



## About CLARISSA

*Child Labour: Action-Research-Innovation in South and South-Eastern Asia (CLARISSA)* was a five-year (2019–2024), deeply participatory, Action Research consortium which generated evidence-informed, innovative solutions by children and business owners to tackle hazardous, exploitative labour in Bangladesh and Nepal. The consortium partners were the Institute of Development Studies (IDS); Terre des hommes (Tdh); ChildHope; Consortium for Street Children (CSC); Children-Women in Social Service and Human Rights (CWISH); Voice of Children (VOC); Grambangla Unnayan Committee, and BRAC Institute of Governance and Development. It was funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).



### The complex issue of worst forms of child labour

Worst forms of child labour is an example of a longstanding development problem, with numerous interlinked causes, which vary from one context to another. An intervention which can reduce worst forms of child labour in one context may not be effective in another. So far, most interventions designed to reduce or eliminate the worst forms of child labour globally have proved limited, and the problem remains hard to tackle effectively and sustainably. In response, CLARISSA set out to build on existing evidence and test how a participatory, learning- and action-oriented, whole systems approach (Systemic Action Research) could generate new and innovative, child- and people-driven solutions to the problem of worst forms of child labour. The decision to work with informal business owners was one important and novel aspect of the programme, as it reframed these actors as potential change agents, and not just as perpetrators.

### The Systemic Action Research approach

CLARISSA used Systemic Action Research to work at scale using deeply participatory methods, with hundreds of children, business owners, and community members in informal and unregulated employment sectors, namely, the leather-supply chain in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and the adult entertainment sector in Kathmandu, Nepal. One aim was to uncover the big picture – the system which drives children to work in the worst forms of child labour – and to find new ways to change this system. Systemic Action Research has also been used for diverse development and humanitarian challenges such as peacebuilding, HIV prevention, and sanitation.

Over five years, some 800 children from the adult entertainment sector in Kathmandu and leather-supply chains in Dhaka – told their ‘Life Stories’ to adult and child researchers. This resulted in 25 Action Research groups mostly made up of children, and some business owners. The Action Research groups generated their own evidence around the themes they had identified from the Life Stories – themes which they had come to understand as contributing to children working in worst forms of child labour. Action Research themes included: family dynamics, such as alcohol abuse and family violence; social norms, such as child marriage; workplace related topics, such as health and safety, and abuse; and broader community issues, such as access to education. Engaging with children and business owners in this way also enabled a deep understanding of the business practices which take place in the informal, and often hidden, spaces of unregulated work sectors.

**Front cover image:**  
*Children and young people sketching connecting lines on a big system map, Nepal*  
CREDIT: ANIS BASTOLA





*An aerial view of a Dhaka neighbourhood, and home to many CLARISSA participants.*

CREDIT: CLARISSA

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These deep and collective understandings of the various interlinked factors that perpetuate the worst forms of child labour were followed by a set of innovative and context-specific actions designed to change the system. These actions were developed and implemented by the children and business owners themselves, with the support of CLARISSA facilitators. While some actions had a focus on improving family relations or improving a business association's code of conduct, others had a stronger advocacy focus, for instance by bringing issues for children who work to the attention of schools and local government. Additionally, during COVID, when CLARISSA was unable to operate as planned, children also took part in CLARISSA Children's research groups which learned about issues in their neighbourhoods. This included documenting their neighbourhood by taking photos using the PhotoVoice methodology.

### **CLARISSA's value add**

The evidence generated by CLARISSA contributed to a new understanding of what drives children into the worst form of child labour in Kathmandu and Dhaka, and how it could be tackled. The evidence was also used to influence policy at local and national government levels. More generally, it also adds to the existing evidence base and learning around the value of a Systemic Action Research approach in diverse contexts.

CLARISSA was also able to rigorously test a number of programme approaches which can support Systemic Action Research at scale, including using 'Participatory Adaptive Management' whereby programme planning is adjusted based on evidence and learning in real time; and how to work effectively with diverse partners as a consortium. This evidenced learning has very practical applications for any organisation or team seeking to tackle a longstanding development or humanitarian challenge in a new way, for instance, by working across sectors with different partners.

Importantly, CLARISSA showed that, even when working at scale, using Systemic Action Research can support deep participation, help build a strong sense of collective ownership and agency among participants, and identify different and new understandings and ways of addressing a longstanding problem such as worst forms of child labour. Furthermore, not only did CLARISSA demonstrate that the approach brought very real benefits to children, their families and communities, but also how it is possible to shift significant power to participants, where they take the lead in finding their own solutions to the challenges which affect them.

**CLARISSA** has its own website where all the research outputs and many other programme resources can be accessed. This learning and reflection series is also hosted by [participatorymethods.org](https://participatorymethods.org) and [Child Hub](https://www.childhub.org).

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# Introduction

*A business owners' Action Research group in Dhaka.*

CREDIT: CLARISSA

## How can this resource enhance programming?

CLARISSA evidence builds upon an existing body of evidence (Burns, 2014; Howard et al., 2021) around deeply participatory processes, where children and adults are given significant decision-making power, and supported to collect data, analyse, and take action in order to shift system dynamics to improve their lives. Critical factors within a process of whole systems change are facilitating child- and people-driven evidence generation; participatory learning and action processes around underlying system dynamics and how they drive a problem; and a high level of collective ownership by participants. These critical factors can be enabled through a facilitation approach, inclusive participation, collective problem-solving, and by giving more decision-making power to children and adult stakeholders by considering them as agents of change. With this in mind, this resource can support any organisation or team which is seeking to:

- Strengthen meaningful, deep participation
- Deepen levels of ownership among participants and groups
- Shift power to local people, children and marginalised groups
- Strengthen people- and child-driven or -led programming
- Work effectively as a diverse, equitable and collectively-minded partnership
- Find new, sustainable ways to address longstanding development and humanitarian challenges
- Find ways to reduce dependency on external development and humanitarian actors
- Build team capacity around the fundamental practitioner and team skills underpinning most deep participatory, people-driven, power-sharing approaches
- Use participatory forms of adaptive management to enable learning that supports effectiveness

While CLARISSA used a child- and people-driven systemic approach within the child protection sector, the approach is not limited to any one sector, and has also been used in diverse settings including [engaging communities in sustainable peacebuilding](#); improving toilet provision in a local market; working with bonded labourers to improve their situation; or reducing the incidence of HIV within an island community (Burns, 2014).

### **The purpose of this resource**

The purpose of this resource is to introduce development and humanitarian organisations and their teams to a programme approach and methodology which can enable deeply participatory, learning- and action-oriented, whole systems change. It is written with the understanding that while most development and humanitarian organisations and programmes are not set up to 'do research', this does not mean that they cannot start to use the principles of a Systemic Action Research approach to enhance their work. This resource can help demystify the perception that robust, participatory, child- and people-led Action Research is more difficult or not possible; only relevant for monitoring, evaluation and learning teams; or that the methods are too technical for most practitioners or local participants.

The resource provides key information and learning through video and written briefs, which supports a process of team reflection and co-learning around each topic, including how the approach might be relevant or could be adapted to teams' own working contexts and programmes. It also encourages teams to set themselves some actions to start shifting how they work. Within the briefs, guidance and additional resources are provided on some of the critical skills and tools required to implement a participatory, learning- and action-oriented, whole systems programme, including further evidence and learning from CLARISSA.

### **What this resource is, and what it is not**

This resource has been designed to be a practical, accessible introduction for practitioners and teams to participatory, learning- and action-oriented, whole systems change. It is not a step-by-step guide on how to implement a Systemic Action Research programme. Rather, it is designed to introduce the approach, spark interest and encourage teams to start trying out and practicing some of the methods, skills and tools highlighted by the videos and each brief. Importantly, it supports a



collaborative reflection and learning process around if and how the approach may be relevant for their own organisation or programme. The reflective process can help orient teams and organisations wanting to revise, update or enhance their own programme guidance.

### Who should use this reflection series?

This resource has the potential to support **any** team, currently using **any** approach, working in **any** sector. What is required, however, is that teams have a level of curiosity and a commitment to changing how they currently approach and carry out their work. In particular, this resource will be useful for organisations, programme teams or groups (hereafter referred to collectively as 'teams')

looking for inspiration, approaches and skills which can help shift their programmes towards deep participation, collective ownership and systems change. It can be used by teams working with adults or children. It is particularly relevant for international NGOs and agencies, as well as national NGOs, and potentially some sub-national NGOs working in development and humanitarian settings. In the case where an organisation is small or has limited capacity, this resource might be suitable if they are working alongside partners with the required capacities.

Additionally, the resource is designed to be used in a programme team setting – it is not designed solely for individual professional development or for training. Importantly, senior management teams; monitoring, evaluation and learning teams; and donor/partner relations teams should undertake this learning and reflection series alongside implementation teams. This is important because the approaches, methods and skills require an enabling environment, which is dependent upon commitment and support from the wider organisation and its various supporting teams.

### Using this resource

- **When to use** – This resource can be used at any time during a programme's implementation, as well as before a programme is designed or implemented. In cases where a programme is already being implemented, teams are encouraged to identify potential 'spaces' where they may be able to integrate aspects of the approach or skills into existing plans and commitments.
- **How to use** – This resource is designed to support a collective learning journey and therefore emphasises co-learning and action setting by teams, as opposed to solely individual learning. Generally, all team members will need to read through the learning and reflection briefs in their own time in preparation for the team reflection session featured at the end of each brief. Teams will need a way to come together, either physically (ideal) or virtually, for the reflection sessions.



*Children and business owners in Nepal share their ideas during a gallery walk.*

CREDIT: CLARISSA

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Teams might also want to experiment with other ways of delivering this resource, perhaps by adapting it to fit an existing method or mechanism already used within their organisation to support practitioner and team learning. Teams can adapt the suggestions to suit their own context, preferences and needs, and are encouraged to find a way of undertaking this learning and reflection series which suits them.

- **Time requirements** – Team members will need about 10 minutes to watch each video and about 30 minutes to read each learning and reflection brief, in their own time. Teams will then need to plan for about two hours of team reflection time for each brief's reflection session. Because many of the skills and tools can also be 'learned by doing' teams will find that they can incorporate the practice of many key approaches and skills into their everyday work. It is recommended that teams go through the series week by week, or at another regular time, perhaps by attaching it to an existing ongoing weekly team meeting or regular organisational event. As the learning itself is a process, it is suggested that going through the series is not rushed. For instance, it would be suitable to work on a different learning and reflection brief weekly, or even monthly.
- **Facilitation suggestions** – The resource can be facilitated or non-facilitated. It is possible, and also encouraged, for team members to take turns to practice facilitating the team discussions for the different reflection sessions. The discussions are about reflecting and listening to one another, they are not about 'teaching' or learning from trainers, so facilitators do not need to be experts in Systemic Action Research.
- **Keeping track of what the team has discussed and your own reflections** – Team members will find it helpful to use a simple dedicated notebook to record discussions and reflections. If individuals have another preferred method, they could use this instead. Recording discussions and reflections in notebooks is very important for tracking and reviewing a learning process and will also help team members decide on key actions at the very end of this resource.
- **Materials required** – The resource does not need to be delivered in a conventional workshop setting and can be delivered in a less formal space. The learning and reflection video and briefs can be watched and read alone, but teams will need to come together for reflection sessions. These sessions require very few materials: a notebook and the usual workshop materials such as a suitable place to meet, whiteboards, large-sized paper, and coloured pens should suffice. For remote delivery, an accessible conferencing platform, internet connection, and digital tools such as a digital whiteboard will be sufficient, in addition to personal notebooks.

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## References

- Burns, D. (2014) [Assessing Impact in Dynamic and Complex Environments: Systemic Action Research and Participatory Systemic Inquiry](#), CDI Practice Paper 8, Brighton: IDS. ISSN: 2053-0536
- Howard, Jo & Burns, Danny & Ospina, Sonia. (2021). [SAGE Handbook of Participatory Research and Inquiry](#). 10.4135/9781529769432.



Section 1

# Working in a child- and people- centred way



## **People-driven solutions:**

An introduction to facilitating deep participation for systemic change through Systemic Action Research programming

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**T**his learning and reflection brief is designed to help teams learn about, reflect on and identify some possible actions to adopt, or to enhance a deeply child- and people-centred way of working. It is useful for any team, no matter what programme approach they are currently using. Specifically, it can help teams:

- Learn about what a child- and people-centred way of working is and why it is so important for participatory, learning- and action-oriented, whole systems programmes,
- Learn about communication skills, a fundamental aspect of a child- and people-centred way of working,
- Access key tools and support for strengthening communications skills,
- Reflect on their own programme(s)'s approach and identify possible actions which could potentially enhance or shift it towards a more strongly child- and people-centred way of working.

*A children's advocacy group in Nepal.*

SOURCE: FROM THE CLARISSA VIDEO 'WORKING IN A CHILD- AND PEOPLE-CENTRED WAY'

*Terms used in this Brief:*

**Dohori**

Places of entertainment where Nepali folk songs are performed.

**Lived experience**

Personal, actual experiences and related perspectives.





## 1 VIDEO

Watch the video '[Working in a child- and people-centred way](#)' where CLARISSA team members, community members and children from Bangladesh and Nepal talk about their experiences and learning as part of CLARISSA. After you have watched the video, note down how you think this approach is similar or different to how you currently work.

*A children's advocacy group meeting in Nepal.*

SOURCE: FROM THE CLARISSA VIDEO '[WORKING IN A CHILD-AND PEOPLE-CENTRED WAY](#)'

## 2 WORKING IN A CHILD- AND PEOPLE-CENTRED WAY

Working in a child- and people- centred way is building a programme where:

- The lived experiences\*, perspectives, knowledge and agency of child and adult stakeholders are valued and prioritised.
- Researchers, facilitators and other programme staff create an enabling, safe and inclusive environment for children and adults to participate deeply and lead their own research, analysis and decision-making around the issues affecting them.
- Children and adult stakeholders own the programme (i.e. learning, decision-making, actions taken) – “this is our project”.
- Child or adult stakeholders’ support networks and environments such as family, friends, community and service providers are seen as important elements of a child- or people-centred strategy – children and adults don’t live alone in a bubble, and their various networks have a strong influence on their lives. For instance, CLARISSA was child-centred but it didn’t only work with children, it was inclusive and also family- and community-focused, while also working with business owners and other key adults to address challenges for children.
- Child and adult stakeholders benefit on different levels, for instance through the specific benefits and impact derived from a programme, as well as by nurturing an individual’s sense of agency, power and confidence in relation to changing other aspects of their life, which will live on beyond the programme.

Working in a child- and people-centred way is important for any programme, but it is critical for Systemic Action Research approaches where there is an emphasis on generating collective learning, taking child- and people-led actions, and adapting a programme as it learns. For example, CLARISSA's participatory, child-centred approach resulted in a deeper and more nuanced understanding of why and how children ended up in the worst forms of child labour, and the impact the work was having on the children, their families and their wider support networks. In turn, the children collectively generated innovative solutions which aligned closely to their life experiences and the challenges they faced. In addition, children expressed how the process had helped them build their confidence more generally.

Working in a child- and people-centred way is sometimes confused with working in a child- and people-focused way. While a programme's focus may be on children or a particular group of vulnerable adults, this does not necessarily mean that the programme values or prioritises these groups' perspectives and agency over the programme's assumptions or staff expertise. Additionally, a child- and people-focused approach won't necessarily ensure broad inclusion, meaningful participation, or foster a sense of ownership by participants.

### 3 WORKING IN A CHILD- AND PEOPLE-CENTRED WAY: PRACTICAL LEARNING FROM CLARISSA

*Children can undertake detailed research and critical analyses.* The child- and people-centred approach used by CLARISSA trained children as researchers and supported them to generate and make sense of the data collected by children's Life Stories, by developing systems maps through causal analysis, and by participating in Action Research groups. Initially, some of the children were not clear on what to expect from their new roles as researchers and were reluctant or shy to take part in group discussions and activities. However, as the training, co-learning and mentoring progressed, the same children became actively engaged in group discussions and even gave presentations of the outcomes of group discussions in plenary. The children's research activities also helped boost the overall confidence of many children. The systems maps (See also Learning and Reflection Brief 2).



*“To find solutions to those problems, it is not possible for adults to do it alone. For children’s problems, children have to come together, and we should listen to what the children in our homes and families have to say.”*

Local motivator, Nepal

*A children’s Action Research group in Nepal.*

CREDIT: CLARISSA



**Mapping systems and taking action)** which the children developed, as well as the additional research undertaken by the Action Research groups, provided rich insights into children’s lives. The systems maps also helped children, families, communities and CLARISSA partners gain additional clarity on how certain interrelated situations and conditions combined to drive children into the worst forms of children labour. CLARISSA evidence shows how this new systemic understanding motivated collective action.

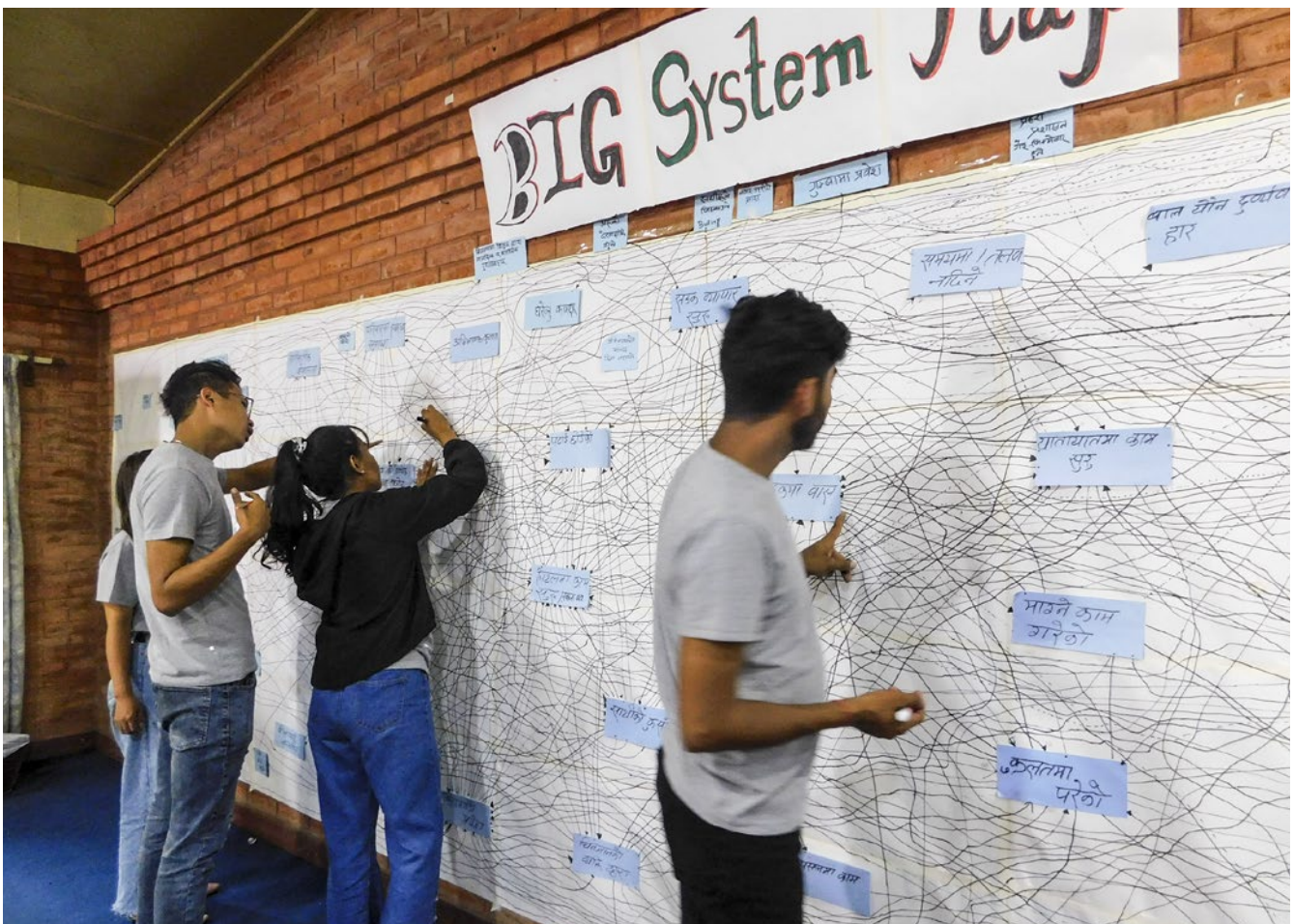
**Working in a child- and people-centred way is about learning, but also ‘un-learning’.**

The child- and people-centred approach of CLARISSA, as well as the reflexive nature of the programme, prompted many of its team members to re-evaluate their own attitudes, assumptions, and expectations in relation to working children. Many partner team members were not convinced at the beginning of the programme that such a deeply child-centred and child-led approach could lead to robust and useful evidence on the worst forms of child labour. However, as the work progressed, team members were at once encouraged to reflect on their own biases as part of the programme, while at the same time experiencing for themselves how, with the right support, the children showed themselves to be capable of undertaking critical, deep analyses of complex data and issues. A key turning point was experienced within CLARISSA, whereby many team members radically shifted their own assumptions and biases by ‘un-learning’ the approaches and perspectives which had been guiding a lot of their previous work, and a new level of trust was established across the whole team – a trust in the agency and ability of children to learn deeply about the issues which affect their lives.

“I saw that many from our own team had a little apprehension at the beginning whether these things were really doable by children, whether they would be able to find a solution by forming an Action Research team.”

CLARISSA partner team member, Bangladesh

Children and young people sketching connecting lines on a big system map, Nepal. CREDIT: ANIS BASTOLA







***Working in a child- and people-centred way requires skilled facilitators.***

CLARISSA trained adult facilitators to undertake story collection (with the help of documenters) and to support the children’s Action Research groups. Before starting any research, facilitators first took several months to build trust – through fun and engaging activities – between themselves and the children, with their families, local stakeholders, and between the children themselves. Once the story collection and research groups started, the facilitators’ approach was not to teach, but to listen, support and encourage. This included addressing power imbalances in group settings, and actively acknowledging each individual’s own abilities, strengths and value. Also, facilitators guided the group towards using critical and reflexive thinking and trusted that the children were capable of these skills. In particular, and linked to ‘un-learning’, CLARISSA also learned that good facilitators don’t necessarily need to have a high-level, formal research skills. In fact, engaging highly qualified researchers at the beginning was found to be a barrier by CLARISSA, as it was hard for these experienced researchers to discard their expertise and established ways of doing research. In the end, less formally qualified facilitators (graduates) with an open mind and genuine curiosity to learn were engaged and were found to be ideally suited for this role. They readily embraced the child- and people-centred principles and approach, and learned new skills to facilitate child-led research. A flexible, child-centred approach to the timing of activities and venue selection also helped children feel safe and made the participatory process effective.

***Being non-judgemental and inclusive deepens child- and people-centred approaches.*** Another important, and innovative, aspect of CLARISSA was that it engaged with the owners of the smaller, informal businesses who employed many of the children. This was a non-judgemental and open-minded strategy which created additional opportunities to learn more deeply and gather broader perspectives.

*A facilitator in Nepal works with a children’s Action Research group.*

SOURCE: FROM THE CLARISSA VIDEO ‘WORKING IN A CHILD- AND PEOPLE-CENTRED WAY’

“Sometimes things used to come up completely different than what we think. And we need to accept that, because it’s them (the children) who are leading.”

CLARISSA partner team member, Nepal

In fact, dialogue and research with these business owners revealed that many of them employed children because they wanted to help the children, but that they were often unaware of laws prohibiting the employment of children, as well as the ages of the children in their employ. This resulted in some of the business owners taking collective steps to make work safer for children. For example, in Nepal, some members of the 'Night Entertainment Business Association Group of Dohori\* and Dance Bar Owners' focused on the lack of identity documentation within business venues. This was identified by their Action Research group as contributing to children engaging in the worst forms of child labour in dohoris and dance bars.

## CLARISSA RESOURCES

**CLARISSA Blog:** *Bringing children into the Life Story collection process (Nepal).*

**CLARISSA Blog:** *Beyond the Participatory Action Research process – achievement with business owners!*

**CLARISSA Learning Note 1:** *Learning from Life Story collection and analysis with children who work in the leather sector in Bangladesh, DOI: [10.19088/CLARISSA.2022.006](https://doi.org/10.19088/CLARISSA.2022.006).*

**CLARISSA Learning Note 2:** *Learning from Life Story collection and analysis with children who work in the worst forms of child labour in Nepal, DOI: [10.19088/CLARISSA.2022.007](https://doi.org/10.19088/CLARISSA.2022.007).*

**CLARISSA Blog:** *Art, craft, and the science of facilitation in a complex partnership programme.*

**CLARISSA Blog:** *Non-Violent Communication in everyday life.*

“We had knowledge of child labour, but after training, we got even more information on child labour. We learnt that the business should be registered and renewed. We have to be updated about legal aspects. We also revised our contracts. We included information like employers must be above 18 (must submit a copy of their citizenship certificate or passport) and they should be Nepali citizens. The business owners who had not renewed their registration also have done that.”  
Business owner, Nepal



Business owners and national CLARISSA team members, Nepal.  
CREDIT: CLARISSA



## 4 SKILLS, METHODS AND TOOLS FOR WORKING IN A CHILD- AND PEOPLE-CENTRED WAY

**Skills and tools for practitioners.** Team members with facilitation and learning mindsets, a genuine openness and curiosity, coupled with the appropriate practitioner skills and qualities are critical for a strong child- and people-centred approach. Central to this is good communication. Good communication is not one single skill but is made up of a wide array of different skills. This includes, knowing how to actively listen, showing empathy and being non-judgmental, being self-aware (especially in relation to one's relative power), avoiding the reflex to try to frame or fix the problem, and humility. Having a good communicator mindset is also linked to being a reflective practitioner. This is explored more fully in Brief 4. **After Action Reviews.** Good communication skills are also not just what facilitators say, but also how they listen, and how they act in the community. Linked to building trust, facilitators in CLARISSA needed to be able to communicate with many different people, including children, from many different backgrounds. This included speaking with local leaders, parents, employers and other stakeholders, and spending time in the programme neighbourhoods. Communicating in an empathetic way also showed that children felt respected, loved and heard.

