



Family Lack of Awareness and Conflict Leads to Abuse and Exploitation at the Workplace

Nepal Action Research Group 7

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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: Subgroup 1 key details

Action Research Group (ARG) name	Child-led Action Research Group
Theme of ARG (issue being worked on)	Lack of awareness and family conflict leading to abuse and exploitation at workplace
Start date	6 February 2022
End date	15 July 2023
Starting participants (N=total)	Males = 2 Females = 15 People with disabilities = 0 Children who are currently working = 17
Ending participants (N=total)	Males = 1 Females = 14 People with disabilities = 0 Children who are currently working = 10

Table 1.2: Subgroup 2 key details

Action Research Group (ARG) name	Child and family-led Action Research Group
Theme of ARG (issue being worked on)	Social norms around voices of children not being important in relation to family matters (children should not interfere; should not speak in front of elders and are not able to express themselves amongst elders)
Start date	4 March 2023
End date	30 September 2023
Starting participants (N=total)	Males = 2 Females = 9 People with disabilities = 0 Children who are currently working = 5
Ending participants (N=total)	Males = 2 Females = 9 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.

CLARISSA Nepal collected 400 life stories from children in the WFCL (200 from the Adult Entertainment Sector (AES) and 200 from selected neighbourhoods) and then carried out participatory analysis of these stories with children. This analysis identified core causal pathways into WFCL and themes (or issues) to be addressed through Action Research.

Slums are socially, economically, and politically marginalised and are the source of much of Kathmandu's cheap labour force, including a labour force acting as service provider in the

informal sector through activities like vending, shoemaking, driving, and construction work. The residents of Kathmandu's slums are involved in diversified livelihood activities, and most of them (90 per cent) are involved in the informal sector.

Kathmandu is the first urban area of Nepal. The AES¹ is a relatively new and growing sector in Kathmandu, developing rapidly after international aid and trade relations led to the growth of a consumer economy and the development of a consumer culture. The sector has developed in response to increased demand for entertainment from a growing urban (particularly male) population engaging in a more consumer-based economy. At the same time, the AES employs women and girls in a context where alternative work opportunities are limited. The AES is included as one of the WFCL due to the nature of forced labour, slavery, and commercial sexual exploitation of children inside the sector.

One of the themes/issues explored during CLARISSA's life story analysis was 'lack of awareness and family conflict leading children into WFCL' – such as the AES, where they face abuse and exploitation. This theme/issue fitted the context of the chosen location for an ARG. Many children from this area who said their life stories emphasised poor family relationships and the majority of children from this settlement are engaged in some sort of child labour.

1.2 Creation of the ARG and how this was linked to previous CLARISSA processes

The ARG location slum has push factors for WFCL, such as low and unstable family incomes, family conflict, and intertwined community labour intermediaries ('neighbourhood aunty', *didi* ('big sister') and peer influence).

Peer influence to start work at a young age (12–13 years old) as a part-time worker in party palaces is prevalent due to the proximity of houses and the children's similar socioeconomic backgrounds.

These children then gradually move into full-time work, whether in the AES or other forms of WFCL, through different informal channels, and also migrate domestically and internationally for work (in some cases they are trafficked). Also, in this location children move jobs frequently – for example, from working in banquet/party palace to working as a vegetable vendor, during emergencies, including the Covid-19 pandemic.

1.2.1 Coordination meeting with the focal person and community

As well as contributing to the story collection phase, children from the location participated in the life story analysis process – this established contact and rapport with children in the area and a focal person (community social worker) in the location helped to select children to be members of this ARG. A coordination meeting was carried out on 11 February 2022, and the venue for group meetings was finalised. The CLARISSA team then visited the community and talked with children and their families, explaining the CLARISSA programme and the Action Research process. Children gave their consent to participate in the ARG and some invited their friends as well. The children were all school-going but also worked part-time in banquets/party palaces, or as street vendors, construction workers, or domestic workers.

