formal sector (some children had returned to working in the informal sector (AES) due to better pay on offer).

This realisation challenged their previous assumption that children re-entered the AES primarily because they could not get training in their preferred field. After having training, one child recounted an offer for a higher-paying job at a hotel which he had to decline due to age restrictions. Group members highlighted that it was easier to find work in the AES, which attracted many young people, including recent migrants from the village, without needing official documents or meeting age requirements. Migrants from villages often struggle to find any opportunities (other than in the AES). Some jobs require computer skills but still offer a

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meagre salary. The children concluded that the AES remains an attractive option due to its informal nature, many jobs, and flexibility, especially for minors. Training did not necessarily create immediate job opportunities to prevent children from entering WFCL. Transitions might take time. Training could still pave the way for a better future, however, and has given the children who received it choices.

4.3 Reflections from children on working with local stakeholders

Group member's reflection included that their interactions with stakeholders had created future opportunities for them. Several stakeholders had not only acknowledged the child labour issue as never before but had also asked the children to follow up on their actions in the future in various ways, and had endorsed this group's registration. Ward 9 – Tokha Municipality – has been actively engaging with the group, inviting them to workshops, requesting further presentations, and conducting monitoring visits. Positive changes have been brought about, such as the allocation of scholarship quotas for working children and a new police commitment to address abuse and exploitation. Biswas Nepal, an AES-focused organisation, had recognised the need for more efficient training programmes for AES workers – another indication of the children's efforts in bringing about positive changes.

4.4 Reflections on actions implementation

The children reflected that they had executed their actions as per their plan, but had found that even after the vocational training, children could not transition to formal jobs – but they will further explore opportunities with their newly acquired skills. Additionally, they are part of an ongoing group at Rani Devi school with child club members and teachers, which was not planned and is an additional achievement. Before their actions, many local stakeholders were unaware of child labour issues in the AES but are now aware, and in some cases keen to platform their newfound knowledge. Many more people know the risks of working in the AES. If the training aligns with children's own interests, they may now have more opportunity to leave risky work in the AES.

4.5 Trust and ownership

The group members scored themselves at **level four of a trust tool (the highest level)**. They cited that they are passionate about the group and about helping others, that they are all now friends and can trust each other, and there is a mutual respect between them.

The group also rated themselves at level four for openness. They felt that everyone listens to each other, voices are equally heard, and all are encouraged to participate in the group's discussions. All recognise that they get valuable insights from others.

In terms of feeling part of the group, the group rated themselves at level three. They felt that they had all supported each other throughout and had participated equally; however, not all the members had been equally active, indeed some had stepped away from the group. As such they scored themselves three not four.

In relation to respect within the group they scored themselves as four, all members were given opportunities to participate equally and roles were allocated to all based on each team member's capacity and strengths.

In relation to ability to see and make change, the group rated themselves as three. They tried their best, but in the end could not see the desired change (children moving to jobs with better pay and therefore eschewing the AES). They are aware of their weaknesses and feel there is

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still work to be done. As already mentioned, there are still group members not fully integrated into the group.

4.6 Turning points

The group members agreed that a major turning point was the formation of the working group in Rani Devi school after the school sensitisation programme, which went beyond the action plan, and they are planning further events, such as on menstrual health and social aspects of menstruation.

Group members also joined a champions group which will go beyond the life of CLARISSA, and have learned leadership skills from youth leaders.

In relation to children's circle of influence – the broader context where they are both influenced by and capable of influencing various aspects of their lives, from family and employers to communities, schools, and even political processes – the group aimed to identify the impacts of their advocacy on different levels. They identified key groups within their circle of influence and assessed themselves as below:

- Children – children's awareness of the AES was raised, leading some students to reconsider working in the AES due to their new knowledge.
- AES workers – AES worker stories were gathered, and insights were gained into their needs and the limitations of NGO programmes set up to assist them.
- NGOs and business owners – interactions with this group raised awareness of why AES workers returned to the WFCL and business owners have raised awareness of the legal implications of employing children and of child labour issues.
- Local government, school, and the police – ARG members coordinated with these groups, leading to increased support for children facing abuse.

Overall, this ARG's initiatives had an impact on various levels, including for individual children, on business owners, and at the government level.

4.7 Group transition beyond CLARISSA

All of the children and young people in this group are at school or college, and as such they are busy and are not in the position to immediately create change. They have all committed at an individual level, however, that if they become aware of any children going into the WFCL (AES) they will try to alert them to the risks.

Three of the children from the group are in the new working group at Rani Devi school and also in a new champions group run by VOC. These children have committed to continuing to spread awareness and share their learning through these platforms.