**Active listening:** Listening, not just talking, is key for communicating and developing relationships with other people. However, it can be quite challenging for many people to truly listen when someone speaks. For instance, the 'listener' may already be thinking about what else they want to say, or perhaps they may assume they already know what the other person is going to say, or want to impose their own understanding upon or offer solutions to what someone has said.

**Empathy and being non-judgemental:** Being able to empathise with someone requires a level of curiosity about another person's perspective, and the desire to try and feel how it might be to experience what they are telling you. Learning to feel and show empathy can help practitioners get a better understanding of another person's position and how they see things, without judgement. It can also help show a person that their experiences and perspectives are valued.

“I think the rapport building with the children themselves is a very necessary one because you don't know them beforehand. They come into this group, and they start sharing their experiences, their lived experiences, their problems. So until unless you have a good rapport with the children, they will not open up with you.”

CLARISSA partner team member, Nepal



CLARISSA country coordinator Nepal working with a children's Action Research group.

SOURCE: CLARISSA (WORKSHOP)



**Being self-aware and humble:** Working in a child- and people-centred way requires that team members become aware of the many assumptions, beliefs, knowledge, values, expectations, attitudes, and behaviours which they already carry, including their relative power within any context, and how these shape the ways in which they engage with participants and stakeholders, as well as programme partners. By taking the time to reflect in a personal capacity, as well as a team, practitioners can become more self-aware, and conscious of what they are bringing to the people, groups and communities they are working with. This can guide practitioners as to where they may need to ‘un-learn,’ or use strategies to reduce the influence they have on a process. Therefore, humility, *especially* putting one’s own views, opinions and expertise in the background, is the foundation for effective work by ‘outsiders’ who are seeking to enable a child- and people-centred process.



*Children participating in fun activities to build rapport and trust in Nepal.*

CREDIT: KAPIL SHRESTHA

**Non-violent communication.** Some members of the CLARISSA team in Bangladesh were trained in ‘non-violent communication’ (NVC), a transformational communication technique that prioritises listening over speaking. It aims to improve communication through a deeper understanding of our emotions and values, and what we observe in the behaviour of others. It can be used to support constructive dialogue and manage non-violent group conflict. Watch a [short video](#) about Non-Violent Communication.

It is possible to practice these skills as an individual and together as a team in order to become excellent communicators in diverse contexts. The resources below provide some further guidance and tools which practitioners can use to develop their communication skills.

**Tools to use with children and adult participants.** In addition to considerations around how facilitators communicate with children and adult participants, there are also considerations regarding how participants communicate with each other, and how this can enable inclusive dialogue between peers. This is important in building a sense of group; for sharing important information and perspectives; enabling participants to communicate ideas effectively with their peers, facilitators and other stakeholders; avoiding non-violent, destructive conflict; and even helping support psychosocial wellbeing. Activities could include facilitated dialogues, sports, drama, games, music, dance or art, and other creative activities. The resource list below provides many links to relevant guidance and tools.

**Creating safe spaces where people feel comfortable.** Not only did CLARISSA facilitators ask children where and when they felt most comfortable holding their meetings, but CLARISSA also integrated children’s feedback mechanisms throughout the Life Story collection processes – individual feedback, as well as group reflections – which helped create safe spaces for children to comfortably communicate their thoughts and feelings. The feedback sessions also helped CLARISSA facilitators to get a sense of how children were participating in activities, and to adapt programme methodologies and any logistical plans as needed. Creating safe spaces also includes the idea of ‘relational’ safeguarding, whereby children have strong, trusting relationships with adults. This can enhance communication between children and facilitators, as well as contribute to enhanced safeguarding, whereby children feel safe to share personal information or seek help from an adult. This is discussed in more detail in Learning and Reflection Brief 6.

**[Safeguarding for Systemic Action Research.](#)**

“As human beings, we prefer to talk more than to listen. Through the NVC training, I’ve learned that many problems can be resolved with empathetic listening, managing emotions, and respectful communication.”

CLARISSA partner team member, Bangladesh

## GUIDANCE AND TOOLKITS FOR WORKING IN A CHILD- AND PEOPLE-CENTRED WAY

Guidance and tools for improving communication skills: Child Resilience Alliance's [Supporting community-led child protection: an online guide and toolkit](#) has detailed guidance and activities to help practitioners build communication skills. In particular, [Deep listening](#); [Empathy](#); [What do I bring to the community](#); and [Humility](#). [Enabling inclusive dialogue](#) gives guidance on how to enable participants to communicate as part of an open discussion and exchange different points of view, as opposed to debating in a more hostile manner. The section on [non-violent conflict management](#) also provides practical guidance on how to facilitate constructive dialogue as opposed to destructive conflict.

Videos of facilitator skills used in Participatory Action Research in Kenya : [Being a facilitator](#); [Being humble and respectful](#); [Deep listening](#); [Enabling inclusive dialogue](#); [Managing non-violent conflict](#).

Terre des hommes's toolkit [YouCreate](#) has guidance for young people on facilitation skills for child- and youth-led Participatory Action Research.

The [Activity Catalogue for Child Friendly Spaces in Humanitarian Settings](#) by the Psychosocial Centre and World Vision has a number of child-friendly activities which can help build communication skills in Section 5. *Relating to others*.

There are many resources available on running activities with children, young people, and adults. Section D. (page 28 ) of Save the Children's and War Child Holland's [Toolkit of Participatory Approaches Using Creative Methods to Strengthen Community Engagement and Ownership](#), which has many links and ideas for energisers, icebreakers and games.

Non-violent communication: The Center for Nonviolent Communication [website](#).

More guidance on [participation](#), [facilitation](#) and [Participatory Action Research](#) from [participatorymethods.org](http://participatorymethods.org)

### Other skills and tools in this series:

#### 1. [Working in a child- and people-centred way](#)

Key skill: *Communications skills*

#### 2. [Mapping systems and taking action](#)

Key skill: *Asking good questions*

#### 3. [Using evidence and learning to adapt programmes in real time](#)

Key skill: *Being a reflexive team*

#### 4. [After Action Reviews](#)

Key skill: *Being a reflective practitioner (individual)*

#### 5. [Working with partners](#)

Key skill: *Being inclusive and aware of power dynamics*

#### 6. [Safeguarding for Systemic Action Research](#)

Key skill: *Building trust and rapport*

“A 16-year-old boy from Hazaribagh is addicted to drugs. While talking to his mother, the social worker discovered his childhood had been abusive. From an early age, his father would beat him every time he refused to go to work. He started working when he was nine years old. His mother said that often her son sits on the roof of their house for hours at night. She was very worried but did not know how to help her son. Later, the Bangladesh team worked with the boy, including him in the training workshop for child Life Story collectors. He was an active participant, attentive and communicative throughout. The workshop helped him to share his own story, but to also hear others too.”

Extract from *Finally telling their stories* (Bangladesh). CLARISSA Blog.

## 5 TIPS ON WORKING IN A CHILD- AND PEOPLE-CENTRED WAY

Do's and Don'ts when working in a child- and people-centred way	
DO	DON'T
Plan to spend adequate time building trust with children and adult stakeholders. Try not to start 'from scratch' but rather, leverage other organisations' existing relationships with communities and groups by engaging them in the work or making use of their spaces and services, for example, psychosocial support.	Don't be in a rush to start researching or implementing activities before strong relationships and trust have been built.
Be inclusive, and gently bring quieter or marginalised children or people into discussions. Ask other children to locate the most marginalised and find ways to include them.	Don't work only with the children or adults who are the most vocal, local leaders or influencers, or only those who show up to meetings.
Learn about local customs and social dynamics. Ask groups how and where they would most feel comfortable talking. Take into account that children and others might not want to speak freely in front of adults or authority figures. Make sure local leaders (formal and informal) support the work.	Don't ignore local power dynamics and etiquette. Don't assume everyone is happy speaking together in one group and that they will feel able to voice their opinions or give information freely. Don't assume everyone will welcome your organisation or programme.
Spend a lot of time in the communities and places where you are working, have informal chats with locals, eat locally, spend time getting to know local people and places, and dress and act in a way that 'fits in' and is respectful. Be self-aware.	Don't go to the communities and places only when you have to. Don't display relative wealth or resources. Don't be unaware of how you might be perceived by the children and people from the community you are working with.
Go in with a trusting, humble, and open mind – that children and other stakeholders can learn new skills such as research and analysis, and that programme staff also have much to learn.	Don't assume you are the expert, that you know what the problem is, and what the people, including your organisation, should do about it. Don't assume children and other stakeholders won't be able to learn something new or complex.
Use story-telling, visual methods, and other interesting methods, especially those which resonate with local practices, to help people convey their feelings, experiences, perceptions and knowledge.	Don't introduce complicated tools which local people are not familiar with, or which require a lot of resources.
Ensure the work will do no harm. Agree a safeguarding plan with all the stakeholders. Refer to 6. <a href="#"><u><b>Safeguarding for Systemic Action Research.</b></u></a>	Don't inadvertently do harm. For instance, creating conflict between groups or problems for some individuals, as a result of dialogues.



## 6 TEAM REFLECTION

This section of the learning and reflection brief is designed to be used in a team reflection session. Answer the questions in this worksheet together. Allow about two hours to complete this worksheet. Use your notebooks to record your answers and main points. You'll need to refer back to these later.

### Skills building (25 mins at the end of the session)

Practice using your communication skills while doing this activity. Make notes as you go along of anything which you notice in relation to these skills. Be prepared to provide and receive critical feedback from the group.

### Team discussion (25 minutes):

It might be helpful to watch the video once more as a team. Discuss ways in which your team is working in a similar or different way from the video and what is described in this brief.

### Team mini self-assessment (40 mins)

Work in as a team to discuss each question. The goal is to reflect, discuss, and learn together, not to finish the task as quickly as possible. Note down your group's answers and ideas in your notebook.

Agree as a group how you will rank each statement from 1–5. (5= strongly agree, 1= strongly disagree). Make a note of the rankings.

**1**

*We trust that children/people are the experts in their own lives. We give them the space and time to lead learning about their situations and make decisions*

**2**

*We have many examples from our team/ programme/organisation of working in child- and people-centred way*

**3**

*We regularly use some tools and methods which can enable a child- and people-centred approach*

**4**

*Our team has skills required to enable a child- and people-centred approach*

Reflect on your collective answers and discuss the extent to which you think your team is working in a child- and people-centred way. What is your group strong on, what is it less strong on? Why do you think this is?

### Actions brainstorm (30 mins)

Suggest and discuss any actions you could potentially take as a team to make your work more strongly child- and people-centred. While remaining realistic, try not to limit your ideas for now, as you will have the opportunity to come back to them once you have completed the series, and to decide if they are still relevant.

### Skills feedback (25 mins)

Discuss with your group how it made you feel to consciously use some of the communications skills during this activity. Also provide group feedback to each participant. As individuals, tell the group about one aspect of communication skills which you would like to improve. Note this down and return to it regularly to remind you to practice. Use the guidance and toolkit links provided in this learning and reflection sheet to help you practice.



## Section 2

# Mapping systems and taking action



### **People-driven solutions:**

An introduction to facilitating deep participation for systemic change through Systemic Action Research programming



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*Children working in threes to highlight causal factors and pathways on a big system map, Kathmandu.*

CREDIT: ANIS BASTOLA

**T**his learning and reflection brief focuses on how ‘whole systems’ can be mapped and analysed in a deeply participatory way to uncover additional, nuanced and contextual evidence and learning about a problem, which can then lead to innovative, people-led interventions. The term ‘system’ here is used to describe a system created by the interplay between various interpersonal and socio-economic factors in different sectors and levels. These factors can combine to drive complex development or humanitarian problems. This brief is designed to help teams decide if and how a whole systems approach may be relevant to their programme; start thinking about programmes using a systemic perspective; and to identify any potential actions which could shift their programme towards a whole systems approach. More generally, the learning, skills and tools highlighted here are also useful for any team interested in exploring how they might further contextualise programmes and deepen participant engagement and ownership.

Specifically, this learning and reflection brief will help teams:

- Learn what a Systemic Action Research approach is about, including what is meant by a complex problem, a systems map, and what innovative solutions can look like.
- Learn about why and how a systemic approach could strengthen programmes tackling longstanding challenges.
- Learn about some of the practical skills required to implement this approach, such as being a facilitator and asking good questions.
- Learn about some of the key methods and tools used by CLARISSA, such as collecting Life Stories and causal analysis.
- Reflect on their own programme and identify aspects and actions to shift it towards a systemic way of working.





## 1 VIDEO

This learning and reflection brief includes two videos. First watch the CLARISSA video *'Causal analysis and working children'*. Then watch *'Mapping systems and taking action'* where CLARISSA team members, local stakeholders, and children from Bangladesh and Nepal discuss how they mapped and took actions to address the system which drives and keeps children in the worst forms of child labour. Before you watch the videos, note down three reasons why you think children might engage in the worst forms of child labour. Then, watch the videos and note down all the causal factors mentioned in the videos. How are the factors different or the same from the ones you identified? Is there anything which you did not expect?

*Children discussing different issues and themes emerging from the Life Stories and Action Research group findings, Nepal.*

SOURCE: FROM THE CLARISSA VIDEO *'MAPPING SYSTEMS AND TAKING ACTION'*

## 2 ABOUT SYSTEMIC ACTION RESEARCH

A development or humanitarian programme using Systemic Action Research is designed to work in a deeply participatory, people-led way in order to collaboratively map the different elements of a 'system' in relation to a problem and learn how these elements play a part in driving the problem. A Systemic Action Research process will engage multiple actors across a system of complex causal relationships, because changing a system requires changes in the actions and behaviours of different people that play a role in the system. As part of the process, participants generate and implement different ideas for action based on their understanding of the various roles different elements of the system play in creating a challenge. Because diverse 'insider' perspectives drive the understanding of the system and what could be done to disrupt it and address root causes, a programme may move in a very different direction compared to one typically developed by external experts and actors.

CLARISSA showed how Systemic Action Research can lead to diverse, innovative actions by children engaged in the worst forms of child labour – as well as actions by some of the business owners who employed children – and how these could target different causal dynamics on different levels, with the potential to disrupt a harmful and complex system.

*“It is actually very difficult to find a solution. That’s why we worked with the system actors in the CLARISSA programme.”*

**CLARISSA partner team member, Bangladesh**



## BOX 1

## A SYSTEMS APPROACH IS ESPECIALLY RELEVANT FOR ANY TEAM SEEKING TO ADDRESS A 'COMPLEX' PROBLEM

'Complex' problems are those where we are required to first learn deeply about what the causes are; how these causes relate to each other; or how the problem should be addressed. Complex development problems are mostly made up of many different elements – for example, different peoples and groups, culture, beliefs, social rules, power, competencies, governance, and various adversities – all of which relate to each other in multiple and different ways to create a particular problem. One organisation alone is unlikely to be able to address all these different elements. Even after learning about what drives a complex problem, it is still not always clear exactly how intervening in this complex web of causal factors will bring about a positive change. There are many possible unintended consequences, effects and other dynamics which can impact upon the outcomes of any given set of actions. For instance, what seems an effective programme in one context may not work so well when used in another. An example of this might be where a sensitisation campaign is successfully used in one community but is not successful when the same strategy is used in another.

This [short video](#) explains the difference between a 'simple', a 'complicated' and a 'complex' problem by using the analogy of making a cake (simple), sending a rocket to the moon (complicated), and raising a child (complex). Often, complex development problems are persistent and longstanding, where real, long-term change is hard to achieve. Complex problems can arise in any sector and include many common development 'issues' such as early marriage, gender-based violence, worst forms of child labour, ongoing conflict, food insecurity, poor sanitation, and poverty. Most development practitioners acknowledge the need for deep, contextual learning to guide responses to these types of challenges. Using a 'systemic' or 'whole systems' lens to approach a complex challenge, by mapping the multiple causes and dynamics in a participatory way, can help generate deeply contextualised, collective understandings, new pathways and innovative actions to change a system.

**The CLARISSA Systemic Action Research process.** Following an extensive set up phase which included establishing strong relationships with partners, communities and children, around 800 children's Life Stories were collected by adult facilitators and some children. The collection process was followed by child-led participatory causal analysis in each country, where they first created a mini-systems map for each story, and then combined these into one big systems map. The CLARISSA video '[Casual analysis and working children](#)' provides more detail on this process.

Through a collaborative process of linking different Life Stories together, children started to see how the different causal factors within the emerging system were connected, and how these combined to drive children into the worst forms of child labour. This level of participant-led insight into the complex problem of child labour revealed a number of diverse themes which were the starting point of Action Research groups with children. CLARISSA also undertook thematic research into supply chain and neighbourhood dynamics that drive children into worst forms of child labour, using participatory and qualitative research approaches such as workplace shadowing and GIS (Geographic Information System) mapping, and interviews with business owners. Themes resulting from the thematic research were also the starting points of additional

“At first, even I didn't know how they would do it. What they are being taught, what they would do with the learning, even I was scared thinking of all this at first. In CLARISSA, we left the whole Action Research part to the children so that they can tell their stories in their own way.”

Local motivator, Nepal

“They don't feel safe at home, then work is safer than this [...] We saw they do not have any leisure (activities) which is also a reason for the worst form of child labour. Because parents were thinking children will mix in bad company or take drugs – they better go to work.”

CLARISSA partner team member, Bangladesh

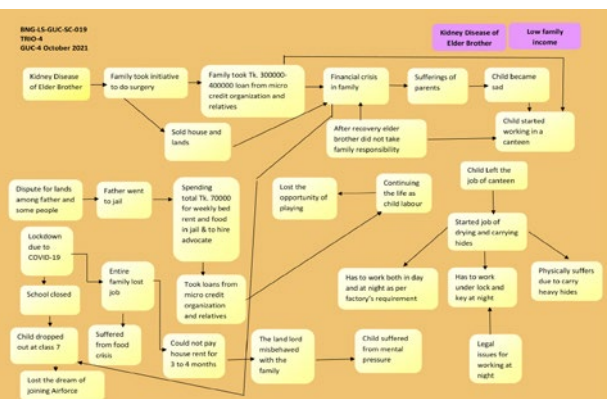
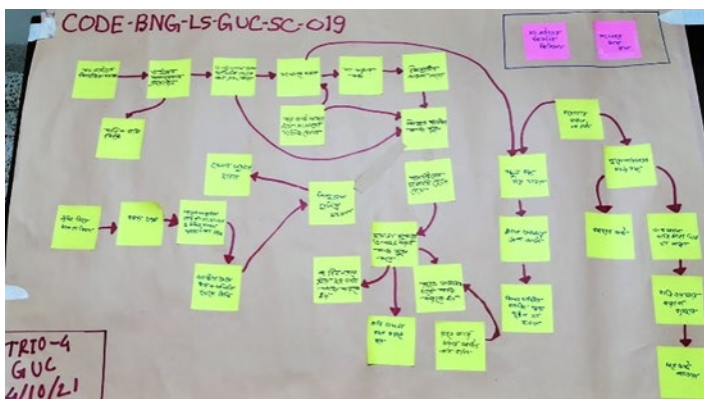
Action Research groups with children and business owners. The issues or themes which children and business owners researched as Action Research groups included:

- Why children re-entered the worst forms of child labour even after receiving livelihoods training from NGOs
- How children were forced to discontinue their studies as a result of poor economic conditions due to family spending on alcohol and other addictions
- Poor financial management and debt
- Child marriage and the causal relationship to child labour
- Lack of awareness around child labour, and family conflict, leading to abuse and exploitation at workplaces
- Lack of access to education
- Clean environments in communities
- Children’s journeys to work and the hazards they face
- Dangerous and unhealthy environments at work
- Social norms and perceptions that encourage child labour. For instance, that children are not safe at home alone and are safer at work.

The Action Research groups then further reflected on their own lived experiences, and also used various methods to collect additional evidence on the issue in their direct environment, for example, through observation, talking with other peers and with family and community stakeholders. Action Research groups then used all these pieces of evidence to help them decide on the kinds of actions which could bring about a change to the specific issue they were focused on. Importantly, Action Research group members (children and business owners) developed their own Theories of Change, which clarified what change they expected to happen around a certain issue, and what kinds of action(s) could bring about this change. Theory of Change is discussed in detail in the Learning and Reflection Brief 3. *Using evidence and learning to adapt programmes in real time.*

Children first created mini-system maps (top row) based on individuals’ Life Stories (from Bangladesh). Children later integrated the mini-maps into one big systems map (bottom, from Nepal) which was organised around the themes which emerged from the mini-maps.

CREDITS: CLARISSA IN BANGLADESH (TOP ROW); ANIS BASTOLA (BOTTOM)



## CLARISSA RESOURCES ON MAPPING SYSTEMS AND TAKING ACTION

**CLARISSA Blog:** *A single story does not tell us what we need to know about child labour.*

Read a **CLARISSA Blog post** on how children’s and business owners’ Action Research groups took part in a ‘gallery walk’ event in Kathmandu to highlight their learning and ideas and to come together to share experiences.

**CLARISSA Blog:** *A children’s Action Research group in Nepal.*

**CLARISSA short post on Action Research groups** This post will link you to a number of examples of Action Research Groups described here.

**CLARISSA Learning Note 1:** *Learning from Life Story Collection and Analysis With Children Who Work in the Worst Forms of Child Labour in Bangladesh.*  
DOI: [10.19088/CLARISSA.2022.006](https://doi.org/10.19088/CLARISSA.2022.006).

**CLARISSA Learning Note 2:** *Learning from Life Story Collection and Analysis With Children Who Work in the Worst Forms of Child Labour in Nepal.* DOI: [10.19088/CLARISSA.2022.007](https://doi.org/10.19088/CLARISSA.2022.007).

**CLARISSA Research and Evidence Paper 5:** *Life stories from children working in Bangladesh’s leather sector and its neighbourhoods: told and analysed by children.* This describes in detail the process of building systems maps. DOI: [10.19088/CLARISSA.2021.005](https://doi.org/10.19088/CLARISSA.2021.005)

**CLARISSA Research and Evidence Paper 8:** *Informal economy perspectives on the prevalence of worst forms of child labour in Bangladesh’s leather industry.*  
DOI: [10.19088/CLARISSA.2024.005](https://doi.org/10.19088/CLARISSA.2024.005)

**CLARISSA Blog:** *Child-centred approach reveals the dynamics driving child labour in Nepal’s Adult Entertainment Sector.*

Many of the children’s Life Stories have been shared anonymously on the CLARISSA website: **Pavel, Shuvashish, Sunil, Anita.**

CLARISSA videos: **Explanation of research methods; Using maps in research; A day in the life of working child in Nepal.**

“Laying out the causal connections within the system, and giving people a view of that system, helps them (participants) to see things that they see as normal or as everyday experiences within a bigger picture, and how it contributes to some of the challenges that they experience.”

IDS CLARISSA team member

## 3 SYSTEMIC ACTION RESEARCH: PRACTICAL LEARNING FROM CLARISSA

**Children and adults can undertake complex evidence generation and analysis for systems mapping.** Mapping complex systems with children or untrained adults might seem like a daunting, and perhaps even an impossible task. However, CLARISSA was developed with the mindset that children and other adults are capable individuals with important expertise based on their lived experience, who can generate and analyse robust and rich evidence with the right support from facilitators. At the outset, there were team members within partner organisations who had reservations and doubts regarding the feasibility of this approach. This was especially so given the scale that CLARISSA proposed to work at, with hundreds of Life Stories being collected in each country (approximately 350 stories in each country were collected by adult facilitators and about 50 in each country were collected by children). However, as the causal analysis process moved forward, partner team members began to see for themselves the level at which children (and business owners) could collectively gather and analyse Life Stories, identify causal dynamics, and build complex systems maps. Indeed, the facilitated child-centred and -led process enabled the insider perspectives of children to provide additional and important collective insights based on the lived experiences of hundreds of children engaging in the worst forms of child labour. This process shed light on unexpected or overlooked causes and dynamics which contribute to the worst forms of child labour.

“In the beginning, some facilitators were a bit hesitant, they weren’t convinced that children could do this. And then as they went through the process, they really noticed their own mindset changing and shifting, especially after the children did the massive collective analysis of the hundreds of Life Stories.”

IDS CLARISSA team member



BOX 2 | ACTION RESEARCH GROUP EXAMPLE

**POOR FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND DEBT – ACTION RESEARCH GROUP OF CHILDREN IN BANGLADESH**

**Method:** The children interviewed family and community members and collected perspectives around financial management and debt.