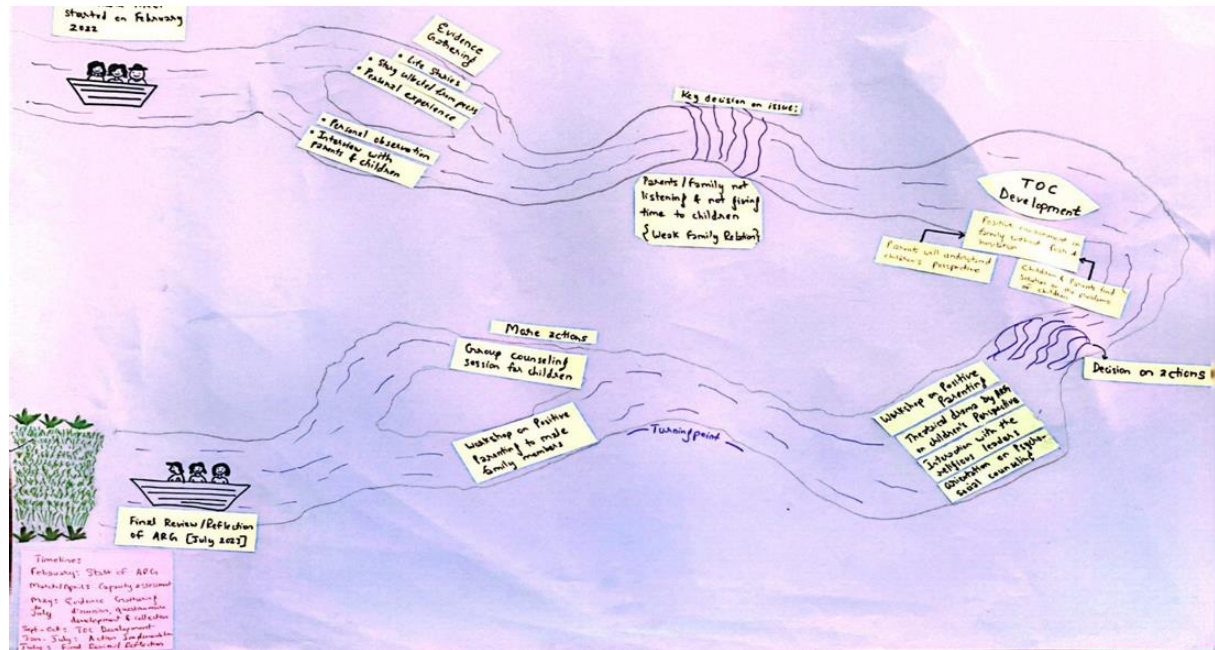
1.2.2 Formal meeting with children

Children decided that Saturday would be a suitable day for them to attend meetings and the meetings formally started on Saturday 26 February 2022.

¹ The AES includes *dohoris*, dance bars, cabin restaurants, and spa/massage venues.

2. The story of the ARG

Figure 2.1: River of life



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

2.1 Key decisions on, and process for, gathering further evidence

2.1.1 Lack of awareness and family conflict leading children into WFCL

The group discussed personal experiences of family conflict leading to WFCL and worked through their discussions in depth using exercises such as body mapping. They also decided to generate further evidence by collecting more life stories from their community and their friends. Members were divided into pairs and each pair was asked to collect one story. As well as exploring links between family conflict and WFCL they were interested in links between family conflict and early marriage and running away from home.

ARG members documented the stories they collected and then discussed the learning from the new stories. One member said: 'Each story was different but the issues regarding the family were common in all stories.'

It was then suggested that the group list all the children in WFCL in the location to inform an awareness-raising programme. The group members suggested that they gather information from their neighbours on families where child labour is prevalent. The group also developed a questionnaire and interviewed eight children and their families to deepen their knowledge of the theme and identify more reasons (causal factors) for the problem of poor family relationships. This evidence substantiated their findings from the life stories they had collected and their own experiences.

2.2 Key topics discussed during the ARG process in order to deeply discuss the issues

During discussions, the group covered early marriage, abuse from parents, multiple marriages of parents, poor economic conditions of families, substance abuse, negative peer influence, illness of parents, and child labour.

They also discussed social norms such as children not being heard by their families, and group members talked about their expectations of being heard by their elders, of their opinions being taken into consideration, and of not being prejudged due to their age.

2.3 Key decisions on specific issues to tackle: ToC development and actions

Through the analysis of the mini system map generated through earlier story analysis, the group listed common issues and then selected two priority issues (peer influence and weak family relations).

They also analysed their new stories, developing a mini system map and working on the identification of major issues. Finally, 'Family/parents not giving time to children and not understanding children issues' was selected as the specific issue to work on because this issue led to other common issues including peer influence, early marriage, and child labour.