**What was learned:** The group learned that being in debt and the worst forms of child labour were caused by: job loss, dowry debt, inability to work due to illness, and lack of financial support from fathers.

**Actions and outcomes:** The children developed a Theory of Change:

- 1) Alternative income generating activities through capacity building,
  - 2) Discussion within families around repayment of debts and impact of loans,
  - 3) Increasing family literacy to track income and expenses and make savings.
- Children were trained in jewellery making as an alternative source of income and were linked to buyers in an exhibition. Some members also managed to persuade their parents to continue paying for their schooling.

“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.”

Children’s comments regarding child-led action taken with parents in CLARISSA

**Children and adults can develop their own Theories of Change based on participatory systems mapping and other evidence.** Significantly, children in CLARISSA developed Theories of Change after the Action Research groups had undertaken extensive evidence gathering and personal reflection on the issue. The systemic ‘big picture’ view helped children identify which causal factors they wanted to focus on, or change, and what actions they could try in order to achieve this. Very importantly, using a Theory of Change helped children to bring together the various pieces of evidence and gave them clarity on what they were going to do, why, and what they expected to happen. It also helped group members work as a collective towards a shared goal. For example, in one instance, children in Nepal identified a causal dynamic within the system, saying they felt they were not listened to, and that some parents chose to send their children to work without taking into account what the child in question wanted or needed. Based on this, children agreed that “Parents/family give time to their children and listen to the children, understand them, and resolve their issues” should be the goal of their Theory of Change. The children then identified a number of actions: a workshop on positive parenting; sensitisation and awareness through street drama; informing parents about counselling services; and interaction among parents and religious leaders. The group also discussed the outcome, timeline and possible indicators of the action points. Children reported back positive changes, such as their parents talking to them in a kinder way, and a neighbour who allowed their daughter to go back to school.

Children in Kathmandu performing a drama for parents and community members. CREDIT: KAPIL SHRESTHA



## BOX 3 | ACTION RESEARCH GROUP EXAMPLE

**CHILDREN RE-ENTERING THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOUR AFTER RECEIVING LIVELIHOODS TRAINING FROM NGOS.****ACTION RESEARCH GROUP OF CHILDREN IN NEPAL**

**Method:** Peer-to-peer interviews with children working in the adult entertainment sector and interviews with NGOs supporting children in the sector.

**What was learned:** There is a lack of follow up from NGOs after training, limited training options, and a focus on training for low paid sectors such as beauty, tailoring and handicraft making. Therefore, skills-based interventions are inappropriate as they don't enable children to earn enough to meet their basic needs, and they aren't based on what the children want to do, nor on market demands. As a result, children return to the adult entertainment sector where they can earn more.

**Actions and outcomes:** The group developed an action plan focused on sensitising children through schools to the risks of the adult entertainment sector; and sharing their evidence with local government and advocating for alternative skills trainings. The children formed a group in a community school comprising students and teachers which reviews the attendance of students, identifies the challenges faced by the children whose attendance is irregular, and provides school-based support to children experiencing challenges. The group also advocated for alternative skills training by using their research findings to target local government. The group identified apprenticeships, IT skills, barista skills, and cooking as desirable skills, with some starting training or apprenticeships in these skills.

“Even though the outcome of the actual action that they take might be similar (to one proposed by an external organisation or actor), the process of getting there and building that ownership over it, I believe, might then lead to stronger, preventative measures or interventions.”

IDS CLARISSA team member

**The children's research brought a new level of understanding to children of some issues which had been normalised.** Some of the Action Research groups worked on social norms that were deeply embedded and seen as 'everyday experiences' by the children, but which are causal factors contributing to worst forms of child labour. Through the participatory process of mapping the system, doing their own research and reflecting on their personal experiences, children themselves made the connection between these social norms and worst forms of child labour, which changed the way they thought about their issues and how they themselves could take action. This new understanding was not the process of a sensitisation campaign by an organisation or agency, but was internally generated, and considered meaningful by the children. For example, one group of children started out with the attitude that child marriage is very common in their community and that it's not really a problem – it's “just something that happens”. However, there was also a girl in this group who had married young, and she shared her experiences about how her life had changed after marriage. The children also did more of their own evidence gathering by talking with neighbours and reflecting on their own experiences. This additional learning, combined with the big system map, showed how early marriage is linked to the worst forms of child labour, and the children began to see early marriage in a new light. They saw how a child who marries in their early teens will then have the responsibility of looking after their own family, which leads to dropping out of education to find work at a young age – work which often ends up being exploitative or harmful.

## BOX 4

## AN EXAMPLE OF CHILDREN WORKING IN THE LEATHER INDUSTRY IN DHAKA, BANGLADESH OWNING THEIR THEORY OF CHANGE

With the support of a facilitator, one Action Research group discussed at length the many issues their research had highlighted and debated what they wanted to tackle. The children eventually agreed that they wanted to address hazards in the workplace and they identified the kinds of outcomes they would like to see, which focused on children working less hours and reducing injuries in the workplace. They then reflected on which actions could lead to these outcomes. At first, they decided to prioritise raising awareness of work safety with their work colleagues (other children and adults) and promote the wearing of protective gear when working with leather chemicals. However, this strategy didn't work out as planned, because their colleagues were uninterested in what the children had to say, didn't believe them, and didn't feel it was important. The children then tried another strategy – to model the changes they were seeking, and to start wearing their own protective gear. CLARISSA helped the children buy protective gear which they wore when undertaking hazardous tasks at work. The children wearing the gear started to notice that their skin problems were improving, and their health was better. After a few weeks, the children's colleagues started to show interest, and were asking about the protective gear. This opened a new dialogue between the children and their colleagues about protective gear for hazardous work tasks, and how it was benefitting them. Eventually some of their colleagues also started to wear protective gear. One of the employers also decided to buy protective gear for their employees as result.



*A young person's hand who works in the leather industry, Dhaka.*

CREDIT: SALMA SULTANA

### What did we learn?

- 1 The children's ownership of their own Theory of Change helped motivate them to try different approaches to reach their desired outcomes, even when their first strategy failed. Their shared identity also helped them to stay motivated and try different solutions. Additionally, as children were working in a context where unionising is not tolerated, supporting each other in a less visible way was important.
- 2 The children decided to make changes to their working environment, i.e. protecting themselves from work hazards, because they were given the space and support to research, reflect on, and decide their own priorities, and because they later experienced real benefits from wearing the gear. In the same way that other colleagues were uninterested in the children's first attempts to raise awareness around wearing protective gear, it is likely that the children themselves may also have been resistant if this idea had been introduced by external actors.
- 3 The modified strategy the children later decided upon of 'showing by doing' facilitated a dialogue between the children and their colleagues which they couldn't achieve using their first plan of awareness raising.
- 4 While this process didn't remove the children from the workplace altogether, it was a positive step towards reducing the hazardous nature of their work, with the potential to spread to other peers, colleagues and businesses.





Children in Kathmandu working together to identify different themes on a small systems map.

CREDIT: ANIS BASTOLA

**Systemic Action Research can help build ownership of a problem and how it is addressed.** CLARISSA highlighted how a people-centred process of Systemic Action Research, which included their own Theories of Change, helped build a sense of ownership of the problem; created a common platform to discuss issues; established a shared identity around issues; and helped children and business owners come up with solutions (See Box 4. above).

#### BOX 5 | ACTION RESEARCH GROUP EXAMPLE

### ‘MY ENVIRONMENT, MY WORK’ ACTION RESEARCH GROUP OF CHILDREN IN BANGLADESH

**Method:** Peer-to-peer interviews, buildings visits / observations

**What was learned:** Community residents prioritise low rent – even if the living conditions are substandard. Building owners and managers take advantage of residents’ lack of awareness and unity. Sanitation is a critical concern, particularly for girls. Issues such as a lack of toilets, gaps in walls and doors, toilets shared by both males and females, and a lack of toilets in workplaces cause huge problems. Buildings pose significant safety risks to the many young children who live in them (steep stairs, no railings, open rooftops). Buildings house mostly transient populations of residents.

**Actions and outcomes:** The work of this group led to physical improvements in infrastructure (e.g. building toilets, installing lights and fixing toilet doors) and residents of these buildings became more aware of their living conditions. Some building residents undertook building improvement initiatives. Unity among residents also increased. One building resident started a successful campaign to persuade a building owner to renovate the unusable cooking place after getting guidance and motivation from the children. Children collectively decided to continue to raise awareness among their peers, neighbours, and relatives about the benefits of a safe and clean living space. Their interactions with the factory owner altered their perception of factory management and resulted in the factory owner installing toilets in the factory.

**CLARISSA found that Systemic Action Research brought benefits at different**

**levels.** A core aspect of CLARISSA was the intentional creation of space, namely, regular meet ups over an extended time frame whereby adults and children were brought together to learn, reflect, and plan. Most of the working children and business owners had extremely busy lives with limited time and space for them to meet with other children, for instance, to chat with their friends about their problems or connect with each other in other ways. At work, children were also wary of interacting too much, lest they were suspected of unionising, amongst other things. In their neighbourhood, there was also a lack of appropriate spaces where they could socialise with their peers in an informal environment.

Children benefitted as individuals as they reported feeling less alone – they had the support of their peers – and some were also experiencing less health issues as a result of wearing protective work gear in Bangladesh. Children also benefited in a collective way, for instance, in Bangladesh, children improved the working environment for themselves as a group and were also acknowledged by other colleagues as bringing something of value to the workplace. On a societal level in Nepal, the process of tackling social norms was observed, such as adults’ expectations of children and how they should behave, as a result of child-generated and -led actions around ‘family relations’.

The Systemic Action Research process intentionally created space where children could share stories and reflect. There were explicit relationship building activities within the formal group meetings such as playing games and sharing stories, also informal outings and trips, as well as evidence gathering and action taking. Children realised that they shared many similar challenges as a group, and that the problem was not “just my problem”. In this way, the process helped build a sense of the collective and, very importantly, that they could problem-solve together.

Additionally, because CLARISSA also worked with business owners who were employing children, and took them through a similar process, these business owners also began to see themselves of part of a group – as opposed to being in competition with each other – and collectively tried to solve some of challenges relating to the worst forms of child labour. For instance, business owners decided to set up a health care centre (Bangladesh); develop better documentation systems for their business to check the age of workers (Nepal); and contract employees more formally (Nepal).

*Children developing a small systems map in Kathmandu.*

CREDIT: ANIS BASTOLA





BOX 6 | ACTION RESEARCH GROUP EXAMPLE

**WORKER DOCUMENTATION IN THE ADULT ENTERTAINMENT SECTOR – ACTION RESEARCH GROUP OF BUSINESS OWNERS IN NEPAL**

**Method:** Business owners were presented with findings from CLARISSA’s interviews with business owners, undertook monitoring visits to dohoris and dance bars, and reflected together on their own practices.

**What was learned:** Business owners don’t systematically request documentation from their workers or include any reference to age in contracts. Business owners are not always aware that some of their workers are under 18.

**Actions and outcomes:** The group developed an action plan to change how their workers were contracted and hired. This included taking copies of workers’ identity documents to prove their age. The changes triggered some other business owners to do the same. The group’s actions also resulted in improved practices for some of the businesses, including businesses choosing to register with the authorities. *“We had knowledge of child labour, but after training [...] we learnt that the business should be registered and renewed. We have to be updated about legal aspects. Based on the information received there, we also revised our contract. We included information like employers must be above 18 and must submit a copy of their ID, and they should be Nepali citizens in the contract document”.* Read the [full blog](#).

“Individualism and everyone struggling in their own silos was really preventing a lot of the problem solving from happening. [...] With the business owners, there was a super interesting process, as when they started, everyone was in competition with each other. And then starting to work together and seeing “actually we are all struggling in the same way with the same things, and if we work together, we can actually solve our own problems together”.”

IDS CLARISSA team member

**There are important roles for facilitators when facilitating a deeply participatory, child-centred and -led Action Research process.** CLARISSA highlighted the key linking or bridging role that skilled facilitators can play when facilitating Systemic Action Research. Facilitators had to strike a balance between supporting the children when needed, but also allowing the process to be led by the children. For instance, the children from the ‘family relations’ Action Research group decided to organise workshops with their family members to initiate a dialogue between themselves and various key family members. The children wanted their family members to reflect on some of the ways they parented and to make some changes. However, the children also realised that they needed the help of the facilitators as they felt that their parents “did not take us seriously”. The children enlisted the facilitators to help the children to structure some of the sessions, negotiate the coming together of the parents and children, and invite the family members. Likewise, the informal business owners enlisted the support of CLARISSA facilitators to help them link with bigger formal factories.

A children’s Action Research group (Nepal) Theory of Change about ‘Family Relations’

CREDIT: KAPIL SHRESTHA





BOX 7 | EXAMPLE

**LINKING FORMAL AND INFORMAL BUSINESS ACTORS IN THE LEATHER INDUSTRY – ACTION RESEARCH GROUP OF BUSINESS OWNERS IN BANGLADESH**

**Method:** Peer-to-peer reflection and discussion over a 20-month period. Various discussions with the Bangladesh Tanners Association, Bangladesh Labour Foundation, Bangladesh Institute of Leather Technology, and others.

**What was learned:** Small businesses are precarious because they can't compete with larger, formal businesses. They often have no contract, they take out expensive loans to cover costs, buy the cheapest quality chemicals and operate for long hours for minimal profit. Formal tanneries enable workers to join a union and access levels of protection and health care. Most informal tanneries don't have adequate first aid kits. An on-site health centre for informal workers would encourage workers to access healthcare.

**Actions and outcomes:** The group developed an action plan to increase export of their products; to supply their products to formal businesses with contracts; to use the same quality tanning chemicals as the bigger tanneries. The group also explored with NGOs how they could provide better access to health care for tannery workers in informal businesses. The group identified and set up a local, staffed health centre with the support of an NGO and a tannery association.

**4 SKILLS, METHODS AND TOOLS FOR MAPPING SYSTEMS AND TAKING ACTION**



A children's Action Research group display (Nepal) developed for the children and business owners' gallery walk. CREDIT: ANIS BASTOLA

CLARISSA facilitation guidance		
Facilitation goals	Facilitation activities	Facilitation skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of the causal factors of the local and personal situations of group members.</li> <li>• Supporting the group to undertake their own analyses to identify possible solutions.</li> <li>• Encouraging ownership of group members' situations and possible solutions.</li> </ul>	<p>The facilitator should use a joint learning approach in which they collaboratively work with the group to analyse their situations. For instance, facilitators might train the group to use research methods and tools, and ensure that data collection and analysis is completed by the group. A facilitator guides critical group dialogue so members can use the evidence they've generated to analyse the causal factors that drive a particular issue.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be familiar with participatory methods and tools for people-led research.</li> <li>• To listen and synthesise discussions.</li> <li>• Ask critical questions that allow group members to deepen their reflection and establish causal links (through asking good questions, such as 'how' and 'why'). The guidance by ADAPT peacebuilding provides detailed guidance, tips and examples of <a href="#">how to ask good questions</a> to collect a Life Story. The "<a href="#">Asking probing questions</a>" section of the online guide and toolkit <a href="#">Supporting community-led child protection</a>, also provides useful examples of probing questions, and some exercises to develop this skill.</li> <li>• Keep personal opinions, perspectives, experience and training around an issue in the background.</li> <li>• Abandon preconceptions or assumptions.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create space for group members to access and express their authentic selves in order to address the themes of their research and learning.</li> <li>• Guide non-violent conflict and friction towards constructive dialogue and transformation.</li> <li>• Create space for group members to bond with each other.</li> </ul>	<p>The facilitator creates an environment where group members can bring their full selves to the Action Research process; where they can be open and express themselves; and where they can share their personal experiences and ideas on how to address an issue. Facilitators use approaches and tools that encourage different kinds of self-expression and openness, for example, creative and playful activities, discussions and roleplaying. This creates a sense of safety for participants, who will be able to bond with each other as they learn about each other's shared experiences. The facilitator also encourages group members' curiosity regarding each other's ideas, and provides an open, non-judgemental space for brainstorming. Facilitators allow space for conflicting ideas to emerge, and then facilitate a constructive process of building new ideas based on diverse perspectives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Familiarity with tools and methods that enable relationship building and bonding in the group.</li> <li>• Show respect.</li> <li>• Establish rapport.</li> <li>• Be power-aware in relation to a facilitator's own power, as well as power dynamics in the group.</li> <li>• Ability to navigate power dynamics and positively guide non-violent conflict.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate a process of reflection, learning and evaluating.</li> </ul>	<p>The facilitator guides the group to be reflexive in relation to their actions, what worked, and what did not. The facilitator also creates an environment in which failure is understood as an opportunity to learn. The facilitator also helps the group reflect on what their actions have achieved.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Models learning from mistakes.</li> <li>• Ability to create a safe space where group members can reflect on successes and failures.</li> <li>• Familiarity with tools and methods for reflexivity and evaluation of actions.</li> </ul>

## GUIDANCE AND TOOLKITS FOR SYSTEMIC ACTION RESEARCH

ADAPT Peacebuilding have developed some detailed and very useful online practical guidance for anyone planning to use Systems Action Research:

- [How to do participatory Action Research for systems mapping](#)
- [How to collect a Life Story for Systemic Action Research](#)
- [How to do participatory Life Story analysis](#) (systems mapping)
- [How to conduct a participatory mapping process.](#)

Additional [Guidance on facilitation in participatorymethods.org](#) – Guidance and links to facilitation tools and examples.

[YouCreate toolkit](#) – Participatory arts-based Action Research for well-being and social change, by Terre des hommes. Designed to train youth leaders, with the support of adult allies. Includes tips on note-taking, facilitation and asking good questions.

Further guidance on the facilitator skills can be found online here as part of the *Online guide and toolkit: [Supporting community-led child protection, by Child Resilience Alliance: FAC 1. Humility; FAC 2. What Do I Bring to the Community; FAC 3. Deep Listening; FAC 4. Empathy; FAC 5. Developing a Reflective Practice; FAC 6. Asking Probing Questions; FAC 7. Enabling Inclusive Dialogue; FAC 8. Understanding Power Dynamics in the Community; FAC 9. Nonviolent Conflict Management](#)*

Short videos where facilitators from an Action Research programme in Kenya reflect on some of the important skills and qualities of a good facilitator: [Being a facilitator](#); [Being humble and respectful](#); [Deep listening](#).

WarChild Holland's and Save the Children's *Participatory facilitation using creative methods to strengthen community engagement and ownership – Resource pack part 4: [Two-day training for field-level facilitators](#).*

**Emerging Evidence Report 6:** *How does participatory Action Research generate innovation? Findings from a rapid realist review.* For those who would like to read more deeply about CLARISSA evidence around facilitation, see pages 32–34 (5.4: *The importance of good facilitation*). DOI: [10.19088/CLARISSA.2021.009](#)

### Other skills and tools in this series:

#### 1. [Working in a child- and people-centred way](#)

Key skill: *Communications skills*

#### 2. [Mapping systems and taking action](#)

Key skill: *Asking good questions*

#### 3. [Using evidence and learning to adapt programmes in real time](#)

Key skill: *Being a reflexive team*

#### 4. [After Action Reviews](#)

Key skill: *Being a reflective practitioner (individual)*

#### 5. [Working with partners](#)

Key skill: *Being inclusive and aware of power dynamics*

#### 6. [Safeguarding for Systemic Action Research](#)

Key skill: *Building trust and rapport*

“It is very important that a facilitator truly mingles [...] We cannot think of ourselves as superiors. It is needed for any facilitation. Be it my sitting style, my manner of speaking, my attire, everything. I have to keep it in mind.”

CLARISSA partner team member, Bangladesh



Tips for using a Systemic Action Research programme approach	
Using a Systemic Action Research programme approach	
IS	ISN'T
Identifying a complex problem and using a systems lens to try and understand it. Seeking to map the different elements of the system and how they interact and relate to participants' own experiences. This can provide insight into the causes of a particular challenge or issue.	Deciding in advance what is the cause of a challenge or identifying a simple or single chain of causes.
Loosely framing a challenge or issue such as worst forms of child labour but allowing for an open-ended process of learning, exploration, innovation and action-taking.	Framing discussions very tightly, based on a single issue. Not allowing participants to explore other aspects of their lived experiences which might be linked to an issue, or to take decisions.
Facilitation-based: "We don't have all the answers, but we can work together to identify what drives the problem, what is important for you, and what kinds of actions you could take."	Expert-led: "We have specific expertise about this issue and we suggest you/we take the following actions...we have already allocated resources for these specific actions."
Internally driven and innovative solutions.	Externally driven solutions based on best practice or a generic model of intervention.
Participants are experts, and active problem-solvers.	Beneficiaries with little agency.
Learning alongside the people affected by a complex problem. People-centred, -led and -owned.	Participatory research with a group or community where learning is not owned or fed back. Extractive.
Facilitating a problem-solving process.	Consulting with participants.
Facilitators support participants at points in the process where appropriate or requested.	'Anything goes'. Participants undertake the whole process with no support OR facilitators make all the decisions.
Supporting internally driven actions which create change, by disrupting or changing a system.	Enabling an individual or group to get out of an adverse situation, even though others will most likely replace them, or where causes are not addressed.
Participants design their own Theory of Change based on their own research.	Programmers develop a Theory of Change to guide and justify the programme's design.
Inclusive participation of a large proportion of people from diverse groups.	Working with a small number of individuals who represent the views and opinions of their respective groups. Only working with people or groups who hold disproportionate levels of power and influence.
Working in a non-judgemental way and including diverse perspectives in the learning process.	Identifying those at fault, or 'perpetrators' and automatically excluding them from the learning process.
<b>Ethical, safeguarding and do no harm considerations should always guide which groups are included.</b>	
Prioritising learning, a patient approach, not rushing implementation.	Prioritising implementation over learning. Rushing the learning phase.



## 5 TIPS ON PLANNING AND BUDGETING FOR SYSTEMS MAPPING AND TAKING ACTION

*Children working on a small system map in Kathmandu.*

CREDIT: ANIS BASTOLA

Programmes which are built around Systemic Action Research don't necessarily have to cost more than a typical development programme. However, the allocation of resources and timeline will most likely look quite different. For instance,

- Proportionately more resources and time might need to be allocated to research and learning activities and resources, which might include the hiring of relatively large teams of facilitators and documenters, for a reasonably long period of time.
- More time may possibly be spent training and supporting team members for their specific roles within the programme.
- More time and resources may be required for everyone involved to get to know each other, and to develop strong relationships and build trust. The first few months, or even longer, might be spent holding meetings, doing activities together, meeting with key individuals or bodies, working with partners and partnership-building, and learning about the context through observation. Systemic Action Research approaches work in a 'relational' way, so ongoing relationship building activities are a central part of the work and require adequate budget.

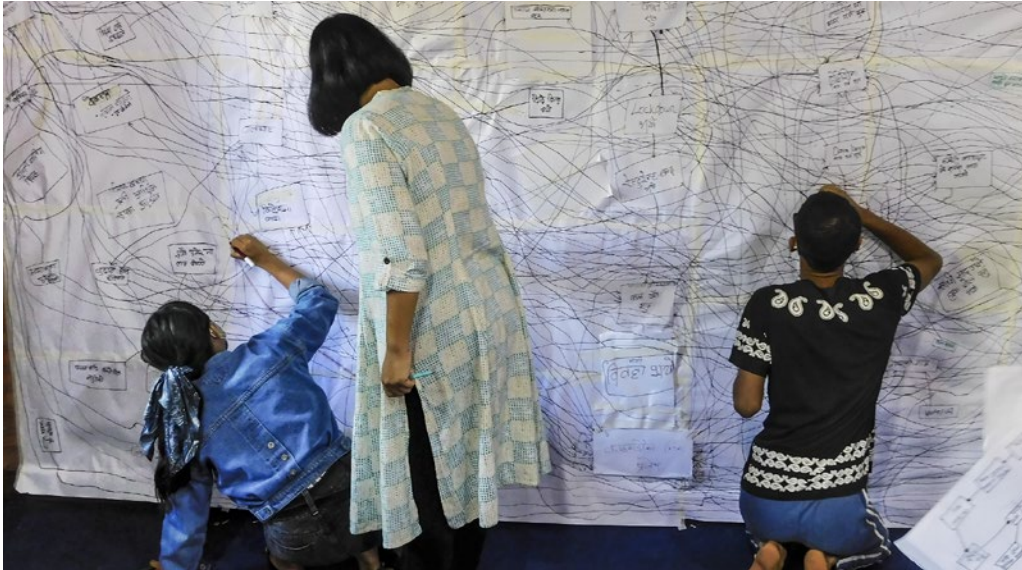
- Using a systemic approach requires adequate time and suitable spaces for research groups to reflect and make decisions. This is not a process which can be rushed, and therefore time frames leading to action-taking might be relatively extended compared to a programme where actions have already been decided in advance, or where programme staff make the decisions.
- Flexible budgeting: The nature of Systemic Action Research means programmes can't know beforehand exactly where a programme will go. Budgets can be planned for the process itself, for instance, for a certain number of meetings or staff salaries, but the interventions which will emerge from the programme process are unknown. Therefore, it is advisable to budget for and negotiate an unassigned 'intervention pot' which Action Research groups may use for their intervention. This is discussed in more detail in Learning and Reflection Brief 3. [\*\*\*Using evidence and learning to adapt programmes in real time.\*\*\*](#)

Although many funders are now showing interest in working differently, including shifting towards a systemic programme approach, the reality of their current funding structures and mechanisms limit the extent to which this is always possible. Many current practices are built to support short-term projects with clear, measurable results rather than collaborative, evolving approaches to create lasting change. There may also be certain restrictions and conditions as to how funding can be used. Taking all of this into account, it may seem as if the funder's requirements actively discourage innovative approaches. Despite this, organisations should not be discouraged from looking for ways to use a systemic approach in their programming. Taking small steps one at a time can be more manageable for all involved and doesn't necessarily have to disrupt a funding agreement.

Suggestions on how teams could move towards a systemic approach:

- There might be space within an existing programme to deepen participation by giving more power to participants to undertake their own small pieces of research or activities, and to make their own decisions.
- Perhaps a programme could deepen the collective understanding of a problem by intentionally including new or different groups into its learning processes and giving more space to those processes.
- Consider training staff on how to become skilled facilitators of a 'bottom-up' approach, where the emphasis is on supporting participants to make decisions and drive change, but not 'teaching'.
- Consider how to build more trust with the funder, for instance, by communicating clearly about the importance of using a systems lens, or a specific aspect of the approach. Use the information in this learning and reflection series to guide, but also think about how the approach may link to and support any common goals, commitments and agendas.
- If a programme starts to diverge from the Theory of Change or log frame as a result of evidence generated by the programme, keep the channels of communication with the funder open and provide a clear rationale for why the programme is changing direction. Funders can gain confidence from seeing that the programme is using a robustly tested method to guide its evolution.





Children working in threes to identify links on a big systems map, Kathmandu.

CREDIT: ANIS BASTOLA

## 6 TEAM REFLECTION

Answer the questions in this section as a team. Allow two hours to complete this section. Use your notebooks to record your answers and main points. You'll need to refer back to these later.

### Skills building (30 mins at end of session)

This reflection brief focuses on being a facilitator and asking good questions. Each participant should aim to practice asking good questions as part of this team reflection.

### Work as a team (45 mins)

Discuss the following as a team:

- 1 Were there any causal dynamics for worst forms of child labour in the videos or this brief which you did not expect? Why do you think this is?
- 2 Are we dealing with any complex problems in our own programmes? If so, what are they, and how do we think they are complex (or are they simple or complicated)?
- 3 How is our programme trying to address this complex problem? Are we using a whole systems ('systemic') approach, or another type of approach? Which aspects seem similar to the approach described here, which parts seem different?
- 4 Is there any space in our programme to introduce a systemic approach, for instance, by emphasising facilitation over expert-led?

### Actions brainstorm (45 mins)

What kinds of actions could we take as a team to move towards a stronger participatory, whole systems programming approach? While remaining realistic, try not to limit your ideas for now, you will come back these ideas later and decide if they are still relevant.

### Skills building (30 mins)

Share how it felt to try and ask good questions. What did you notice about yourself? Can you give any constructive feedback to another team member?



## Section 3

# Using evidence and learning to adapt programmes in real time



### **People-driven solutions:**

An introduction to facilitating deep participation for systemic change through Systemic Action Research programming



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*Children in Manohora community, Kathmandu.*

CREDIT: CLARISSA

This learning and reflection brief can help teams learn about the value of using a participatory ‘adaptive management’ approach within a participatory, learning- and action-oriented, whole systems programme. Teams can start to identify if and how their programme may benefit from using adaptive management; the extent to which their programme may already incorporate aspects of adaptive management; where adaptive management principles could potentially be introduced or strengthened; and any possible actions which could support more adaptive programming. Generally, the key lessons, skills and tools highlighted here are also useful for any team interested in exploring how intentionally and systematically using evidence and learning can shape a programme in real time.

Specifically, this brief will help teams:

- Learn about what an adaptive management programme is about, including what this approach looks like in development and humanitarian programmes, and some examples from CLARISSA.
- Learn about some of the key methods and tools used by CLARISSA for adaptive management such as a reflexive Theory of Change.
- Reflect on their own programme(s) and ways of working, and identify actions which could potentially enhance, or help shift a programme towards an adaptive management approach.

Holding periodic After Action Reviews with country and consortium partners played a central role in CLARISSA’s intentional and systematic approach to using learning and evidence in order to adapt. This is addressed in the learning and reflection brief which follows, Brief 4. [After Action Reviews](#).

*Terms used in this Brief:*

**Actionable learning**

Learning which is designed to guide decision-making and actions.

**Children’s research groups**

Child- and youth-led research groups within CLARISSA which undertook research during COVID.



## 1 VIDEO

Watch the video '[Using evidence and learning to adapt programmes in real time](#)' where CLARISSA team members from Bangladesh and Nepal provide some perspectives based on their experience of working using adaptive management. After you've watched the video, note down how you think this approach is similar or different to how you currently work. You will discuss this later in the reflection session.

*Children in the children's advocacy group, Nepal, discussing advocacy messages.*

SOURCE: FROM THE CLARISSA VIDEO '[USING EVIDENCE AND LEARNING TO ADAPT PROGRAMMES IN REAL TIME](#)'

## 2 PARTICIPATORY ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

Most practitioners will be aware that programme implementation rarely goes according to plan. There will always be programme changes or modifications which need to be made in response to unexpected events or situations, or because something didn't work out as originally intended. So on this level, most development and humanitarian work is already required to respond to the context and is expected to make itself 'fit for context'. However, what does it mean to embrace participatory 'adaptive management', and how is this different from the inevitable programme adjustments we expect to make?

For CLARISSA, participatory adaptive management was based on the understanding that the programme would be addressing many causal interdependencies which combine to drive children into the worst forms of child labour; that this would likely involve many actors on different levels; but that there were high levels of uncertainty around what precisely drove the problem and who the key actors might be. In response to this, the programme's interventions were intentionally not pre-defined. Rather, the participatory nature of the programme was designed to inform responses and actions in real time. Therefore, from the outset, CLARISSA acknowledged that it was going to need to adapt itself as it went along – it didn't have all the answers, and needed to generate evidence and learning which it could use to inform its responses. In order to do this, CLARISSA set about establishing inclusive mechanisms

*Terms used in this Brief:*

### **Action Research groups**

The groups of children or adults in CLARISSA who worked to further research, learn about and act around the different aspects of worst forms of child labour identified from the Life Stories and systems mapping.



within the consortium partnership to enable partners and teams at all levels to systematically and intentionally learn together about the different assumptions and strategies being used by CLARISSA. In other words, what was working, what was not working, who did this apply to, and why was this? This reflection and learning, enabled by regular After Action Reviews (see also Learning and Reflection Brief 4. [After Action Reviews](#)) brought together learning across the different levels of work. It was then used to collectively decide how the programme would move forward, and the kinds of actions or changes which were required on various levels.

This type of process was different from simply identifying the changes or actions typically required to deliver a programme. After Action Reviews didn't just focus on programme delivery, but also on the programme's underlying assumptions and strategies, and CLARISSA continuously asked itself whether these were still relevant in light of ongoing, participatory, programme-generated learning and evidence. CLARISSA also considered collaborative governance as core to its approach and tried to optimise governance through adaptations as part of the process too. The adaptive management approach was considered participatory because it sought to avoid hierarchical or top-down decision-making. For instance, After Action Reviews were inclusive of all partners and generally, "it was everybody's business to learn". Brief 5. [Working with partners](#) provides further insight into how CLARISSA worked to enable an equitable, empowered and flexible partnership to support participatory adaptive management.

## THE DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF CLARISSA'S PARTICIPATORY ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

**Adaptive DELIVERY:** Adaptive delivery is the reality of programme implementation on the ground. This is the typical kind of flexible delivery which responds to a context or event, and which is often unavoidable. Most practitioners are already familiar with this way of working and will likely make many adaptations to their delivery plans over the course of a programme.

### *How did CLARISSA work to adapt delivery?*

Learning from Action Research groups was captured through programme supported documentation of the research process, which included monitoring qualitative\* and quantitative\* indicators to assess how the Action Research groups were working (performance and facilitation) and what they were achieving (innovations and outcomes). Local implementation teams (facilitators and documenters) periodically reviewed the learning to adapt CLARISSA implementation in consultation with the country-level team. Regular management meetings and ad-hoc 'mini' After Action Reviews (see Learning and Reflection Brief 4. [After Action Reviews](#)) supported the piloting and adjustment of these approaches.

**Examples:** Brief 6. [Safeguarding for Systemic Action Research](#) describes the way in which child-centred, participatory decisions were taken to change the GPS devices which were planned to be used, as well as the way children captured data during GIS mapping in Nepal. In another example, Nepali local partners provided emergency food to families during COVID lockdowns. In yet another example, the Nepal team decided to change its recruitment criteria for research documenters and field organisers from trained academic researchers to younger graduates, because the graduates were more open to embracing the participatory and child-centred approach required by CLARISSA.

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Terms used in this Brief:

### **PhotoVoice**

A participatory visual method where participants use photos to tell a story or narrative about an aspect of their lives. *Participatory Approaches Using Creative Methods to Strengthen Community Engagement and Ownership – Resource Pack* has plenty of guidance on PhotoVoice.

### **Reflexivity**

The ability to take a step back and think objectively and critically about something.

### **Qualitative**

Information that cannot be counted, measured or easily expressed using numbers.

### **Quantitative**

Information which can be counted or measured.

“If you're honest about your engagement with them (affected peoples), you don't know what the solution is. And so you have to embrace the fact that there's going to be uncertainty.”

IDS CLARISSA team member

**Adaptive PROGRAMMING:** Adaptive programming is when more fundamental decisions and changes are made around a programme’s focus areas or ways of working. For instance, deciding to put more energy into a particular issue based on what programme evidence is showing in real time, or deciding to respond to an opportunity that’s recently emerged during implementation. These types of programme adaptations tend to happen much less frequently in many development and humanitarian programmes compared to adaptation for delivery.

#### **How did CLARISSA work to adapt programming?**

After Action Reviews were facilitated on a six-monthly and annual basis within each country and across all the countries (see Brief 4. [After Action Reviews](#)). Monitoring data and learning from programme activities — including Action Research groups and the partnership’s self-evaluation process (see Brief 5. [Working with partners](#)) — were the main inputs. After Action Reviews examined the programme’s main assumptions and produced actionable learning\* reports. After Action Reviews were also timed to ensure that learning could be communicated effectively and usefully from the country to consortium level, thereby allowing programme plans to be adapted accordingly.

**Examples:** During the set-up phase (very early programme implementation), it became clear that the programme should focus on worst forms of child labour in the context of informal and domestic markets, as opposed to export-oriented markets and in big global corporations, as initially thought. This was the result of a collective decision-making process based on evidence drawn from what was happening on the ground. In this way, evidence had already started to challenge CLARISSA’s initial assumptions, and it motivated a significant conceptual shift and change of strategy for the programme. In another example from Bangladesh, CLARISSA opened an unplanned ‘hub’ office and a community space so that staff from the different partners could spend more time collaborating as a team. The hub office and community space meant they would spend less time driving to different offices through Dhaka’s traffic, and more time spent working together building stronger working relationships in a shared physical space nearer to where the research was taking place. Another example was the decision to phase out the CLARISSA Children’s eesearch group\* in Nepal after they had completed an initial PhotoVoice\* project. While the value of that initial project was appreciated, the programme decided that more could be derived from focusing on the research by the Action Research groups (See Brief 2. [Mapping systems and taking action](#)). A final example was the development of a mentoring group after the Action Research groups were up and running, in response to a demand from the facilitation teams to have more direct and hands-on support from the IDS team. This led to the set up of bi-weekly mentoring sessions that proved crucial for building the teams’ reflexive capacities and enabling a space for real-time troubleshooting.

**Adaptive GOVERNANCE:** Adaptive governance can include renegotiating a programme plan with a donor, perhaps to reconfigure how the programme is structured, including or excluding features of the programme, and reallocating budget. This commonly happens to varying degrees in many programmes, but often there may be donor restrictions on how radical a change or budget reallocation can be.

“Sometimes there was a bit of frustration. Are we stuck? Why so many meetings and discussions? Now I understand that the meetings and discussions were for adaptation.”

CLARISSA partner team member, Bangladesh

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### How did CLARISSA work to adapt governance?

Actionable learning was constantly fed upwards to the programme's lead partners, and also annually to the donor via the programme reports. A strongly collaborative and trusting relationship with the donor, established during the co-generation phase, and maintained throughout implementation, also enabled CLARISSA to steer toward its key objectives despite working in an environment with many uncertainties, including COVID restrictions. Major programme adaptations, designed and agreed through the adaptive management approach, were approved by the donor. Donor representatives also participated in many of the early (co-conception and set up phase) programme workshops where decisions about the programme's design and partnership composition were collectively made. This included discussions about what would be done, by whom, where it would be done, and who with. As such, the donor was already well-acquainted with the proposed adaptations before being asked to approve them, as it had been part of the collaborative decision-making process.

**Examples:** Before CLARISSA could get fully underway, the military coup in Myanmar created a difficult environment for the programme to operate, so it was agreed that Myanmar would be withdrawn from the programme, and the budget reconfigured. Also, the donor decided it needed to reduce the CLARISSA budget, so a participatory budgeting process was undertaken by all the programme partners to decide how the budget should be reallocated, and which aspects of the programme needed to be modified. In another example, the programme budget and activities were modified to embrace the restrictions imposed on international travel by the COVID lockdowns, while also responding to input regarding how the teams were collaborating. These aspects also contributed to the decision to shift from the original work stream-led way of working (whereby teams comprised members from different countries and partners) to a country-led way.

“Because here, we do not have anything fixed like other development programmes [...] here we are talking about Participatory Action Research. The ethos of this programme is learning by doing. Our design itself has driven us to embrace adaptive management, and that has been from our operations, to governance, and even financial management.”

CLARISSA partner team member, Bangladesh

## CLARISSA RESOURCES ON ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

**CLARISSA Blog:** *Why are effective feedback mechanisms in cash transfers so important?* Reflections on how effective feedback mechanism can support adaptive delivery.

**CLARISSA Blog:** *Art, craft, and the science of facilitation in a complex partnership programme.* Team member insights into the After Action Review process.

**CLARISSA Blog:** *5 reflections on operationalising CLARISSA to generate evidence.* Reflections on how CLARISSA got its adaptive management process up and running.

## 3 PARTICIPATORY ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT: PRACTICAL LEARNING FROM CLARISSA

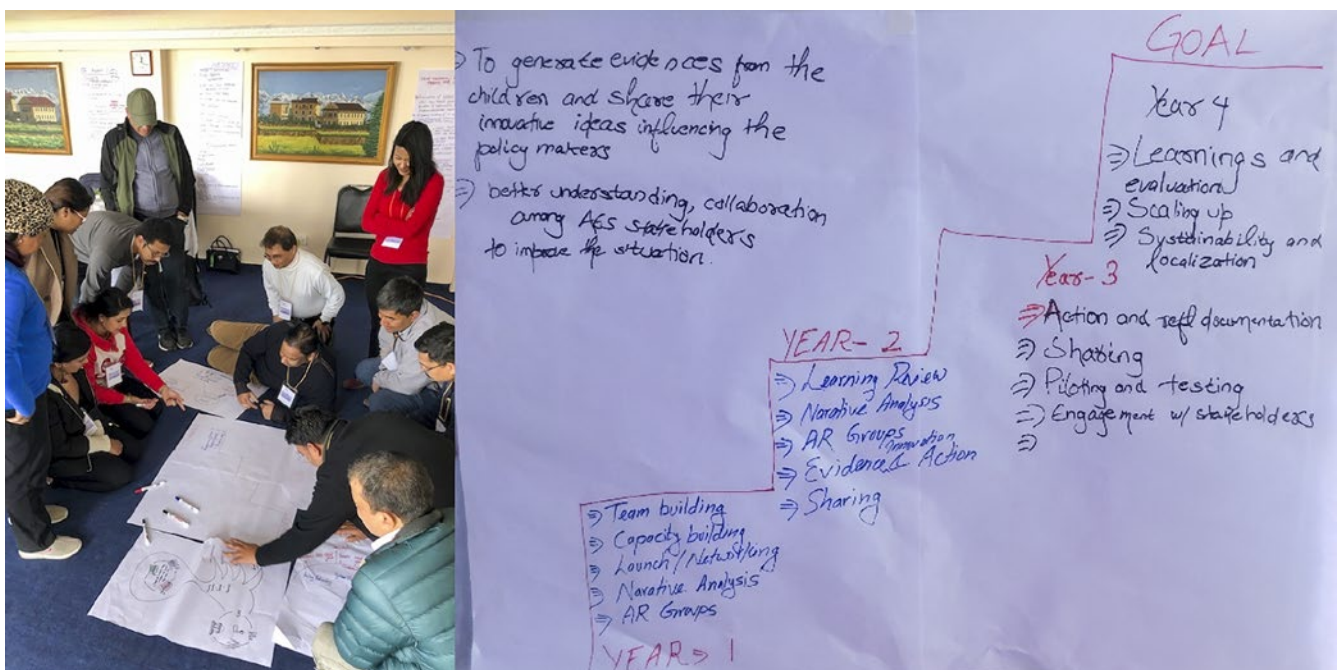
**Learning for programme decision-making can become (almost) everybody's business.** At each level of CLARISSA there was a very collaborative approach to decision-making. This allowed diverse team members from different levels to be part of learning and decision-making, and they were involved in making conscious decisions to shift both big and small aspects of the programme. This inclusive, collaborative and empowering approach was supported by ongoing efforts to



monitor and strengthen the functionality of the partnership (see Brief 5. *Working with partners*); by organising After Action Reviews in different ways, for instance between partners in-country, and not just high-level or big international meetings; by promoting reflection and learning at all levels, including the uptake of mini-After Action Reviews and individual reflective journalling; and by using participatory, creative tools such as the River of Life to support reflection processes. By the end of the programme, the extended use of After Action Reviews had been embraced by the whole team and became part of the approach of all staff. Some partners also expanded its use to other programmes beyond CLARISSA, and the approach became more central to several partners' own operations, with corresponding budget allocations. Despite these efforts, it was also acknowledged by CLARISSA that some team members on the ground were still excluded from decision-making at times, and that these programme power dynamics, linked to the dynamics of aid itself, were not easily or entirely overcome by the mechanisms and strategies CLARISSA used.

**It is possible to design a robust, adaptive, impactful programme which doesn't have a log frame.** In many ways, CLARISSA was a radical process, because it didn't use a log frame for its results framework. At the beginning of the process, CLARISSA's lead partner (IDS) explicitly negotiated with the funder to omit the typically required log frame, because it didn't align with the programme's adaptive management approach. Instead, a high-level Theory of Change was included in the proposal and a monitoring, evaluation and learning framework, which the funder approved, included commitments on outputs and targets, as well as a commitment to monitor and evaluate the implementation processes and outcomes as they emerged. While this was accepted by the funder, the approach remained controversial within the programme itself, with one IDS team member observing "some individuals and some partners found it really hard to embrace". With the agreed understanding that the purpose of the work was to test out the programme's Theory of Change and adapt as more was learned in real time, CLARISSA went on to develop its own participatory, co-generated, 'reflexive' Theory of Change during the first phase. This reflexive Theory of Change was designed to appropriately support an ongoing process of critical reflection around the programme assumptions and strategies. Boxes 1 and 2 explain

CLARISSA team in Nepal discussing their Theory of Change.  
CREDIT: CLARISSA



in more detail why and how CLARISSA approached its Theory of Change differently from a typical development or humanitarian programme.

**Robust adaptive management programmes require strong monitoring, evaluation and learning capacity.** The CLARISSA monitoring, evaluation and learning team enabled other teams to engage with the evidence being generated through the After Action Review workshops and also by engaging across the various decision-making structures and points in time which were built into CLARISSA. CLARISSA significantly invested in its monitoring, evaluation and learning capacity so it could support informed and deep reflection with teams at all levels. This centred around facilitating participatory reflection by feeding back the copious and rich data which was being collected, as well as by creating an enabling environment through the various systems, mechanisms and activities described here.

“When the learning feeds into decision-making, then you can really say you’re intentionally using an adaptive management approach.”  
IDS CLARISSA team member

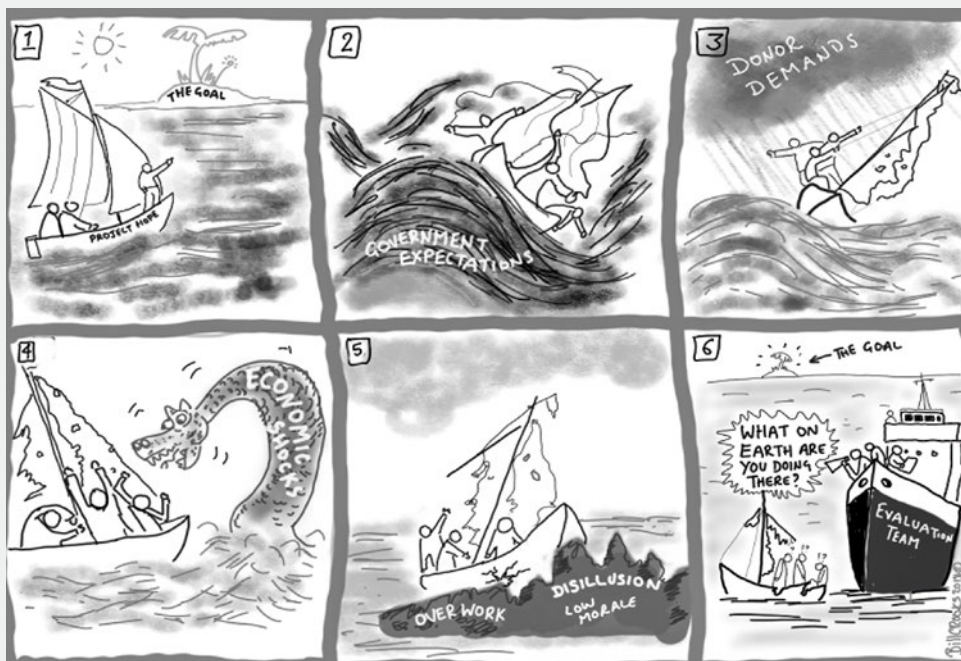
BOX 1

**THE THEORY OF CHANGE ‘STRAIGHT-JACKET’**

A conventional ‘linear’ approach to a Theory of Change assumes we know everything from the outset; that one set of actions leads neatly, or most likely, to certain outputs and outcomes; and it doesn’t acknowledge the context and complexity of many issues typically addressed in development and humanitarian contexts. A conventional Theory of Change usually doesn’t allow much flexibility to adapt the programme according to the changing needs of participants, stakeholders and partners to emerging learning, or to a major disruption such as COVID. Most programmes spend a lot of time on developing a Theory of Change early on and only return to it at the end to evaluate their performance against the initial plans. Often how the programme ends up doesn’t really align with the original Theory of Change. For more detail read the **CLARISSA blog**: *Breaking free from the theory of change straight jacket*.

**What happens when a Theory of Change is linear and inflexible**

*The evaluation of complex programmes*



CREDIT: DRAWN BY BILL CROOKS, BASED ON AN ORIGINAL CONCEPT BY NIGEL SIMISTER

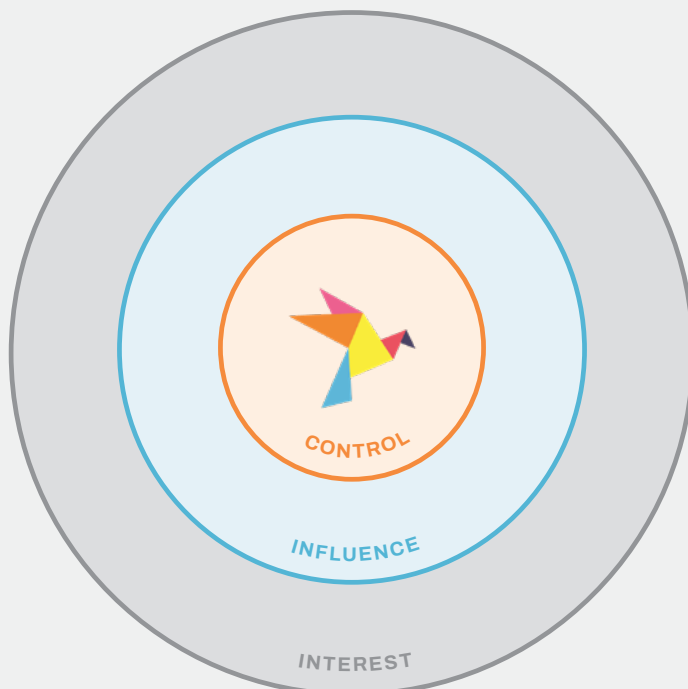
BOX 2

**THE REFLEXIVE THEORY OF CHANGE**

It is now commonly accepted that conventional Theories of Change are not useful for adaptive programmes that embrace uncertainty, and which use increasingly popular adaptive-styled monitoring, evaluation and learning systems. A ‘reflexive’ Theory of Change is not simply there “because we have to have one” but can facilitate a critical reflection process through which programme assumptions and the strategies used can be unpacked, considered and adjusted in an ongoing manner.