Based on their analysis (in the twelfth meeting) the group collaboratively discussed actions and desired outcomes to address their core issue. They chose to prioritise the sensitisation of parents on positive family relationships and the roles and responsibilities of parents, and to do this by performing a street drama on child rights.

2.3.1 Theory of Change (ToC)

By the thirteenth meeting, the group had developed ToC actions comprising a workshop on positive parenting, sensitisation and awareness through street drama, informing parents about counselling services, and interactions among parents and religious leaders. A timeline and possible indicators and outcomes for action points was developed.

ToC: 'Parents/family give time to their children and listen to their children, understand them and resolve their issues.'

2.4 Key decisions on actions

Based on the ToC, in the fourteenth meeting the ARG decided on their responsibilities, risks associated with action implementation (and mitigation), and the hoped-for outcome of each action. As above, they were focused on orientation to parents/family members on positive parenting, conducting short dialogues and theatrical dramas to parents on children's perspectives, convening religious leaders to share what is written in religious books on parental responsibilities, and orienting parents about agencies or individuals who provide psycho-social counselling.

After completion of each action, children evaluated them and realised that working with family would also be crucial for them to understand the whole family's point of view on the issue, and also wanted to emphasise social norms aspects of the theme in order to change system dynamics pushing children into WFCL. To understand the parental point of view, children decided to form a second Action Research Group incorporating children from the group along with parents interested in working together with children to address the issue. The second ARG

was an extended group of five working children who were already part of the existing ARG and six parents, to understand the parents' points of view and also to give a platform to children and parents to have a dialogue. The selection of children and parents to be part of this group was done as per their availability and the group started four months before the first ARG was completed. After completion of the first group, other children also actively engaged in the extended group to get a better perspective on parents' points of view.

The CLARISSA programme had by this time pre-built rapport and trust with children and community members in the location and a good understanding of the norms of parenting and community in squatter settlements. We had drawn issues of social norms from 25 life stories previously collected from children in the location. Personal experiences on social norms also guided the group's decision to work on the voices of children being neglected by elders.

The group then delivered some one-to-one dialogues with their peers (community parents and children) on positive and negative parenting practices. After one-to-one discussion a bigger group sat together and discussed the impact of both positive and negative parenting (social norms) on children and on relationships in the family. This was then repeated in a second session and was felt to be successful in growing people's understanding of social norms.

2.5 What did the group learn from their actions and what happened as a result of the actions?

During a review and reflection of the ARG, the group said they had felt comfortable and confident to work with peer groups rather than with adults/parents and felt most ownership of these actions.

As a result of the actions, several positive changes were observed, and the below are quotes from the children in the group:

MC10F14's mother told us that after the parental workshop and observing the drama, her husband has reduced scolding the children at home so he should be sent to the meetings of the ARG.

My mother, after coming back from the meeting, did not shout at my sister who usually indulged herself on her smartphone. My mother instead talked with her and tried to make her understand not to use the smartphone a lot and to focus on study.

My father said that he would not shout at children anymore and he understood about good parenting. So, he said that he won't be shouting and scolding us.

There was a neighbour who used to engage her daughter more in household chores but after watching the drama they told the daughter to focus on studying rather than helping at home. They sometimes ask the child to help but it has reduced compared to before.

Yes, last time my friend was referred for counselling. Her relationship with her mother was not good. Both mother and daughter attended the counselling session. After several sessions, their family relationship has now improved. My friend has become less aggressive towards her mother.

I also think that the dialogue went well. I found the participants listening actively during that day. After completion of the action, now my peer/neighbour doesn't scold her children.

Through the dialogue I got to share my learning with peers. I realised that I am capable of carrying out interaction with others.

It was good. After the one-on-one dialogue, my peer told me that she applied the suggestion I gave her, which was to engage her daughter in drawing instead of using the phone and spending time with her (playing games, reading stories). She said that now her daughter's screen time has been limited and interaction among them has increased. My peer was happy to join the dialogue and said that she would like to join more ARG meetings in the coming days.

3. Reflections from the facilitator/documenter

Working with the children and families of the ARG location helped us to deepen our knowledge about the WFCL in a location comprising people who have migrated from all across Nepal. The children there are easily influenced by their friends or by 'didis' ('big sisters') and 'aunties' due to the proximity of their houses and common spaces for washing clothes, etc. Being engaged with these children helped us understand the peer influences in their community and, critically, the environment within the family which drives children towards the WFCL.