*Imagine you throw a pebble into a lake. You can choose a very small or a large pebble, and you can direct where the pebble goes (because you have good aim) – you can throw it close to the edge of the shore or perhaps far away into the middle of the lake. You can throw it high in the air or skim it across the surface. This is what you can **control**. When the pebble drops in, you know it will make some ripples in the water around your pebble, but you can’t control these ripples – they may spread evenly or there may be other things in the lake, like the shore or fallen trees, or even a strong wind, which make the ripples act differently, or go in different directions. You and your pebble have **influenced** these ripples. You can make an educated guess as to what might happen, based on what you can see in the lake and how you threw your pebble, but you can’t control exactly how the ripples act. By watching what happens, you’ll be able to adjust your starting guess when you see where the ripples actually did go and how they acted. Other creatures might notice the activity in the lake, become **interested**, and move closer to see what is happening, and further ripples might be created around other objects in the lake.*

**The CLARISSA interactive Theory Of Change**



Box continues on next page ➤

“I was giving example of journey mapping when we were doing that we were supposed to stay there for 12 hours and fill in a small questionnaire but when we did a field test and shared with IDS colleagues this method is not sufficient to find out the deeper stories. In that case, we had to take a broader observation method [...] and we could add an ethnographic observation with journey mapping. So, our methodology has changed with our context...”

CLARISSA partner team member, Bangladesh



**This is an analogy of how the CLARISSA programme visualised its own reflexive Theory Of Change.** This approach is borrowed from the framing used by ‘outcome mapping’ (which identifies the spheres of ‘control’, ‘influence’ and ‘interest’). To do this, a workshop with all the partners, including some local partners early on (but before country teams were in place) was organised, during which they explored their understanding of CLARISSA’s potential to influence whole systems change around the worst forms of child labour. In a participatory session, they mapped all the current actors in the child labour programming system and explored the various pathways which could potentially shift how the issue of worst forms of child labour is currently framed. For example, moving from “worst forms of child labour are a result of unscrupulous business owners” to “what if business owners could become part of the solution?”. This exercise helped everyone gain more clarity about why and how current programmes are designed to address the worst forms of child labour, where there may be limitations, and how the CLARISSA programme might add value and new thinking.

The CLARISSA programme identified three main ‘impact’ pathways – the ‘pebbles’ that create the ripples of impact:

- 1 Generating participatory evidence and innovation around the worst forms of child labour through the participatory activities facilitated by the programme.
- 2 Supporting advocacy groups around the worst forms of child labour through the child-led and other activities facilitated by the programme.
- 3 Working in a bottom-up and participatory way through an intentional and ongoing monitoring, evaluation and learning and the application of CLARISSA’s principles, i.e. child- and people-centred, meaningful participation, facilitation-driven, not expert-driven.

It was envisaged that the ‘ripples’ produced by these core programme actions would lead to new understandings of the problem and **influence and spark** diverse and valid actions by participants and stakeholders around the worst forms of labour. It also envisaged that broader stakeholders would be **interested** in the new evidence and learning the CLARISSA programme was generating, and that some would also leverage this knowledge to help reduce the worst forms of child labour. Although the programme couldn’t control or confidently predict what different actions these might be, it *could* set itself up to intentionally learn about them as it went along, and to evaluate the changes they were bringing about. In this way, CLARISSA was not bound by a set of specific activities beyond its ‘pebbles’, but it did commit to systematically integrating evidence, reflection and adaptation into the heart of its programme.

An interactive **Theory Of Change** (above) was developed to help illustrate how CLARISSA conceptualised its actions leading to change, and it also provides real examples of what actually happened. By using this interactive tool you can learn more about the CLARISSA ‘pebbles’ and ‘ripples’.

“It’s all very well talking about learning, or adaptive management, but there are certain skills that you as a team and as individuals need to learn to turn the practice of adaptive management into true learning.”  
IDS CLARISSA team member

Using a shared information drive and other technology was critical for the CLARISSA's adaptive management. Using Microsoft Teams was a really important aspect of the programme's adaptive management approach. CLARISSA generated a huge amount of data, and was committed to consistently and meaningfully using the evidence gathered. The Microsoft Teams platform, combined with a strong monitoring, evaluation and learning team, promoted high degrees of transparency and collaboration, as there was a commonly accessible information and communications platform and a solid structure for participation. Other meeting platforms and programmes such as Zoom and the Miro whiteboard also enabled remote relationship building, reflection and learning. However, the programme also found that different team members had different capacities in relation to using these online tools, which at times did contribute to some inter-organisational strain.

### RESOURCES ON ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT AND THEORY OF CHANGE

**CLARISSA Blog:** *Our best evidenced guess of how we will achieve change.* Provides more detail on CLARISSA's Theory of Change.

**Adaptive management: What it means for civil society organisations.** A useful report commissioned by BOND which includes considerations around budgets and funders.

**Adaptive programme management in fragile and complex settings** – A practice note developed by Food & Business Knowledge Platform with further examples of adaptive management in development and humanitarian settings.

**How to set up and manage an adaptive programme:** *Lessons from the Action on Climate Today programme.* By Oxford Policy Management.

A Medium article by UNDP: **How do we use M&E as a vehicle for learning?**

*Making adaptive rigour work – Principles and practices for strengthening monitoring, evaluation and learning for adaptive management.* A **Briefing note** by the ODI.

A view of Kathmandu valley.

CREDIT: CLARISSA







## 4 SKILLS, METHODS AND TOOLS FOR PARTICIPATORY ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

CLARISSA team reflection on different child-led, participatory research methods.

CREDIT: ANIS BASTOLA

Adaptive management programmes require individuals and teams who are skilled in learning and reflection, and who are interested in testing out uncertain strategies, and reflecting and modifying based on what is learned. This is often described as an ‘entrepreneurial’ mindset, and highlights taking informed ‘risks’ to test a strategy. Strong communication and collaboration across different programme teams, countries and partners were also all critical aspects of a robust adaptive management process within CLARISSA, as a well as clear systems for bringing team members together to undertake these processes. Brief 5. [Working with partners](#) discusses this in more detail.

This brief focuses on the concept of being a reflexive\* team and programme. Reflexivity can be used individually to improve one’s own practice, or as part of a team activity, such as an After Action Review, to collectively reflect on and make decisions about a programme. Detailed guidance on the tool ‘Rivers of Life’, After Action Reviews, and on individual reflective journaling skills is addressed in Brief 4. [After Action Reviews](#).



Being reflexive is	Being reflexive is not
<p>Being reflexive is the conscious act of stepping back and reflecting critically on how one approaches and implements one’s work, or how a programme is working, and then taking steps to address the aspects which need changing.</p>	<p>The aim of reflection is not to criticise, but to learn from experiences, avoid repeating mistakes, and to take steps to change how work is done.</p>
<p>On an individual level, being reflexive is closely related to self-awareness and being able to reflect on one’s own relative power and how this can affect working relationships. For example, regularly committing to identifying and exploring personal thoughts, feelings, assumptions, skills and experiences and then evaluating how they do or don’t fit in with the programme approach, and how they may influence others around them.</p>	<p>Being reflexive is not about judging personal values, attitudes, feelings, beliefs, or that a person, group or organisation holds relative power. It is about recognising in an objective manner how they might impact on a programme approach, and how they may help or hinder.</p> <p>This is explored further in Brief 1. <i><b>Working in a child- and people-centred way.</b></i></p>
<p>The same understanding above is true at the programme level. Here, teams reflect objectively on the programme itself and identify how certain assumptions may have led to particular strategies, and how these may or may not be leading to an anticipated result.</p>	<p>At the programme level, being reflexive is not about criticising a programme as a failure. Reflexivity allows for failure. It does not judge that the programme has ‘failed’ because a particular strategy didn’t work out. Rather, the reflexive learning process objectively acknowledges and learns from shortcomings, and feeds into improved strategies which follow.</p>
<p>Any person playing a role in implementing a programme should strive to become a reflective practitioner. Being reflexive is a core part of professional (and volunteer) development.</p>	<p>Being reflexive is not just for senior management, anyone, and everyone, can learn to be more reflexive.</p>
<p>Reflective practice can be undertaken alone, with another person, or in a group/team, or as a whole organisation.</p>	<p>Reflective practice is not about reviewing the performance of a practitioner. The focus is not to supervise staff, teams or volunteers.</p>
<p>An important aspect of being a reflective practitioner is asking probing questions, asking “why”, constructively discussing different team members’ perspectives, assumptions and actions, and the different ways of approaching a question or issue.</p>	<p>Reflective practice is not about who is ‘right’ and who is ‘wrong’, nor making teams or team members feel like they are failing at their job, or that the programme is failing.</p>
<p>Reflective practice is about identifying what has been learned and then using this learning to <b>take actions</b> to improve practice or change course.</p>	<p>Reflective practice isn’t only identifying problems, or judging or evaluating programme outcomes.</p>



*CLARISSA team members reflecting together on what has been learned during a cross country meeting.*

CREDIT: ANIS BASTOLA

### Tips from CLARISSA for participatory adaptive management

When working to address a complex challenge, assume you don't know the answer. For instance, in the CLARISSA context, the understanding was that there is weak evidence of what leads children into worst forms of child labour, and that many responses simply don't work.

Working adaptively may not be appropriate in all circumstances. There are relatively simple problems and simple contexts in which more traditional, linear programming approaches are valid.

An adaptive programme isn't simply vague or 'anything goes'. It has robust mechanisms in place to be able to collectively learn and adapt at all levels to move forward towards real change.

Expect to make the most changes at earlier stages of the programme, and then stick to these decisions while they are tested.

Embrace change – don't hold onto things that don't serve the programme's goal any more.

Learning is everyone's business: build a programme which is fully inclusive and participatory so programme teams can learn collectively. Make sure this aspect is adequately funded and centred, rather than simply seen as an added burden.

Don't be afraid to take a 'risk' – be entrepreneurial, test out evidence-informed, and collectively monitored assumptions and strategies, and don't be afraid to fail. Treat failing as an important part of the learning process.

Consider taking the first steps towards being adaptive by reflecting on how this approach could enhance or change the way your programme or organisation works. The team reflection exercise which follows can kick start this thinking.

Start with small actions: For instance, consider making space for being more reflexive as an organisation.

## GUIDANCE AND TOOLKITS FOR SUPPORTING REFLECTION

**CLARISSA Learning Note 4:** *Applying the River of Life method to support reflection and learning in Terre des hommes, Nepal.* DOI: [10.19088/ CLARISSA.2023.005](https://doi.org/10.19088/CLARISSA.2023.005)

**Rivers of Life:** More detailed 'how to' guidance on [participatorymethods.org](https://participatorymethods.org)

**Participatory Visual Methods:** a case study. An example of how visual storytelling can open up new spaces to reflect on [participatorymethods.org](https://participatorymethods.org)

**Participatory Approaches Using Creative Methods to Strengthen Community Engagement and Ownership** – Resource pack: Guidance on using a broad range of participatory, creative methods for facilitation and many links to different tools.

**Other skills and tools in this series:**

**1. Working in a child- and people-centred way**

Key skill: *Communications skills*

**2. Mapping systems and taking action**

Key skill: *Asking good questions*

**3. Using evidence and learning to adapt programmes in real time**

Key skill: *Being a reflexive team*

**4. After Action Reviews**

Key skill: *Being a reflective practitioner (individual)*

**5. Working with partners**

Key skill: *Being inclusive and aware of power dynamics*

**6. Safeguarding for Systemic Action Research**

Key skill: *Building trust and rapport*

## 5 TIPS ON PLANNING AND BUDGETING FOR ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

Planning and budgeting for an adaptively managed programme can look quite different from a typical programme. For instance, there will be significantly more resources allocated to monitoring, evaluation and learning. Not surprisingly, this is often one of the most challenging aspects of working in an adaptive way, both for implementing organisations and for funders. Learning so far suggests that even where funders are interested in or committed, in theory, to working in an adaptive way, their organisational and contracting systems and mechanisms are often mismatched. For example, funding contracts may still require a log frame, clear outputs and outcomes, and numbers to be reached, and may have many conditions or restrictions attached to budget modifications or the payment of tranches. Implementing organisations themselves may also have their own regulations, guidelines and practices which don't create an enabling environment for an agile, adaptive programming approach. Generally, greater focus is still needed to create the right institutional and funding conditions to enable and facilitate adaptive approaches. This includes a more widespread acceptance of the inherent uncertainties and the risk of failure – an 'entrepreneurial' approach – involved in tackling complex challenges and issues.



CLARISSA developed a somewhat detailed budget, but it was developed in a participatory, process-oriented way, based around its Systemic Action Research approach. For example, many of the details of activities were only roughly defined, as it was assumed from the outset that activities and resource allocations would be modified over time as learning emerged and activities were decided upon. This approach was useful when the programme had to respond to shocks such as COVID, political changes affecting the civil society space in Bangladesh, and the funder's own restructuring and budget cuts. The CLARISSA management team maintained a strong relationship with the funder, and there were also key entrepreneurial-minded champions within the funder's own management team. All of this contributed to successfully negotiating an adaptive programme with a sufficiently flexible budget arrangement.

For example, CLARISSA wasn't required to stick rigidly to particular types of budget lines or to refrain from deviating more than 10% on a particular budget line. Significant changes to the budget and allocations of resources were always explained to the donor and were accepted. Budget flexibility allowed the teams to focus resources on where they were most needed and on elements of the programme that were not originally budgeted for, such as the Bangladesh Office Hub. Teams were also employed for longer than anticipated, mainly due to COVID delays, and also cost more than originally anticipated. Donor flexibility in this respect was critically important to the programme's success. It is possible that the funder's own necessary budget cuts to CLARISSA contributed to them being more flexible towards the different iterations of the budget, alongside the inclusion of funder representatives in many of the workshops where adaptations were discussed or emerged.

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*CLARISSA team  
reflection and planning.*  
CREDIT: ANIS BASTOLA



## 6 TEAM REFLECTION

This reflection session is designed to be undertaken as a team. Allow up to two hours. Use your notebooks to record your answers and main points. You'll need to refer back to these later.

### Mini team/programme/organisation self-assessment: How do we work adaptively? (30 mins)

Read the table together, then discuss how you would describe your programme's level of ability to adapt. Make a note of the key factors which have influenced how you would describe your programme's level of adaptability.

Different levels of programme adaption				
RIGID	FLEXIBLE		ADAPTIVE	
Inflexible and fixed	Making 'reactive' repairs	Making opportunistic adjustments	Passive adaptive management	Active adaptive management
<p>Plans are considered fixed, including most budget allocations. Programme reviews are exceptional and may only be allowed at specific times (such as a mid-term evaluation), provided their impact is limited.</p> <p>E.g. 'The plan doesn't work but cannot be changed. We either tweak but pretend to still follow it, or we cancel operations'</p>	<p>Plans are expected to be followed. Even minor adaptations require ad-hoc and time-consuming requests, and explicit high-level approval.</p> <p>E.g. 'COVID 19 forces us to alter our planned community engagement actions to get back on track'</p>	<p>Recognises the need for flexibility and change when the context shifts, but the focus is on implementing the plan and achieving its objectives. Learning is 'accidental' and implementation is prioritised over learning.</p> <p>E.g. 'Since travel is not allowed, let's leverage virtual tools for our capacity development plan'</p>	<p>Some monitoring and reflective capacity is in place to detect context shifts and challenges. Plans are able to change to achieve the desired outcomes. Learning is considered a useful by-product of programme implementation</p> <p>E.g. 'Significant time and resources are wasted in travel. We need to establish a Hub Office closer to the communities'</p>	<p>Intentional and systematic experimentation to validate programme assumptions and to test different strategies. The programme acknowledges it has 'imperfect' knowledge and tries to reduce uncertainties by capturing actionable learning. Learning is considered a central objective of management.</p> <p>E.g. 'Our pilots show that earning trust from communities is harder than expected. Let's double down on our engagement with grassroots partners'</p>

### Discussion (45 mins)

Discuss the following questions together. Note down the key points for reference later.

- 1 Do you have any programme examples of adaptations for enhanced delivery, for programming, and for governance?
- 2 How does your programme decide to make these changes? For instance:
  - What information or learning was used to inform the change?
  - Who made the decisions? Was the decision participatory?
  - Is there an organisational space, mechanism or system in place to enable team learning and change? Or are changes made in an ad hoc way?
- 3 Does your programme use a Theory of Change? If so, how would you describe it? What do you feel are the strengths and weaknesses of your Theory of Change?

### Action brainstorming (30 mins)

Use your discussions and the mini assessment to help you collectively identify any opportunities for actions which could enhance how your programme learns and adapts, and how it can shift closer to working in an adaptive way.





Section 4

# After Action Reviews



**People-driven solutions:**

An introduction to facilitating deep participation for systemic change through Systemic Action Research programming

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*CLARISSA team members in Nepal.*

CREDIT: ANIS BASTOLA

**T**his learning and reflection brief outlines using After Action Reviews as a key collaborative learning, reflection and review process within an adaptive management programme. Teams will be able to identify if and how their programme may benefit from holding regular After Action Reviews to support adaptations; the extent to which their programme may already undertake or use similar processes; how After Action Reviews or similar programme processes could be introduced or strengthened; and if there are any possible actions which teams could take. The After Action Review process could be used by any team which is open and able to change, and that would like to strengthen its learning and action-taking process.

Specifically, this brief will help teams:

- Learn about how to be a reflective practitioner within a reflexive programme – a key programme approach and practitioner skill for adaptive management and for any programme.
- Learn about some of the key methods and tools used by CLARISSA for After Action Reviews such as Rivers of Life, as well as how practitioners can use reflective journaling.
- Reflect on their own programme(s) and ways of working, and identify actions which could potentially enhance, or help strengthen a programme's learning and action-taking process.



## 1 VIDEO

Watch the video '[After Action Reviews](#)' where CLARISSA team members from Bangladesh and Nepal discuss their experiences and perspectives. After you've watched the video, note down two questions which you'd like the learning and reflection brief, or team, to help you answer.

## 2 AFTER ACTION REVIEWS

Holding periodic After Action Reviews with country and consortium partners played a central role in CLARISSA's intentional and systematic approach to using learning and evidence to adapt how it was working at different levels.

**After Action Reviews:** An After Action Review is a structured, yet simple, facilitated learning process. It is used by groups, such as implementation teams, or broader partner or stakeholder groups, in order to capture the outcomes and lessons from past programme successes and failures and to build an ongoing evidence base of how a programme is working. The aim is to learn and improve future programme performance. After Action Reviews offer a valuable opportunity for groups to pause and reflect on projects, activities, events, or tasks, and to transform learning into actionable strategies for improvement.

After Action Reviews are useful processes because they enable teams to step back from day-to-day tasks and take time to assess their achievements. It is a versatile tool that can be used for various contexts, ranging from brief post-activity reflections, for example a half-hour session following a day of fieldwork – a 'mini'-After Action Review – to more extensive reviews, for example, a three-day workshop for an implementation team evaluating a year's worth of programme activities.

The process typically begins with a set of generic questions that guide reflection:

- What was expected to happen?
- What actually happened, and why were there deviations?

*A CLARISSA team member reflects with colleagues.*

CREDIT: FROM THE CLARISSA VIDEO '[AFTER ACTION REVIEWS](#)'

*“Another thing I want to emphasise is that the management of this project was adaptive. Even a community mobiliser could communicate with the project director easily. Thus, the project director was able to know what is happening at field level, what decisions should be made, and the community mobiliser felt good that the project director was aware of their contribution.”*

**CLARISSA partner team member, Bangladesh**

- What aspects worked well, which didn't, and what are the reasons for each?
- How can we improve for next time, and what specific steps should be taken?

These questions form the basis of group discussions, analysis and lessons, which facilitate a collective understanding and strategy for enhanced performance in real time and as the programme moves forward.

## 3 AFTER ACTION REVIEWS: PRACTICAL LEARNING FROM CLARISSA

**Learning how to run an After Action Review.** While each After Action Review was designed to respond to the specific point in time the programme found itself in, there was a general structure which guided all the reviews. At the beginning, the After Action Review process was modelled by the global monitoring, evaluation and learning team who designed and facilitated the first few sessions, and then worked with the country level partners to co-design subsequent After Action Review sessions.

### AN EXAMPLE OF A CLARISSA COUNTRY-LEVEL AFTER ACTION REVIEW MEETING IN BANGLADESH

#### Day 1 – Looking back

**Step 1:** Reconstructing a timeline of activities, identifying big moments and collective achievements and challenges (for instance, by using Rivers of Life)

**Step 2:** Zooming into individual high and low points, to tap into personal motivations and experiences – this way the process is grounded by the lived experience and the value of everyone's contribution.

**Step 3:** Reflect on outcomes achieved and explore personal/team contributions to them.

**Step 4:** Reflect on any deviation from plans – what learning were we responding to?

#### Day 2 – Deepening reflections

**Step 1:** Team building activities

**Step 2:** Facilitated reflections on learning areas such as being child-centred, capacity development, and partnership working.

**Step 3:** Deepening reflections on specific relevant issues (e.g. power in the Participatory Action Research process, trust building, thematic research topics).

#### Day 3 – Looking forward

**Step 1:** Apply the partnership self-assessment 'partnership rubric'. See Brief 5: [\*Working with partners.\*](#)

**Step 2:** Develop critical and actionable learning

**Step 3:** Plan next phase of work by building on learning

**A final step always involves feedback and reflections on the After Action Review process by participants and facilitators.**

“So, when we started working, we saw that if we did a reflection after finishing a small process rather than meeting every six months, it will help us learn in a more systematic way. We started doing mini-After Action Reviews ourselves. The facilitators and those of us in management sit together and reflect after finishing a small process. This is how we took small adaptations which we have seen from the evidence which helped our work.”

CLARISSA partner team member, Bangladesh





CLARISSA team members in Nepal.  
CREDIT: ANIS BASTOLA

**Mini-After Action Reviews.** Implementing teams also experimented with a scaled-down version called mini-After Action Reviews, because they saw the value of the bigger After Action Reviews in promoting reflection and learning. Mini versions were applied to specific programme implementation activities such as the Life Story collection and analysis process, capacity development, and the social protection community mobilising work. These meetings, which took place either tri-monthly or linked to project milestones, such as the piloting of a new approach or activity, were facilitated by the monitoring, evaluation and learning focal person in each country.

Mini-After Action Reviews were also valuable opportunities for interaction and team building, given that team members frequently worked in different places and did not always have the opportunity to interact as colleagues, or in a less formal way. Importantly, the mini-After Action Reviews were also documented, and this documentation fed into the six-monthly programme ‘big’ After Action Reviews.

**After Action Reviews were adapted to fit team contexts.** The inclusive, collaborative and empowering approach of CLARISSA overall towards its partners meant that partners had the flexibility to organise their After Action Reviews in different ways. For instance, After Action Reviews took place between partners in-country, and not just at international meetings; and by holding their own mini-After Action Reviews. After Action Reviews eventually became an established organisational practice for many partners. This is discussed in more detail in Brief 3. [Using evidence and learning to adapt programmes in real time.](#)

**Reflective journalling:** Some practitioners started using reflective journalling as a way to build their own reflection skills and to feed in effectively to the After Action Reviews.

“Journalling helped me to connect the dots as part of the reflective event. We had one session when we had to describe the Action Research groups and what are the key points or milestones that they have achieved and how they have achieved them. Thanks to the reflective journalling I could connect the dots and indicate how things happened, why it happened, what kind of changes occurred, or what were our learnings during that process.”

CLARISSA country partner team member.



## 4 SKILLS, METHODS AND TOOLS FOR AFTER ACTION REVIEWS

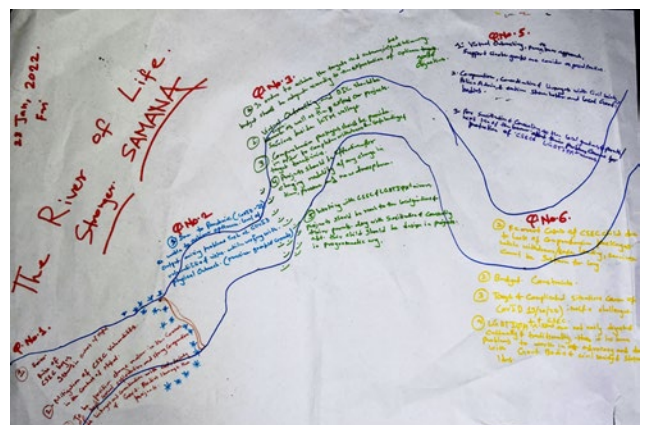
Team members presenting their River of Life, Bangladesh.  
CREDIT: ROJU GIRI

**Rivers of Life:** CLARISSA adapted the ‘Rivers of Life’ method to help team members document and reflect on their collective experience and perspectives of the programme process during After Action Reviews. Rivers of Life helped team members tell the CLARISSA ‘story’ at regular intervals, and start to identify how, for whom and under what conditions the approach was contributing to innovative solutions to tackle the drivers of the worst forms of child labour. It also revealed details about the process which the whole programme team was not always aware of and helped them explore ‘hidden’ aspects of the programme.

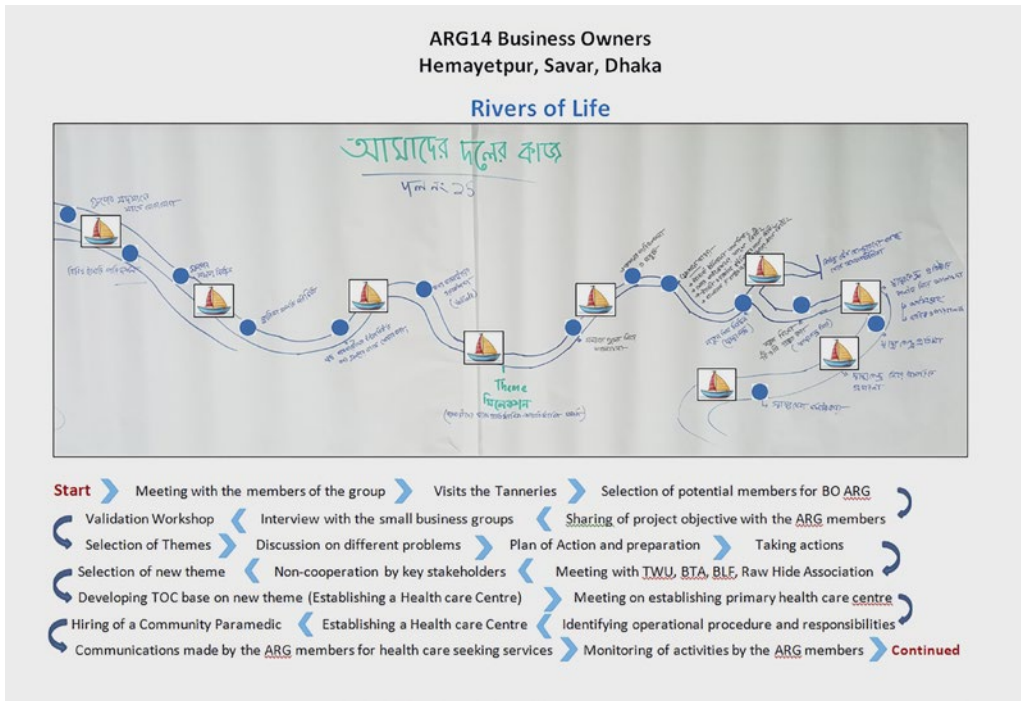
The Rivers of Life method is a visual storytelling method that helps people reflect on and share their stories about the past and present and visualise futures. Individuals can also use this method to tell a personal story. A group can use it to understand and reflect on the past and imagine the future of a project. In addition, it can also be used to build a shared view of a process over time while acknowledging different and sometimes contradictory perspectives. Rivers of Life can be very useful for anyone who wants to:

A River of Life drawn by a local implementing partner in Nepal.  
CREDIT: CLARISSA

- generate reflection on experiences, enablers, influences and barriers or challenges
- appreciate personal experiences
- generate dialogue
- identify and discuss the reasons behind the enablers and challenges
- identify strategies for change







A River of Life developed by business owners in Bangladesh. CREDIT: CLARISSA

“The facilitators are using reflective journals. They write on it after every meeting that they facilitate. These are not uploaded anywhere. They then provide input, in the After Action Reviews that we do, from those diaries. What went well, what didn't go well [...] If they would not keep a diary, they would miss a point [...] Once I've done with the meeting I go back to the diary and write what happened to the meeting from my point of view. This is not for anyone else to read. And I could have criticised myself, on things I could have done differently, or things the children could have done differently.”

CLARISSA country partner team member

The method uses drawings, making it useful in groups that do not share a common language, or in settings with low literacy. Arts-based and visual methods are also powerful because they can help people unlock their thinking, and to explain complex or detailed experiences, processes or feelings. Metaphors from a river are used to explore aspects of a story, for instance, whirlpools can depict challenges or lakes can suggest a sense of calm. When used in a group, it is an active method, which engages people in the process of storytelling and of listening to each other.

**Becoming a reflective practitioner and reflective journalling.** Because practitioners are often so busy with the day-to-day demands of a programme, it is easy to forget about or deprioritise important learning moments. By regularly keeping a reflective journal, practitioners will be able to record, be reminded of, and reflect upon issues which have arisen in their work. Additionally, a reflective journal documents decisions and actions over an extended time period and can help show what has been achieved in terms of real changes to one's practice over time. An example of the reflective journal used by CLARISSA team members is shown below.

Becoming more reflexive is as much a discipline as a skill, but it doesn't have to be complicated or burdensome. Practitioners should be realistic about how often they will reflect. Being over-ambitious could make reflection practice feel overwhelming and hard to maintain – potentially making it a source of stress. Rather, choose a feasible, regular time to reflect, ideally by leveraging regular programme events, such as weekly meetings or After Action Reviews, to create time to write in journals. Teams could even factor this activity into regular meeting agendas, if it seems appropriate.

Practitioners might also choose to use the journal to help improve their own skills for facilitating Action Research groups. For personal reflection, it is recommended that practitioners 'start small' if seeking to improve personal practice, and to identify one or two key aspects to reflect on. For instance, many practitioners might find it helpful to focus on the core skills described in this series. Perhaps identify one skill to improve, or a challenging issue which keeps coming up at work.



Keeping a reflective journal can help practitioners to:

- focus one’s thoughts and develop one’s ideas
- experiment with ideas and ask questions
- organise one’s thinking through exploring and mapping complex issues
- develop one’s conceptual and analytical skills
- become aware of one’s actions and strategies and reflect upon and make sense of experiences and the processes behind them
- express and reflect on one’s feelings and emotional responses
- develop one’s voice and gain confidence
- develop a conversation with others

## FACILITATOR REFLECTIVE JOURNALLING DIARY

### General information

Name of the facilitator	
Designation of the facilitator	
Workshop number	
Group ID	
Day number	
Date	
Location	

### Notes

- Facilitators to complete at the end of each workshop day
- To help ongoing reflection

Changes in the children
Factors/methods that contributed to these changes
Open reflection about facilitation

.....  
*Example of facilitator’s reflective journal used by CLARISSA.*

## GUIDANCE AND TOOLKITS FOR SUPPORTING PERSONAL REFLECTION AND AFTER ACTION REVIEW REFLECTION

**Rivers of Life:** More detailed ‘how to’ guidance on [participatorymethods.org](https://participatorymethods.org)

**Participatory Visual Methods:** A case study. An example of how visual storytelling can open up new spaces to reflect on [participatorymethods.org](https://participatorymethods.org)

**Participatory Approaches Using Creative Methods to Strengthen Community Engagement and Ownership** – Resource pack: Guidance on using a broad range of participatory, creative methods for facilitation and many links to different tools.

Brief guidance on **Reflective practice** on [participatorymethods.org](https://participatorymethods.org)

**Developing a reflective practice.** From Child Resilience Alliance’s *Supporting Community-led Child Protection: an online guide and toolkit*.

**CLARISSA Learning Note 4:** *Applying the River of Life method to support reflection and learning in Terre des hommes, Nepal.* DOI: [10.19088/CLARISSA.2023.005](https://doi.org/10.19088/CLARISSA.2023.005)

### Other skills and tools in this series:

**1. Working in a child- and people-centred way**

Key skill: *Communications skills*

**2. Mapping systems and taking action**

Key skill: *Asking good questions*

**3. Using evidence and learning to adapt programmes in real time**

Key skill: *Being a reflexive team*

**4. After Action Reviews**

Key skill: *Being a reflective practitioner (individual)*

**5. Working with partners**

Key skill: *Being inclusive and aware of power dynamics*

**6. Safeguarding for Systemic Action Research**

Key skill: *Building trust and rapport*



International partner team member at a CLARISSA cross country reflection and learning meeting.  
CREDIT: ANIS BASTOLA



## 5 TIPS ON PLANNING AND BUDGETING FOR AFTER ACTION REVIEWS

Planning and budgeting for After Action Reviews does not necessarily have to affect the typical planning and budgeting of many development and humanitarian programmes. However, because After Action Reviews should be inclusive and participatory, there may also be additional costs involved in bringing everyone together in different ways, some of which may only be identified as the programme moves forward.

If a team is planning to hold After Action Reviews of any kind, it should also consider the wider organisational culture of learning and change, and the extent to which its current culture can support open and frank discussions about what is working and what is not in a programme, and use actionable learning to commit to how work is being done at all levels. It may be that additional resources and activities could be earmarked to help build trust and strengthen working relationships and teams. This might include team building retreats or workshops, hiring venues or facilitators, or any other activities which can support team building.

Encouraging practitioners within a programme to become more reflexive in terms of their own professional skills is an activity which is usually very low cost. What tends to be more challenging for practitioners is finding the time and motivation to regularly write in their reflective journals. It is advised that programme planning takes this into account and that it allocates time within existing or planned activities such as meetings, workshops or trainings to give time for reflective journaling. As with After Action Reviews, practitioners will appreciate being acknowledged by their organisation or team, and being shown that it values their efforts to actively try to work in a more reflexive way. Consider planning specific activities/events in order to co-learn with practitioners about what is supportive and what is not supportive for their professional reflection and learning.

*Nepal partner team member speaking at a CLARISSA cross country reflection and learning meeting.*

CREDIT: CLARISSA

**“To commit to learning means committing to changing. And if you learn but you don’t change, you’re constrained in some way.”**

**IDS CLARISSA team member**



## 6 TEAM REFLECTION

This reflection session is designed to be undertaken as a team. Allow about two hours. Use your notebooks to record your answers and main points. You'll need to refer back to these later.

### Skills building (1 hr):

This reflection session focuses on being a reflexive team within a reflexive programme. To practice the skills and tools in this learning and reflection brief, teams could try using the Rivers of Life method. Your team will also practice running a mini-After Action Review later on in this series, as part of *Final Tasks: Team action setting and mini-After Action Review*.

**Suggested method:** Depending on the size of your group and whether you work in the same or different programmes, work together on either a single, or several different programme 'rivers'. Use large pieces of paper, and as a team, collectively draw the 'story' of a programme you are working on. Show important milestones and events, challenges, what went well and what went not so well, where changes were made, and where the programme is heading next. Importantly, your team should include any significant learning events or moments on the river.

### Action brainstorming (30 mins)

Use your team's River of Life to help you collectively identify any opportunities for actions which could enhance how your programme actively reflects, identifies actionable learning and adapts, and anywhere where it might be possible to shift closer to this way of working. Add these ideas to your River of Life (in the 'future' part of the river) and keep the river drawing somewhere safe and/or each take a photo of the drawing. You will need to refer back to it later.

### Team reflection (30 mins)

Spend some time at the end reflecting on this session.

- How did the River of Life activity feel? Did you find it helpful? Were there any challenges?
- Did the brief and the session help answer the questions you identified from the video?
- Is there anything else you want to raise or discuss with the team?



## Section 5

# Working with partners



### **People-driven solutions:**

An introduction to facilitating deep participation for systemic change through Systemic Action Research programming



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*Consortium partners  
at a cross country  
learning event in  
Kathmandu.*

CREDIT: ANIS BASTOLA

**B**eing able to work effectively together as an equitable partnership is a critical aspect of a participatory, learning- and action-oriented, whole systems approach. This learning and reflection brief can help teams learn about how CLARISSA enabled diverse partners in different countries to systematically strengthen how they worked together in-country, and also as part of the wider CLARISSA consortium. These practical lessons are equally relevant for any team seeking to empower its partners and to support a deeply collaborative partnership, regardless of whether teams are already working in a systemic, adaptive way, or not.

Specifically, this brief will help teams:

- Learn about why collaborative and empowering partnerships are an essential element of a systemic, adaptive management approach.
- Learn about the tool – the ‘partnership rubric’ – used by CLARISSA to self-evaluate and enhance how consortium partners worked together on the various levels.
- Learn about working inclusively, a vital skill and approach for empowering partners and making partnerships equitable.
- Reflect on if and how the partnership approach and tools used by CLARISSA has relevance for their team’s programme context.
- Identify any possible actions which their team could take to strengthen how it works with partners.





## 1 VIDEO

Watch the video '[Working with partners](#)' where CLARISSA team members from Bangladesh and Nepal talk about their experiences and learning from working as a partnership. After you have watched the video, note down one to two points which you'd like to highlight and discuss further during the team reflection session.

## 2 WORKING WITH PARTNERS

Working with partners is a typical element of many development and humanitarian programme strategies, and there is an increase in consortium-working across both sectors. For instance, international or larger organisations or agencies often partner with smaller, local or grassroots organisations, which are already known and trusted by target communities and groups. This can enable larger organisations to work with communities and groups on the ground. Grassroots organisations might also decide to partner with larger organisations because it can enable them to access additional resources and capacities. In some cases, organisations might partner with others which have a specific technical expertise and capacity which can support an aspect of a programme. Partnerships can also enable multi-sectoral approaches, which in turn can support broader and more systemic types of programmes. For example, the value of working multi-sectorally is embedded in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with SDG 17 highlighting the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships to achieve all the SDGs.

The nature of partnerships between different development actors within a consortium can therefore vary enormously, with different power dynamics at play. While some organisations may be engaging with partners primarily for service delivery, or in a hierarchical way, where lead partners hold the resources and make the decisions; others might be working in a more collaborative, facilitative and power-sharing manner, perhaps by facilitating a network or alliance of partners.

*Bangladeshi, Nepali and international consortium team members at a cross country learning event in Kathmandu from the video '[Working with partners](#)'.*

CREDIT: ANIS BASTOLA

*Terms used in this Brief:*

### **Actionable learning**

Learning which is designed to guide decision-making and actions.

### **Rubric**

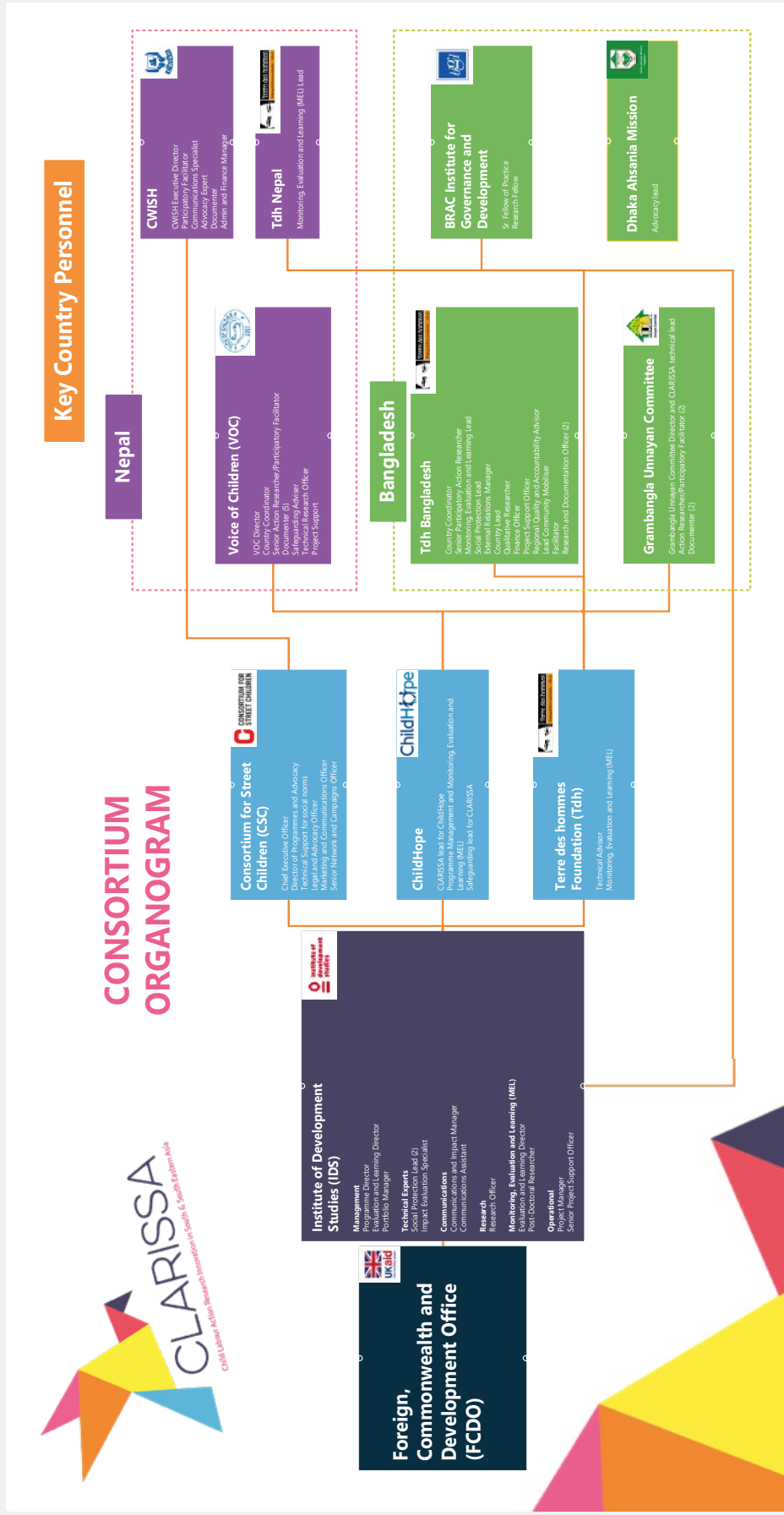
An evaluation tool comprising a set of criteria designed to promote consistent learning and/or measurement.

### **Qualitative**

Information that cannot be counted, measured or easily expressed using numbers.



CLARISSA worked with diverse international and national partners in two implementing countries, as a consortium. The diagram below shows the partners and their respective roles, and the extent which the partnership was somewhat complex.



SOURCE: CLARISSA (2020)

In the context of a complex social challenge, such as the worst forms of child labour, it is unlikely any single organisation could comprehensively address the problem alone. The diverse causes, dynamics and interlinkages require rich and equally diverse approaches, perspectives, experience and capacities from a range of actors collectively seeking to address the problem. Additionally, the flexibility of an adaptive approach also requires a partnership arrangement and way of working which can learn and adapt too. Critically, partnerships should be flexible; not hierarchical; actively reflecting on how partnerships are functioning; and making collective decisions and changes in real time throughout the life of the programme. In addition to these considerations, CLARISSA undertook Systemic Action Research on an unusually large scale, working with numerous partners, nearly a thousand children and adult participants in two countries, over several years. To this end, CLARISSA used a specific method and tool to support a strong partnership – the ‘partnership rubric’. CLARISSA also evaluated if and how, and for whom, this tool was effective, and how it could support a strong partnership.

### The CLARISSA partnership rubric

The ‘partnership rubric’ used by CLARISSA partners was a qualitative\* participatory tool used for self-assessment and internal reflection around how the partnership was working. At the heart of this method is the identification of key criteria, which are considered the fundamental elements for the effective performance of the partnership. During a fully inclusive process of participatory workshops with partners, which started at the inception phase, a rubric\* was agreed which identified the following seven key elements of the CLARISSA partnership:

- 1 Communications
- 2 Team identity
- 3 Openness, honesty and mutual trust
- 4 Impact orientation
- 5 Inclusivity and equitability
- 6 Adaptability and flexibility
- 7 Entrepreneurial culture

Each element was designed to be periodically assessed by partner teams during workshops, which in the case of CLARISSA, were incorporated into its After Action Reviews. Teams, usually at the organisational level, ranked the level of performance for each element as either: ‘well-functioning’; ‘emerging’ or; ‘needs help’. These rankings were guided by ‘descriptors’ which aimed to describe what each element may look like at each of the three levels of performance. As with the partnership performance elements, the descriptors were identified in an inclusive and participatory way by partners.



*Consortium partners at a cross country learning event in Kathmandu.*

CREDIT: ANIS BASTOLA

CLARISSA's original partnership rubric			
Element	 Well-functioning	 Emerging	 Needs help
<b>Communications</b>	Partners are clear on how the programme is progressing. All partners use Teams seamlessly. Regular communication through multiple mechanisms.	Communication is haphazard and sometimes causes confusion.  Without regular face to face meetings, we would not be on the same page about key decisions.	Disagreements due to misinformation leads to conflict.  Some partners feel left out or unsure of what is happening. Country level teams are confused by mixed messages.
<b>Team Identity</b>	Decisions are reached through consensus.  Productive and enjoyable working environment.  Clear definition of roles helps us work as a team.	There is mutual respect, but this remains formal.  People work well together but don't necessarily trust each other.	Each partner focuses only on what is in their contract.  There is no mutual support between partners.  Partners feel they can make unilateral decisions.
<b>Openness, Honesty and Mutual Trust</b>	Problems are identified, shared, and discussed openly.  We have positive personal relationships.  We handle crises without internal conflict.	Some partners feel apprehensive about sharing honest opinions with the whole group.	There is conflict due to problems not being resolved.
<b>Impact Orientation</b>	Agreed Theory of Change provides clear vision and priorities.  The monitoring, evaluation and learning system is co-owned by all partners and delivers quality information on how we are progressing along impact pathways.	There are frequent conversations between partners about the common vision because it remains unclear.	Activities are not aligned with the programme Theory of Change.  Partners are not aware of how their work supports the impact strategy of the consortium as a whole.
<b>Inclusive and Equitable</b>	Good dialogue that enables all to engage.  Smaller organisations feel they have full voice in decision-making processes.	Roles require ongoing clarification.	IDS dominates consortium decision making.  Smaller partners don't feel valued equally.
<b>Adaptability and Flexibility</b>	Programme stays on track through making evidence-based decisions to adapt.  Mistakes are openly discussed.	There is some adaptation along the way, but it is not well documented.	We never deviate from original plans.  Budgets never shift throughout the programme.
<b>Entrepreneurial culture</b>	We find creative practical solutions to problems.	We have lots of new ideas but struggle to find ways to implement them.	We implement the plan without new ideas emerging.  We fear taking risks.



### ③ WORKING WITH PARTNERS: PRACTICAL LEARNING FROM CLARISSA

**Using an agreed approach, and also the partnership rubric, strengthened the partnership.** It was found that by using this method and tool over the course of the programme, the CLARISSA consortium was able to build a sense of co-ownership of the partnership; build a common understanding of what makes a strong partnership; support multiple and disparate partners to work together as a collective; and foster a sense of mutual accountability. Also, the rubric enabled partners to get a sense of how aspects of the partnership were progressing by looking back at past rubric exercises.

**Using the partnership rubric was empowering for partners and helped strengthen inclusivity within the partnership.** CLARISSA found that the partnership rubric method enabled dialogue about power dynamics and inclusivity, as well as around the other elements of the partnership. Partners were considered, and saw themselves as, collaborators in the partnership process. Often, the actions agreed upon to improve aspects of the partnership, such as relationship and trust building were very simple, for instance, by deciding to hold coffee mornings, by being available for informal social interactions, or by deciding to call team members when issues needed to be discussed rather than just emailing.

**The power of the partnership rubric lies not so much in the final evaluation, but rather the process of collective reflection and discussion which the rubric facilitates.** A partnership rubric is not the same as a typical programme evaluation log frame, which uses narrowly defined indicators to measure if a programme objective has been achieved. Rather, the rubric uses ‘descriptors’ of the different elements of the partnership. Descriptors are much broader and open to different interpretations compared to indicators. The organisational team discussions around how to describe the elements and levels of the partnership, as well as the group self-assessments, enabled rich and collective dialogue and reflection. This led to actionable learning\* in real time, with the expectation that certain agreed actions would improve the partnership.

**Partnership rubrics are not a static, one-size-fits-all recipe.** While an initial, collaboratively developed rubric might seem ‘right’ at the time, as a programme progresses and learns, team members may feel the need to adjust the rubric to make it more meaningful in their particular working context. The rubric is flexible in that it can be adapted as programme teams reflect at regular intervals during After Action Reviews. In CLARISSA, this included teams preferring to reflect in their native language (as opposed to the consortium’s use of English as a common language) on what the elements meant or how they could be described at the different levels. As a result, a single programme such as CLARISSA eventually worked using three separate rubrics. While all three rubrics shared the same seven key elements, the descriptors for the elements varied between rubrics and were informed by the context of the international consortium, as well as two separate country contexts. It was found that the ongoing adaptation of the rubrics was particularly helpful for generating an increased sense of ownership for those new to CLARISSA; as well as the refinement and clarification of the collective elements of the partnership in response to what was emerging from programme operations on the ground.

“The CLARISSA partnership is novel to me because it is such a big consortium, but there is no hierarchy in this programme. This is very beautiful.”

CLARISSA partner team member, Bangladesh

“Because criteria are intentionally fuzzy, they are open to different interpretations; and it is exactly this openness to interpretation that triggers discussions and deepens learning.”

CLARISSA Learning Note 3: [Using a ‘Partnership Rubric’ in Participatory Evaluations](#)  
DOI: [10.19088/CLARISSA.2023.001](#)

**There may be times when using the rubric will not be helpful for partner relations.**

If levels of trust between partners are particularly weak, or certain programme tensions have arisen, it might be preferable to take a break from the rubric and use another method to help safely strengthen trust and communications and to facilitate a safe environment to exchange critical perspectives. In the CLARISSA case, working during COVID put a strain on partners forced to work remotely, and the programme opted to use the World Café method on few occasions for this reason. Links to this tool and more details of this process can be found below.

“There is a danger that we create a sense of competition between partners and reinforcing a dichotomous view of big-small and by association, strong-weak. We know that every partner is unique in their scope, capacity and nature of work and this is what makes the partnership function. The rubric will be most effective when we nurture a culture of learning and mutual understanding. Honesty, transparency, commitment and mutual respect are all essential elements, as well as learning to accept criticism.”