3.1 Challenges and mitigation

Major challenges were around the fact that they were school-going children, which made it difficult for them to make time for meetings and actions. Likewise, for parents, their only day off was usually Saturday, and so everything had to happen on a Saturday.

3.2 Proud moments

Some of our proudest moments were when children were able to invite male members of their families to participate in positive parenting training, as per their ToC action. Likewise, when children questioned some things said by parents, or challenged or corrected adults/parents. We were also proud to see group members bringing their peers into dialogues and continuing discussions on their own.

4. Reflections from the children

During the final learning and reflection of the group, the members went through a ToC review. They looked at the problem identified, the evidence gathered, action planning and implementation and the desired outcomes. Throughout their group journey the members have experienced a change in their group dynamics. One child said,

Yes, I think there have been many changes compared to our initial phase. I have seen that trust has developed in our group as we have been engaged together for a long period. Besides that, I have seen change in myself.

Another child said,

Yes, I feel the same way as you do. In our earlier days of ARG, the members didn't know each other properly. We hesitated to share our opinion because we doubted if our opinion was correct, or it was wrong. Now I think all the members openly share their opinion in the group because we trust each other, and we listen to each other respectfully.

The group said that to some extent they have succeeded in changing themselves and others (parents, community people, peers) through their actions. One child said,

Before joining the ARG, I used to get angry with my family. I tried to work to make some money, but after I became an ARG member I learned about child labour and became aware of the consequences. That's the change I have felt in myself. What about you? Have you felt any changes in the group?

Another child said:

We have seen changes in others through our actions – the workshop on positive parenting brought changes in parents (change in behaviour, self-realisation among parents, children), street drama performance received positive response from parents, change in family/neighbour conflict seen after the positive parenting workshop with male members, positive changes in the children after group counselling, through life-skill training built self-confidence among us, we have seen positive changes in our family relation, heard success from friends, saw changes ourselves among the participants; so we think these were the success.

The group also said that they felt more comfortable and confident working with peer groups rather than with adults/parents, and the group demonstrated greater ownership of and carried out more successful actions connected with peers rather than those targeted towards families.

4.1 Trust and ownership

The majority of the ARG members agreed that the group developed trust and reached level 5 of the trust tool criteria, which states: 'Actors are showing up for each other. They feel like a team and can rely on each other for support through the highs and lows.'

The group feels their bond has deepened; they trust each other and, because of this, they were able to carry out their initial planned actions. Likewise, ARG members were able to plan and convince the extended group to carry out the extended actions. Some members, however, felt the group's trust level was level 4 ('Actors are becoming friends. They express appreciation of each other and proactively enhance each other's strengths') and not 5, because they felt that sometimes the members planned to act but didn't execute fully or demonstrate equal efforts and time during implementation.

One child said,

Sometimes the group doesn't agree on a common point; for instance, during the planning phase of group counselling half of the members agreed to carry out whereas others didn't.

Overall, most of the members agreed that trust had increased and rated the group as level 5.

Though the group worked for 17 months, there was a perceived lack of ownership as a result of several factors such as irregularity of group members in ARG meetings, lack of active participation in action implementation, and fear and hesitation of not being heard by parents (making the members reach out to the group facilitator at times for help). Members said the drama performance was an example of where ownership had not been shown by all members. On the other hand, the ARG demonstrated high ownership for group counselling. The members mostly showed high ownership of actions connected with their peers – because they felt more comfortable and confident in this approach. Three members felt they had fully taken ownership because they had seen a change in themselves, and other participants who had been included in their actions. One child mentioned a: 'change in speaking tone of uncle towards grandfather post positive parenting workshop.' Another child said: 'We organised group counselling and saw changes through our action,' and another child said: 'I invited my sister's husband (guardian) to the positive parenting workshop, I wondered if he would share his learning with my sister or not. Well, he did share it.'

4.2 Group transition beyond CLARISSA

Reflecting on how the group can bring change in their community and what actions they can take to continue their group's efforts beyond CLARISSA, the group expressed an interest in continuing via the existing 'child club' in the community. The group feels that children need to be further sensitised on child labour issues and collaborating with their families, and wants to do further work on social norms issues. For transitioning beyond CLARISSA this group merged with some of the members of the child club in the location. Through the composition of this mixed group, they plan to continue their efforts to bring positive changes in relation to social norms practice through awareness-raising and knowledge-sharing with neighbours and friends in their community.