**CLARISSA Blog:** [Reflections on if and how our partnership is working in Bangladesh](#)

**CLARISSA RESOURCES**

**CLARISSA Blog:** [Reflections on if and how our partnership is working in Bangladesh](#)

**CLARISSA Learning Note 3:** [Using a 'Partnership Rubric' in Participatory Evaluations](#)  
DOI: [10.19088/CLARISSA.2023.001](#)

## 4 SKILLS, METHODS AND TOOLS FOR WORKING WITH PARTNERS

CLARISSA’s original partnership rubric describes the preliminary collective understanding of how the seven key elements might look at each level. However, when different partners started to unpack the different descriptors, they found that they did not always share the same understandings and interpretations of some of the elements and their descriptors. This led to the collaborative development of the three, separate consortium-level (1) and country-level (2) rubrics during co-creation workshops. Below is an example of how different teams and organisations interpreted the element of ‘entrepreneurial culture’ in the rubric.

### INTERPRETATIONS OF ‘ENTREPRENEURIAL CULTURE’ IN CLARISSA’S PARTNERSHIP RUBRIC

This list of characteristics of ‘entrepreneurial culture’ was identified by different partners from different country contexts, and shows the diverse interpretations. The discussion included a focus on what ‘taking risks’ can mean in the context of the partnership, and CLARISSA more generally.

**What ‘entrepreneurial culture’ can mean to different people:**

- 1 Working together to address emerging issues through joint team effort – COVID context with moderate risk taking
- 2 Combined effort for social benefit
- 3 Creative practice for generating evidence and taking follow up actions
- 4 Combined efforts of groups to achieve common goal
- 5 A joint effort where resources contribution from different bodies are shared or contribute to produce goal
- 6 Culture that dares to act jointly to bring positive change through innovative and collective efforts
- 7 Being adaptive
- 8 Openness to receive feedback – constructive criticism
- 9 Converting challenges into opportunities to promote innovation
- 10 Motivate to take risk

**Using the rubric.** Organisational teams went through the rubric exercise at six-monthly intervals during the After Action Review workshops. Teams found that completing the rubric in advance was useful in many ways as it allowed more time for discussion during the workshops, and it also provided a safe space for partners to self-assess prior to meeting with the wider partnership. Partners did, however, use the rubric in slightly different ways, for instance, by giving themselves one collective organisational ranking; or by asking individual team members to undertake the rubric exercise and then compiling these into a collective organisational ranking; or even by providing input under each possible ranking, i.e. for each element: what was well-functioning, what was emerging and what needed help. The programme found that while doing the rubric in advance freed up more time for nuanced discussion during meetings, the different ways partners used the rubric also created some lopsided input during the meetings.

*“I have learned a lot. I am a ‘small’ researcher from Bangladesh. From that place I have never felt small. Not only me, but everybody could share their ideas.”*  
 CLARISSA partner team member, Bangladesh

Below is an example of how ‘Openness, honesty and mutual trust’ was originally collectively described by CLARISSA consortium partners during the inception phase, and also an example of how partners at the consortium level assessed the consortium during a workshop.

**An example of assessing ‘Openness, honesty and mutual trust’ in the partnership rubric**

Element	Well-functioning	Emerging	Needs help
Openness, honesty and mutual trust			

**Example of how the consortium collectively described this element during one review:** Overall, we are emerging, though certain things are going well and other are less than emerging. High levels of openness and trust in long-established relationships; Some of the team members might be too new to the programme so have not had the time to establish a level of trust that produces openness and honesty (e.g. the Country Coordinators who only met everyone a few weeks ago); There is not an expectation that they will have high levels of trust already, people are too new to have this trust; Trust and openness can be hard within local cultural dynamics where there are existing hierarchies.

.....  
 Consortium partners at a cross country learning event, Kathmandu.  
 CREDIT: ANIS BASTOLA





## DECIDING NOT TO USE THE RUBRIC AND THE ROLE OF OTHER ACTIVITIES

At one point during CLARISSA's implementation, following the time of COVID when partners could only work together remotely, it was decided that it was better to adapt the use of the partnership rubric during one After Action Review, because there were partnership tensions emerging, underscored by a lack of trust. The shift to the World Café method for this workshop, conducted in person, helped navigate these tensions and allowed for more critical reflection. The World Café method offered a safe and welcoming environment for individuals to connect in smaller mixed groups. All the groups could give their input on all the elements through several rounds of small group conversations. CLARISSA learned that in both countries, more open conversation in relation to the rubric and stronger partner relationships were achieved through a combination of shifting to in-person discussions, spending time working together to improve trust, the use of informal spaces to connect with each other, using the World Café method, and explicit partnership-building activities. For more information, watch a [short video](#) on how to run a World Café workshop. More detailed guidance can be found at the [World Café website](#).

“At the same time, people potentially showed less courage in mentioning negative points about their organisation if the exercise is done in a group consisting of people working in different positions within the organisation. Not all group processes are equally safe for everyone sitting around the table. Power dynamics can create blockages to generating open dialogue.”

CLARISSA Blog: [Reflections on if and how our partnership is working in Bangladesh](#)

Partners in Nepal reflect together on what has been learned in an end of programme workshop.

CREDIT: ANIS BASTOLA

**Working inclusively.** The approach and skills required to work in a deeply participatory, learning- and action-oriented way with programme participants are also highly relevant and critical when seeking to work in an open, power-sharing and collaborative manner with partners. For this reason, this learning and reflection brief focuses on being inclusive.

A core element of CLARISSA generally, and a feature of the partnership rubric method, is an inclusive approach. Broad participation of all the partners and their respective team members helped strengthen meaningful participation and ownership of the partnership. This meant that the different partners and team members were heard, diverse perspectives could be expressed, and that they could influence decisions about how to go forward as partners.

Being inclusive requires a strong, trusting relationship between partners, which can support creative problem-solving, as well as help ensure a sense of ownership in relation to a partnership. Conversely, if a process is not inclusive, for instance if it works with a very small group; if partners do not trust each other; or if it does not acknowledge power dynamics or hierarchies, it is unlikely that there will be a strong sense of collective ownership of the partnership.



There are a number of other reasons why a process might not be inclusive. For instance, in CLARISSA, national teams were not comfortable discussing specific ideas or terms in the rubric which were unclear to them in English, preferring to use their own home language. More generally, there may also be cultural factors which limit some team members from speaking openly, for instance in some cultures women may not speak out in front of male colleagues, or younger employees may let their older supervisor take the lead. These typical challenges were actively addressed during After Action Reviews, and corresponding actionable learning points were identified. CLARISSA was also very conscious that the lead organisations could be seen as the more powerful partners, as they held the resources and potentially could make important decisions. This issue of power is discussed further in this brief under *Tips on Planning and budgeting to work with partners* below.

### TIPS FOR BEING MORE INCLUSIVE

**Inclusivity is usually based on power relations.** Observing who holds more or less power in a context can help identify who might be included or excluded from a process. In development programming this might include considerations around children; women; stigmatised, discriminated against or minority groups, especially vulnerable groups; and people with disabilities. Be aware that power relations also exist between partners and within partner organisations. Learn more about **power** on the [participatorymethods.org](http://participatorymethods.org) website. Consider trying the activity '**The power in the room**' from the **Barefoot Guides** series which helps organisations analyse their internal power relationships.

**Being inclusive** requires that each partner be aware of what they bring to a partnership, how the other partners may see them, and being prepared to find strategies to make power-sharing more equitable.

**Being inclusive** is about identifying who (people, partners) is being left out and developing diverse strategies to access and better include them. Consider taking time to facilitate a discussion on the significance of inclusiveness with partners or groups.

**There are many diverse reasons why** individuals or partners might be, or feel, excluded. This could form part of the discussion on inclusivity, where the group collectively learns about which factors influence inclusivity in their contexts, and then develops inclusive facilitation strategies accordingly.

**Other inclusive strategies include** being very attentive to the dynamics of partner dialogues: who is speaking/contributing more, and who is speaking/contributing less? Being aware that people and partners may adapt what they say depending on who else is in the group. For instance, if the international organisation or head of an organisation is present, other participants or partners may not say what they are really thinking.

**Facilitating an inclusive process is not always straightforward**, but with reflection and practice, Individuals and teams can become skilled, inclusive practitioners.

## GUIDANCE AND TOOLKITS FOR WORKING MORE INCLUSIVELY

Further guidance and some practice exercises on how to **enable inclusive dialogue** from Child Resilience Alliance's *Supporting community-led child protection: an online guide and toolkit*.

Watch this **short video** about how power imbalances in a community process can lead to exclusion. The same can apply to a partnership.

This video shows how **facilitators enabled inclusive dialogue** as part of a Participatory Action Research programme in Kenya.

Barefoot Guide 5: **Mission Inclusion** has many diverse reflections, suggestions and activities around inclusivity.

**Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS)** The SDG website.

### CLARISSA resources about being inclusive

CLARISSA **Blog**: *Building rapport for Action Research with the community in Bangladesh*.

CLARISSA **Research and Evidence Paper 6**: *Business Owners' Perspectives on Running Khaja Ghars, Massage Parlours, Dance Bars, Hostess Bars, and Dohoris in Kathmandu, Nepal*. DOI: [10.19088/CLARISSA.2024.001](https://doi.org/10.19088/CLARISSA.2024.001)

Participation, Inclusion and Social Change **cluster** at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS).

### Other skills and tools in this series:

1. **Working in a child- and people-centred way**

Key skill: *Communications skills*

2. **Mapping systems and taking action**

Key skill: *Asking good questions*

3. **Using evidence and learning to adapt programmes in real time**

Key skill: *Being a reflexive team*

4. **After Action Reviews**

Key skill: *Being a reflective practitioner (individual)*

5. **Working with partners**

Key skill: *Being inclusive and aware of power dynamics*

6. **Safeguarding for Systemic Action Research**

Key skill: *Building trust and rapport*

## 5 TIPS ON PLANNING AND BUDGETING TO WORK WITH PARTNERS

- Using a partnership rubric doesn't necessarily have to increase the budget or timeframe of a programme. For instance, the activity could be integrated into existing or planned meetings and other reviews at no additional cost.
- It is also possible to introduce the rubric within an existing programme. It is likely that any funder will welcome this aspect within a programme, as it is a systematic way of assessing how a partnership is functioning, and making informed changes as the programme goes along.



- One question which is less straightforward is the extent to which one should involve the funder(s) in these assessments. By definition, the funder will be perceived as holding a lot of power. Partners may not feel comfortable sharing some of the more challenging aspects of the partnership with the funder. Also, while we often use the language of partnership in relation to funders, careful consideration would need to be given to extent to which a funder is willing to see itself as a true partner in the process, and that it is open to critical reflection and making changes by using the rubric. In the case of CLARISSA, it maintained open and honest lines of communication with its funder and there was a high level of trust between the funder and the lead partner (IDS).

**CLARISSA practical do's and don'ts for working with partners for inclusive, deep collaboration**

DO	DON'T
Do use the partnership rubric periodically and regularly. CLARISSA undertook the process every six months.	Don't use the partnership rubric so often that partners get 'rubric fatigue'.
Do be sensitive to when it might not be appropriate to undertake a rubric evaluation session. For instance, if the rubric exercise could exacerbate partner tensions.	Don't force partners to work on the rubric together when there are underlying issues, such as weak relationships and trust which could be better addressed in other ways.
Do focus on and prioritise the reflection and discussion process around how to describe the elements, and which ranking to give each element. The rubric is designed to provoke deep reflection and discussion from different perspectives, and from which everyone can learn.	Don't rush the reflection and discussion process by prioritising arriving at decisions or 'answers' regarding the descriptions or level of performance for each element. The process of arriving at the 'answer' is equally important.
Do develop a partnership rubric in a collaborative, inclusive and participatory way in order to include diverse perspectives and to help build a sense of ownership of the partnership.	Don't impose a predefined rubric on partners. It may not seem meaningful, clear or relevant to some partners, it may feel top down, and it may erode a shared sense of collective ownership.
Do enable teams to contextualise and adapt the rubric where needed in an ongoing way.	Failure to adapt a rubric will mean that it will seem less contextually relevant to many team members, who may see less value in using it.
Do be aware of the power dynamics between different partners and that this might limit critical reflection. Build trust and develop reflection strategies that allow for openness.	Don't assume all partners feel comfortable contributing to critical reflection, or that they will say what they are really thinking.
Do plan to bring partners together physically where possible, and not just virtually. CLARISSA evidence highlighted how in-person meetings yielded the richest discussions.	Don't assume that virtual discussions or other remote settings will enable deep reflection or discussion. While these can be run skilfully, relationship building and trust is always a key consideration within these processes.
Do consider how to integrate the partnership rubric into other relevant workshops and meetings.	Don't assume that systematically managing the partnership needs to cost money or take more time.
Do work in a bottom-up way to support a strong partnership. Use the same programme facilitation approach, skills and mindset to work with partners.	Don't work in a top-down manner with partners, where the lead organisation makes all the decisions.
Do accept that in large and complex programmes it might not be possible for everyone to know everything. Create a shared drive, CLARISSA used Microsoft Teams, so that team members can access additional information as needed.	Don't bombard team members with too much information or 'over-communicate'. This can have the opposite effect, with people ignoring updates and other communications because they cannot deal with the volume of information shared.

## 6 TEAM REFLECTION

This section of the brief is designed to be used in a team reflection session. Allow around two hours to complete this section. Use your notebooks to record your answers and main points. You'll need to refer back to these later.

**Skills building (undertake throughout the reflection session, with 20–30 mins discussion at the end of the session)** This brief focuses on the skill of being inclusive and acknowledging the power dynamics between different people, groups and organisations. Aim to observe and take notes throughout your discussion regarding how inclusive you think the conversation is. Is there anything in particular you noticed?

**Team discussion about working in partnership (45 mins)** It is suggested the team watch the video again together. Then discuss the following as a team:

- 1 Are we part of a partnership? How would we describe the partnership? For instance, is it a hierarchy, or power-sharing? Is it simple or more complex?
- 2 How do we currently manage our partnership?
- 3 In what ways do any of the points in this the video or brief seem relevant or helpful for our own context?
- 4 Is there space to integrate a partnership rubric method into how we work? How would it be helpful?
- 5 Is there anything you still want highlight or discuss with the group?

**Actions brainstorm (45 mins)** What kinds of actions could the team take to move towards strengthening how it works with partners? Note down your ideas, you will come back these ideas later and decide if they are still relevant.

**Critical reflection and feedback on being inclusive (20–30 mins)** Spend some time at the end of the session to discussing with the other team members how inclusive you felt the session was. Aim to provide and receive critical reflection and feedback in an open and honest way. The feedback is not designed to judge an individual or team, it is designed to spark ideas on how the team might work more inclusively next time. Note how this feedback session felt – is there anything in particular you noticed that you want to share?





Section 6

# Safeguarding for Systemic Action Research



## **People-driven solutions:**

An introduction to facilitating deep participation for systemic change through Systemic Action Research programming

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*A scene in a neighbourhood of Dhaka which is centred around the leather supply chain.*  
CREDIT: CLARISSA

This learning and reflection brief is designed to help teams identify some possible actions to enhance or adapt their safeguarding approach to support a deeply participatory, learning- and action-oriented, whole systems approach within their programme. It is also useful for any team seeking to review or enhance their participatory safeguarding approach more generally. This brief highlights useful learning from CLARISSA but it does not provide a comprehensive overview of how to set up and implement a safeguarding policy or plan. The brief is designed for teams already implementing a safeguarding policies and plans. If teams are not already familiar with safeguarding, it is suggested they first refer to the additional guidance suggested in the resource boxes below.

Specifically, this learning and reflection brief can help teams:

- Learn about how safeguarding can be implemented within a deeply participatory child- and people-centred programme.
- Learn about the key skill of 'building rapport and trust' and why it is so important, especially for people- and child-centred, deeply participatory safeguarding.
- Access key tools and support on Psychological First Aid, ethical decision-making and relationship-building activities, and learn how these can support strong, participatory safeguarding.
- Reflect on their own programme(s)'s safeguarding approach and plan, and identify possible actions which could enhance safeguarding elements and shift towards a deeply participatory, child- and people-centred approach.





## 1 VIDEO

Watch the video '[Safeguarding for Systemic Action Research](#)' where CLARISSA team members from Bangladesh and Nepal give some examples and highlight their learning around safeguarding in CLARISSA. While you watch the video, note down any safeguarding points mentioned which you feel resemble the approach your own programme or team undertakes safeguarding. Are there also any aspects which you feel are different, or new to you? Add to these notes as you work through the learning and reflection brief and be prepared to discuss during the team reflection.

A CLARISSA facilitator talks with a boy who works in the leather supply chain.

CREDIT: FROM THE CLARISSA VIDEO '[SAFEGUARDING FOR SYSTEMIC ACTION RESEARCH](#)'

## 2 WHAT IS SAFEGUARDING?

**Safeguarding** means protecting all children and vulnerable adults (including programme workers) from any harms, abuses or distress that can happen as a result of an organisation's programming and operations. Safeguarding usually includes organisational or programme policies and codes of conduct (for staff, volunteers and partners); prevention; reporting; and responses. Safeguarding is different from **Protection, including Child Protection**, because protection focuses on making the world safer for children and vulnerable adults, and refers to actions undertaken to protect specific groups of people or children, or individuals, from risks or harms. **Research Ethics** is usually understood to be the ethical principles which guide research involving people, including monitoring, evaluation and learning. Research ethics are underscored by ensuring participants in research are respected; that they are not harmed; and that they are treated fairly – in other words that participants benefit equally from the research. **Ethical Conduct** refers to programme workers', including volunteers', responsibilities and how they behave in a community or towards programme participants more generally. For instance being respectful, being role appropriate, as well as ensuring research and learning is ethical. While Safeguarding, Protection, Research Ethics and Ethical Conduct are different, they also overlap in many areas, and are fundamental considerations for

*Terms used in this Brief:*

### **GIS: Geographic Information System**

A computer programme which can collect (sometimes from different sources) and show data in relation to its geographic position. A simple example is Google Maps showing all the cafes or schools in a neighbourhood.



any team already collecting data, including for monitoring, evaluation and learning, or planning any kind of research, development or humanitarian programme. Teams should consider exploring the key practical resources provided below for additional support on safeguarding.

In practice, safeguarding policies and approaches within different organisations are diverse, with many developing their own policies and guidance around specific contexts and programme approaches. For instance, an organisation might develop a policy for child safeguarding; for disability-inclusive safeguarding; for the prevention of sexual abuse and exploitation; for older people; for LGBTIQ+\*; or for refugees and asylum seekers. Safeguarding should always be inclusive and participatory, and centre itself around the perspectives, experience and input of less powerful or marginalised groups or individuals. Safeguarding is part of the *Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability* (see Resource box below).

## ETHICAL CLEARANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARDS

If any organisation is planning to conduct research for the purpose of producing or sharing research reports, or the research poses risks, for instance, a risk of trauma, best practice is to seek ethical clearance from a relevant independent Institutional Review Board(s). More generally, organisations may already, or be planning to, collect various data for their own monitoring, learning and evaluation processes, or community members might be supported to collect data as part of their own people-led research process. It is important that the principles of research ethics are applied within any evidence- and learning-oriented programme, for example, how data will be collected, stored, used, and who it will benefit. Any write ups of the process should reference these principles and explain, for instance, how informed consent was given, how participants were recruited, and how the data was collected, stored and used, and the safeguarding process.

For CLARISSA, IDS sought ethical clearance for the whole programme at the onset from its Research Ethics Review Board. It then submitted bi-annual updates during the operational period, including submitting additional updates for specific processes, such as Action Research groups and Children's research groups. Country teams also received training on research ethics as part of their initial training, there was a data management plan, and programme safeguarding policies. It was agreed that the best way to deal with a highly adaptive programme such as CLARISSA was to make further submissions to the Research Ethics Review Board outlining programme processes as they became 'live', and at a time when the details of the work were clear. For example, when Action Research groups were about to start, CLARISSA outlined to the Research Ethics Review Board the key considerations for preventing harm, including using safeguarding, trust-building and a facilitation approach.

*Terms used in this Brief:*

**LGBTIQ+**

Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, Bisexual, Intersex, Queer/Questioning, Asexual.

**MHPSS**

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

**Mitigation strategy**

A strategy to prepare for or reduce a risk or threat to a person.

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS: TO COMPENSATE OR NOT TO COMPENSATE – BANGLADESH

The question of whether and how to compensate children participating in the Action Research groups presented a complex dilemma for the Bangladesh team and the whole CLARISSA team. In the first stages of the programme, children engaged in the Life Story collection processes were compensated with money to offset their lost earnings, as missing work often resulted in severe penalties, such as losing an entire day's salary for an hour of absence. However, during the transition to the Action Research group phase, which required strong ownership from the children, a debate emerged regarding the use of compensation, revealing contrasting views between the two main implementing organisations. One organisation, influenced by a previous negative incident, opposed monetary compensation, fearing it might undermine Action Research groups' participatory nature. They were concerned that children might participate solely for financial gain, rather than genuine interest in the group activities. The other organisation, recognising the children's sacrifice of work hours and their income loss, argued in favour of compensation, and favoured monetary payments because this was also the preference of the children. After nearly a year of deliberation, a compromise was reached in early 2022. It was decided that all Action Research group participants would receive in-kind compensation in the form of monthly food packages. This solution worked well, although it introduced a substantial administrative and logistical burden for the teams. Children were informed about the reasoning behind the approach and continued to appreciate the support. However, there were still some cases of children whose engagement remained weak, and who seemingly participated mainly because of the food packages.

## 3 SAFEGUARDING: PRACTICAL LEARNING FROM CLARISSA

What emerged from the CLARISSA process was a tension between wanting to ensure safeguarding, while also working in a 'entrepreneurial' way. These two concepts can sometimes be understood as conflicting. On the one hand, safeguarding is designed to actively lower the risk of harms and distress posed by a programme, while on the other hand, a Systemic Action Research approach encourages 'risk taking' and embraces uncertainty in the quest for deeper systemic change. In Systemic Action Research, people lead the research, decision-making and interventions, and it is acknowledged that much can be learned from failure by using the lessons learned to adapt the programme. However, in a safeguarding setting, failure is clearly not an option, a programme cannot fail to safeguard those participating or working in a programme. CLARISSA successfully practiced strong safeguarding while also navigating the uncertainties of a Systemic Action Research methodology. Central to this was the child- and people-centred approach and the acknowledgment and trust of the programme team that children and other stakeholders were mostly best placed to guide safeguarding decisions about themselves. In practice, this meant establishing open and ongoing two-way communication between team members and participants enabled by high levels of

“The attitude was not so much one of saying “that cannot be done” (because of safeguarding concerns), but of, “let’s find a way to do it that incorporates good safeguarding.””  
IDS CLARISSA team member



trust, strong relationships, and certain programme mechanisms, such as collecting children’s feedback after each activity. Additionally, safeguarding was considered central to all programme operations at all levels, and was implemented, reviewed and revised in an active, ongoing way throughout the duration of the programme.

**Safeguarding for Systemic Action Research needs to be informed by a child- and people-centred approach.** Programme participants are mostly the best source for identifying risk mitigation strategies\* in their local context, because they have the relevant lived experience which many programme staff may not have. Programmes therefore need to plan for adequate time, budget and capacity so that participants can engage meaningfully and inclusively with the programme’s design, implementation, learning, actions, and safeguarding. By fostering trusting, strong relationships and open, two-way communication around potential risks, a team can collaboratively develop with participants, including children, a participant-centred and -led safeguarding plan which can help prevent risks from the outset.

In the context of child safeguarding, this concept of trust has also been further developed, and is sometimes understood as ‘relational safety’. This refers to providing a warm, trusting, positive and stable relationship for children with a key adult, who applies boundaries consistently, communicates sensitively to the child, and expresses their care for and understanding of the child’s perspective. Building relational safety for children can contribute to unlocking positive long-term outcomes such as children’s re-engagement in education or in decision-making that affects their lives; and increasing their self-esteem and their long-term psychological safety (see Module 3 of *Moving towards children as partners in Child Protection in COVID-19 Guide: from participation to partnerships* for more on relational safety).

**Safeguarding doesn’t have to get in the way of participants’ deep participation and own agency.** Safeguarding doesn’t have to limit how participants generate evidence, do analysis, or take action. By enabling participants to lead in the

*Children in the CLARISSA children’s advocacy group, Nepal, take a vote.*

CREDIT: CLARISSA

“Ethics and safeguarding isn’t actually a tick box exercise, it is a lively engagement [...] you have to be reflexive all the time, individually, but also in a group, and you need to have had enough safeguarding conversations with the children in advance that you feel comfortable to bring things up in real time too...you feel comfortable to step in and say “no” actually, we’re drawing a line here.”

IDS CLARISSA team member



design from the very beginning – in the CLARISSA context this meant involving children, parents, business owners, and local authorities – and by collaborating with participants in an ongoing way, this potential barrier was avoided to a great extent in CLARISSA. The example of the children’s GIS neighbourhood mapping in Kathmandu below is a good example of how safeguarding was adapted to support deeply participatory and safe work. This is followed by another example in Bangladesh – *An example of Bangladeshi working children’s input for a ‘Day in the Life’ mapping activity, some using GIS devices.*

**Safeguarding for Systemic Action Research is an ongoing and adaptable process.** Systemic Action Research generates participant-driven evidence, analysis, learning and actions. A programme needs to be adaptive to support this kind of approach, as does the safeguarding. For instance, CLARISSA undertook regular participatory reflection around safeguarding, and used the learning to jointly decide how to modify or adapt some activities’ safeguarding plans.

“Adaption is also in the safeguarding, and a lot of people might feel a bit uncomfortable about that. Although I think that’s actually what happens in real life anyway.”

IDS CLARISSA team member

## AN EXAMPLE OF HOW A GIS\* MAPPING METHODOLOGY WAS ADAPTED FOR BETTER SAFEGUARDING, GUIDED BY CHILDREN

A GIS journey mapping activity in Kathmandu was planned with children to collect data on tablets. When asked about safeguarding, children said that they felt the tablets would stand out too much, that it would draw too many questions from the community, and it would not feel safe. They agreed on using mobile phones instead, as these were already used by the adult team researchers and would not draw the same level of attention to the children compared to tablets. The GIS programme methodology was subsequently modified for mobile phones. However, after some time, it became apparent that the children had to spend too much time typing in text on their phones which was also drawing attention. After further consultation with the children, the GIS software was again modified to enable them to easily add an audio note to their phone, which was automatically transcribed and added to the map. These adaptations took additional time and resources, but were important in reducing child-identified risks. The GIS methodologies were adapted based on children’s insights into what they considered safe or unsafe in their environment. This adaption allowed the child-led GIS activity to go ahead, but with significantly reduced levels of risk.



Neighbourhood of Gongabu, Kathmandu.

CREDIT: CLARISSA



## AN EXAMPLE OF BANGLADESHI WORKING CHILDREN’S INPUT FOR A ‘DAY IN THE LIFE’ MAPPING ACTIVITY, SOME USING GIS DEVICES (PHONES)

Children played a meaningful role in designing the activity as well as the safeguarding plan, and took part in the analysis later.

Children learning about GIS mapping in Kathmandu.

CREDIT: CLARISSA

Safeguarding issues identified by the children	Suggested possible mitigation plan by children
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harassment in the streets</li> <li>• Hijacking</li> <li>• Accident/vehicle-related accident</li> <li>• Employer issues: they don't give permission to use the phone/ be accompanied by an adult person inside the factory/workplaces.</li> <li>• Uses of mobile during school/ lessons for mapping</li> <li>• Restriction by community/parents/ employer</li> <li>• Risk of natural disaster</li> <li>• Sudden sickness</li> <li>• GPS logger programme might close (and not capture the data)</li> <li>• Risk of losing the mobile phone if carried in different places by children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can get help from the police</li> <li>• Keep the mobile phone very safely. If possible do not carry the mobile phone (use an adult)</li> <li>• Be very careful when walking in the road</li> <li>• Get help from the community mobilisers/CLARISSA research team if needed</li> <li>• Be very alert when we have the phones</li> </ul>

**Example of safeguarding considerations for GIS mapping of neighbourhoods** (see table over page). This is an edited and simplified example of how safeguarding considerations and adaptations were built into the design of a CLARISSA journey mapping GIS activity by children engaged in the worst forms of labour in Bangladesh.

**Safeguarding considerations and adaptations for children’s journey mapping in Dhaka**

Main question for the activity	Mapping questions children will answer	Data collectors	Ethics and safeguarding considerations based on team’s (local staff and safeguarding leads) and children’s joint input
<p>How do children move through their neighbourhoods (including between places of work)?</p> <p>We want to learn where children go and what they experience</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What have you come here to do?</li> <li>2. How do you feel in this place?</li> <li>3. Why do you feel this way?</li> </ol>	<p>10 children from Children’s research group</p> <p>1 day each (12–24 hours)</p> <p>1 adult researcher to accompany</p>	<p><b>An overall CLARISSA programme safeguarding risk assessment and planning has already been undertaken with children. An additional safeguarding risk assessment needs to be undertaken with the group of children engaging in this GIS journey mapping.</b> Some considerations are listed here:</p> <p><b>Children are accompanied by adult for 12–24 hours?</b> Best practice is two adults accompanying a child, but two adults accompanying a child for a long period might limit the behaviour of the child, and attract the interest of the community. In this case, if two adults accompany one child, it will possibly make the process riskier. Suggest for girls, one female staff member and for boys, one male staff member. A 12-hour slot is preferred, both the child and the adult staff member are at risk if working 24 hours at a stretch. 12 hours during the daylight is safe. If 24 hours is planned it is important to ask the parents what they think, because after dark most of the children stay at home. At night, accompanying a child might be awkward/disturbing for parents. Having the staff in their house might create extra pressure to serve a guest. The male head of household might not like to host an outsider at night. There are safeguarding risks for an adult staff to stay in community at night.</p> <p><b>Can we give the adult the tablet/phone to make it safer?</b> It might be fine to have a tablet/phone with staff as they use mobile phones anyway. It might be better to use phones instead of tablets to avoid people asking “<i>What they are doing?</i>” Ask for the perspective of country level teams. Children will need to be consulted as part of the risk assessment to guide this question.</p> <p><b>How do we make children comfortable to navigate their neighbourhood as they usually would?</b> This question to be answered by the children once risks and mitigation measures are identified. Normally the children will identify and discuss what makes them feel safe and comfortable in their neighbourhood. If they think the mapping process will make them feel unsafe, we’ll explore with children what can be done to minimise the unsafe/uncomfortable feeling the process might create.</p> <p><b>What issues in the community will we face from accompanying children, especially after dark? How can we navigate these?</b> These questions need to be explored with the children. The safeguarding focal points and the researchers should use existing knowledge and information and consult with children on key issues and how to manage. There are also risks of abuse for both adult staff and children; the family of the child might feel awkward and need to answer queries of other community members/neighbours; head of household/father might not approve of the process but will not want to say; having an additional member at their house might be uncomfortable for the family, including eating in front of strangers; they might feel pressure to offer the guest/staff food as s/he will be staying; staying in the child’s house might be uncomfortable for the staff and risky. Additional risks to be identified with local teams.</p> <p><b>Keep individual journey maps private and only share the collective journey stories. All journeys will be anonymised.</b> This is because children talking about their own journeys in a group will mean sharing confidential information with others.</p>



## AN EXAMPLE OF SAFEGUARDING WHERE THE RISK WAS DEEMED TO BE TOO HIGH TO FINISH THE ACTIVITY

In Kathmandu, children helped design and undertake a GIS mapping activity of a neighbourhood where they lived and worked. It was in a bus park area and the aim was to learn how the street changed from day to night. The children, each accompanied by an adult, started mapping the area during the day. However, at night, the area started to feel very different, including that it was inappropriate for girls and women to be there. However, the children really wanted to carry on, and the accompanying adult researchers could see that the children were seeing things as insiders that the adults could not. Despite this, the decision was made by the adult researchers to step in and end the activity because they considered the setting had become too risky. An IDS team member observed that despite the children's enthusiasm, and the fact that children already experienced this neighbourhood on a daily basis anyway because they lived there, adult researchers felt comfortable to highlight the risks to children in real time and make the decision to stop the activity. There had been many ongoing safeguarding conversations with the children prior to this event which facilitated this type of decision.

### CLARISSA RESOURCES ON SAFEGUARDING

[Safeguarding the mental health of children in child labour in Nepal](#). A CLARISSA Blog.

[Building rapport for Action Research with the community in Bangladesh](#). A CLARISSA Blog.

[A chance to build trust and rapport in the global pandemic \(Nepal\)](#). A CLARISSA Blog.

## 4 SKILLS, METHODS AND TOOLS FOR SAFEGUARDING

**Safeguarding information, training and expertise:** CLARISSA invested in safeguarding at all levels, including, training field staff, partner organisations, management, and communications and advocacy teams. CLARISSA also appointed safeguarding leads within teams and countries and engaged a skilled safeguarding advisor for the whole programme. For example, in Nepal, CLARISSA trained all its team members in safeguarding, including its local partners, and provided refresher training at least twice a year. It also distributed safeguarding brochures with emergency numbers to all staff and ensured that emergency numbers were clearly visible in the office and for Action Research group meeting places.

**Mental Health and Psychosocial Support:** For CLARISSA, Life Story telling and analysis by children engaging in the worst forms of child labour had the potential to re-traumatise. CLARISSA also coincided with COVID which added another level of vulnerability for many children and families. Safeguarding and MHPSS were therefore high priority processes in CLARISSA, especially during COVID. Where deemed necessary, children were referred to MHPSS services. In Bangladesh, all facilitators

were trained in Psychological First Aid, and a CLARISSA social worker was also appointed, who was central to MHPSS. Implementing good COVID safety procedures also helped to build trust with parents and children, for instance, by providing tests and safe spaces to undertake CLARISSA work. Additionally, the analysis of children's Life Stories, which involved the retelling of the stories a group setting, was organised in such a way that the children in the group who had contributed their own Life Story would not be required to listen to and analyse their own story in the group.

**Psychological First Aid (PFA):** Any team working in a deeply participatory way should consider the participants and context where it is working to determine whether practitioner skills such as PFA are required. CLARISSA facilitators were trained in PFA, a tool which can be used by first responders in situations where children are experiencing extreme distress or trauma. Using PFA enabled CLARISSA staff to support children experiencing psychological distress or trauma without putting children at risk of further harm. Children could then be referred to the appropriate service provider if needed.



Children doing a body mapping activity in Kathmandu.

CREDIT: CLARISSA

## SAFEGUARDING DURING COVID

When COVID restrictions started, teams initially felt that the project was no longer possible – it was impossible to visit the communities and conduct Participatory Action Research in such circumstances. However, teams quickly developed ideas on how to overcome each operational challenge. For example, considerable thought was given to the safeguarding and operational processes used to get in touch with the children, obtain the required consents, and then conduct interviews. Masks, gloves, and hand sanitisers were used to provide phones to children, allowing remote interaction with researchers, and conducting and recording interviews using Facebook Messenger — the communication tool used in the communities.

**Building rapport and trust:** While all of the skills mentioned throughout this CLARISSA learning and reflection brief series are considered important for safeguarding, building rapport and trust with programme participants is critical for strengthening the 'relational' aspect of safeguarding as well as making safeguarding participatory and child- and people-centred. CLARISSA research required that facilitators became known in the communities where they were planning to work, so that community members would become familiar with them, trust them, and be comfortable to share their stories. This required taking the time to walk about in the community – often during out-of-office hours – sharing meals with community members, meeting and talking with different community members in an informal way, as well as sharing their own Life Stories with the community. This process

took considerable time, around six months, before any story collection started. The CLARISSA experience showed how rapport building cannot be rushed, and also how individual rapport building was especially effective and important, as it led to developing stronger trust compared to group activities only. However, building trust was not only important for the relationship between the facilitator and the child and adult participants, but also with the wider social network, including parents, caregivers, and gatekeepers. Another important aspect of building rapport and trust in CLARISSA was managing the expectations of participants and the wider community, and being clear about what the programme could and could not help with, or provide.

In general, rapport building with children focused on spending time together and playing fun, participatory games which helped everyone to get to know each other better and break down barriers. For instance, in Bangladesh, children were keen to play sport (cricket), which was facilitated by CLARISSA. In a different example from Nepal, the COVID outbreak slowed down the project but was also an opportunity to further build rapport and trust by providing 'COVID relief kits' (masks, toiletries, food) to children and young people working in the adult entertainment sector. It is important the facilitators who are working in the community or with participants are prepared to try and blend in with what is going on locally, that they leverage popular local culture (perhaps singing, dancing, poetry, or storytelling) to inspire activities, and that they feel comfortable, and practice facilitating fun activities and events, such as sports.

## GUIDANCE AND TOOLKITS FOR DEEPLY PARTICIPATORY SAFEGUARDING

### Safeguarding

**Terre des hommes Child Safeguarding Policy**: An example of Terre des hommes' safeguarding policy.

Dhaka **PhotoVoice COVID exhibition**: A short post about this exhibition and a link to the photos.

**Disability-inclusive Child Safeguarding Guidelines**. Guidance on how to include children with disabilities in safeguarding by AbleChild Africa and Save the Children.

For more guidance and many tried and tested tools on how to work in participatory way with children around safeguarding: **Moving towards children as partners in Child Protection in COVID-19 Guide: from participation to partnerships** Module 3 provides guidance on *Ethics and Safeguarding during COVID-19*. While the guidance is designed to support child protection work during a time of COVID, it can also be used in many other contexts.

The **Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub** has many tools and guidance for those seeking to strengthen safeguarding generally.

**Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability** sets out nine commitments to ensure that organisations support people and communities affected by crisis and vulnerability in ways that respect their rights and dignity and promotes their primary role in finding solutions to the crises they face.

### Research ethics and ethical conduct

CLARISSA **Working Paper 3: Towards Ethical Good Practice in Cash Transfer Trials and their Evaluation**. ISBN: 978-1-78118-660-2

For those wanting to learn more about research ethics in relation to children, the *Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC)* website is a rich source. This includes a useful **reflexive tool** which can help teams start thinking about ethics in their work.

Box continues on next page ►



For more guidance around ethical considerations and decision-making when working in communities, refer to [Thinking Through Facilitators' Ethical Responsibilities](#) from the Child Resilience Alliance's *Toolkit for reflective practice in supporting community-led child protection processes*.

[Key ethical issues in humanitarian research](#), a 'Research Snapshot' by ELRHA.

Save the Children have written some useful guidance about [Ethics and Child Safeguarding](#) in its Safe Schools Common Approach guidelines.

Individuals and team can practice navigating ethical dilemmas in the field based on real-life challenges in a range of education in emergencies contexts with this resource: [Navigating Ethical Dilemmas in Education in Emergencies \(EiE\): A Compendium of Vignettes for Research & Practice](#).

CLARISSA used visual methods and tools for learning. [The practice and ethics of participatory visual methods for community engagement in public health and health science](#) provides ethical guidance for practitioners using these methods.

Ethical guidance for those considering using GIS has been considered in detail in [Ethical Considerations When Using Geospatial Technologies for Evidence Generation](#) by Gabrielle Berman, Sara de La Rosa and Tanya Accone for [Innocenti](#). DOI: [10.18356/688ca64a-en](#)

## MHPSS

[Psychological First Aid](#) – Facilitator's manual for orienting field workers. World Health Organization.

[Psychological First Aid for children, adolescents and families experiencing trauma](#), developed specifically to use with children by UNICEF.

## Facilitation tools for trust building

Watch the videos set in an Action Research programme in Kenya to hear about facilitator and community perspectives on [Being a Facilitator](#) and being [Humble and Respectful](#).

There are many resources available on running activities with children, young people, and adults. Section d (page 28) of the [Toolkit of Participatory Approaches Using Creative Methods to Strengthen Community Engagement and Ownership](#) has many links and ideas for energisers, icebreakers and games.

## Other skills and tools in this series

### 1. [Working in a child- and people-centred way](#)

Key skill: *Communications skills*

### 2. [Mapping systems and taking action](#)

Key skill: *Asking good questions*

### 3. [Using evidence and learning to adapt programmes in real time](#)

Key skill: *Being a reflexive team*

### 4. [After Action Reviews](#)

Key skill: *Being a reflective practitioner (individual)*

### 5. [Working with partners](#)

Key skill: *Being inclusive and aware of power dynamics*

### 6. [Safeguarding for Systemic Action Research](#)

Key skill: *Building trust and rapport*

.....  
*Children undertaking a collage activity in Kathmandu, Nepal.*

CREDIT: CLARISSA



## 5 TIPS ON PLANNING AND BUDGETING FOR SAFEGUARDING

**Funders:** While most funders agree with the need to ensure strong safeguarding, many organisations are concerned that funders will not be prepared to accommodate the safeguarding needs of a programme using Systemic Action Research, namely, one that requires a longer, slower timeframe and an open-ended, adaptive approach. While this can be a real challenge, funders are now starting to move towards new models of funding. The tips and resources below can help teams strengthen their programmes and proposals in relation to safeguarding within a deeply participatory, learning- and action-oriented, whole systems process.

- Do include a safeguarding budget line and explain the safeguarding approach and rationale in the proposal, which includes extra capacity to ensure adequate safeguarding for a deeply participatory approach. Don't skimp on this consideration to make a budget seem more attractive to a donor.
- Plan adequate time (not rushing) and budget (e.g. staff and activity costs) at the beginning of programme to build strong relationships and trust.
- Assume that safeguarding will require additional resources at points during the course of the programme because it has to respond to participants' input by adapting. Budget for adapting the safeguarding plan as the programme progresses. For instance, CLARISSA had to change the way children did the GIS mapping to accommodate safeguarding issues, which involved additional costs.
- If working with children, budget for adequate local staff to accompany children when researching in public.
- Consider a budget for compensating participants for their time spent participating in the programme.
- Consider a budget for emergency assistance where participants might be especially vulnerable or at risk. For instance, for providing emergency food supplies, small cash amounts, or small medical costs. These will inevitably arise in any setting, and especially if an emergency happens, such as COVID.

### RESOURCES FOR FUNDING SAFEGUARDING

***Community-driven systems change: The power of grassroots-led change for long term impact and how funders can nurture it.*** Firelight Foundation. There is a useful table on page 15-17: *How can funders support community-based organizations to catalyze community-driven systems change?* The column on 'organisational capacity and effectiveness' provides some useful rationale.

***Tools and Templates for donors.*** Firelight Foundation.

***Weaving a collective tapestry: a funder's toolkit for child and youth participation.*** Elevate Children Funders Group.

- On page 32 the useful table of research-driven principles highlights "3. Safe and consistent - Do no harm and mitigate any potential risks to children and young people; 6. Non-extractive and Compensated – Value people's time, expertise and contribution, be clear about your intentions, and build in feedback and recognition throughout".
- On page 40-42 there is guidance aimed at donors around compensation.
- On page 43-44 there is section for donors called 'Getting started: safeguarding, care and wellbeing'.

***Funder safeguarding collaborative*** A website of the Global Fund for Children. There are a lot of resources on this site targeted at funders but also useful for organisations developing programmes or preparing proposals and considering safeguarding.

***Maximising benefits: a recommended framework for volunteerism and compensation for young people.*** CIVICUS Youth and Restless Development.

Safeguarding for Systemic Action Research	
DO	DON'T
<b>Allocating time and capacity</b>	
<p>Do allocate reasonable time for safeguarding planning to be a central concern and activity from the very beginning of a project.</p> <p>Do take time to build and maintain strong relationships and trust with participants and the wider community.</p> <p>Do ensure teams feel empowered and adequately skilled to undertake participatory processes of decision-making as well as real time safeguarding decisions.</p> <p>Do reflect on if and how to compensate participants for workdays lost. Participant's time should be valued.</p> <p>Do train participants and anyone involved in the programme on the importance of anonymity and confidentiality.</p> <p>Assume that participants will be triggered at some point and discuss with them the strategies they use to cope with triggering. Do ensure good PSS and other services.</p>	<p>Don't develop a safeguarding plan as an 'add on' to a programme, or just to satisfy organisational or donor requirements.</p> <p>Don't rush the process of developing a safeguarding plan. Without trust, people may not be open about potential risks or harms, nor feel confident to report issues.</p> <p>Don't assume that a safeguarding risk means it isn't possible to undertake an activity – look for alternative strategies. However, child- and people-centred working and safeguarding is not an 'anything goes' process.</p> <p>Don't offer compensation which will pressurise or is designed to incentivise children/adults to take part in an activity or programme they may not otherwise want to participate in.</p> <p>Don't do a participatory activity which will reveal identities and private information about participants. Don't assume people will automatically understand why this is important.</p> <p>Don't assume that participants will not be triggered by some discussions, even if they choose not tell you how they are feeling. Don't ask staff to provide PSS without adequate training.</p>
<b>Using a child- or people-centred, ethical approach</b>	
<p><b>Do approach risk and vulnerability as a relative concept. Often there will be dilemmas. Decisions about when and how to respond to risk and vulnerability should be jointly guided by an organisation's safeguarding policy; participants' own perspectives and suggestions; local and external staff input; safeguarding lead/expert; the context. Ensure inclusivity and broad representation of different needs and perspectives.</b></p>	
<p>Use the 'Do No Harm' principle and an ethical approach. Ensure voluntary participation, informed consent, and that they can change their mind at any point in the process.</p> <p>Do use an approach where participants 'own' the data and use it to inform their own actions.</p> <p>Do be clear about what the programme and its staff can and can't provide or do for participants, including what the programme is focusing on.</p> <p>Be aware that a deeply participatory action might not always be appropriate in every context. Work with those with a strong knowledge of the local context to help decide.</p> <p>Do make sure that transparent conversations take place around the ethics of research and evidence collection and sharing. Keep raw data confidential.</p>	<p>Participation should never feel or be obligatory. If there are any safeguarding doubts, work with participants to jointly understand the context and risks involved and find a less risky way.</p> <p>Don't be 'extractive' and collect data which won't be fed back.</p> <p>Even through Systemic Action Research is open-ended, don't raise expectations among participants which the programme can't deliver on.</p> <p>Don't start a participatory activity without trust, consultation and agreement by locally knowledgeable stakeholders, leaders and authorities.</p> <p>Don't share raw data with external stakeholders. Store it in a way that keeps it confidential. Raw data could be used by different actors to stigmatise, intimidate, or target individuals and groups.</p>
<b>Safeguarding is a process</b>	
<p>Do develop an overall safeguarding plan for the whole programme alongside additional plans for specific activities for instance, a neighbourhood mapping with children, a photography project, a video.</p> <p>Do prioritise participatory risk assessments and any mitigation strategies with those you are working with.</p> <p>Set up participant feedback mechanisms and check-ins to test out safeguarding plans. Make adjustments as needed.</p>	<p>Don't apply the same generic safeguarding plan for every activity. Separate activities require additional safeguarding planning.</p> <p>Don't develop a safeguarding plan which has been decided by programme or organisational staff only.</p> <p>Don't develop a rigid or fixed safeguarding plan which is never tested, revisited or revised.</p>



## 6 TEAM REFLECTION

This reflection session is designed to be undertaken as a team. Answer the questions together. Allow about two, or two and a quarter hours. Use your notebooks to record your answers and main points. You'll need to refer back to this later.

### Skills building (35 mins)

This worksheet focuses on building rapport and trust with participants, their families and the wider community. Use this team reflection session to test out or practice a particular tool or methods which can help build rapport and trust between facilitators and participants and/or between participants themselves. You might want to practice an activity which is already popular within your own team organisation or perhaps try out a new activity from the resources provided in this brief. Take turns to facilitate an activity with the rest of the team acting as the participants. Reflect together after each activity and provide constructive feedback to the facilitator.

**Alternatively**, use this time to discuss some ethical dilemmas with your team.

For instance *Navigating Ethical Dilemmas in Education in Emergencies (EiE): A Compendium of Vignettes for Research & Practice* presents different ethical dilemmas for discussion. For instance, 'To pay or not to pay' on page 30, and 'Securing Informed Consent in Humanitarian Settings' on page 23, or 'Risks of Retraumatizing Study Participants for Research Gains' on page 33.

### Team discussion (25 mins)

You may find it helpful to watch the video again together. Discuss any the points which you identified from watching the video and reading the brief – what seems similar to your programme's approach, what seems different?

### Team safeguarding mini-assessment (30 mins)

Discuss as a team.

Questions 1 and 2: Rank from 1–5. 5 = very strongly, 1 = not at all. Don't spend a lot of time trying to reach consensus, rather, prioritise presenting your different perspectives, and note down the different rankings.

- 1 Rank the extent to which you think your team's safeguarding approach is similar to the participatory, people-centred one described in this brief.
- 2 Rank your team's capacity to ensure participant-centred, ongoing safeguarding. Where do you think the team is particularly strong, and where do you think the team is less strong?
- 3 Do you have any examples of how safeguarding may have conflicted with programme plans? How was this conflict addressed? Is there anything similar or different to the approach used by CLARISSA?

### Actions brainstorm (30 mins)

Suggest and discuss any concrete actions you could take as a team that could shift your current safeguarding approach towards one which is closer to the approach described here. While remaining realistic, try not to limit your ideas for now, as you will have the opportunity to come back to them once you have completed all the learning and reflection briefs.



# Final Tasks: Team action setting and mini-After Action Review

Part 1 of this last set of suggested tasks is designed to help teams review the collective learning and reflection process which has taken place over the course of the entire series, and to collaboratively identify some feasible, priority actions which could help shift them closer to a deeply participatory, learning- and action-oriented systemic approach. Part 2 is designed to guide teams in a mini-After Action Review in order to reflect on and assess how the actions went, what can be learned, and what they could do next.

## Part 1. Team action setting (2 hrs)

*Purpose: Teams decide which actions they could take to move closer to a participatory, learning- and action-oriented systemic approach, and how they will implement them.*

Teams will need to set aside about two hours so that there is adequate time to reflect and make a decision. Teams may also choose to facilitate this session, perhaps by taking turns as facilitator. Each person will need their notebooks and the River of Life drawing made during Brief 4. *After Action Reviews*. A participatory action-setting method is suggested below, however teams may also choose to use another preferred participatory method.

### Suggested method

**1. Preparation:** Set up five different white boards (real or virtual) or five separate spaces on a big wall. Label each board or space with the title of a learning and reflection brief. You'll also need sticky notes and coloured dot stickers (if available) alongside some pens for the sticky notes.

**2. Sharing and reflecting on actionable learning:** As a group, referring back to your notebooks and your River of Life drawing, revisit the various individual ideas for action, one by one, under each learning and reflection brief topic. Group members could share one idea for action, per sticky note, and add it to the relevant whiteboard until all the ideas have been stuck on the whiteboards. Take some time to read and reflect on the notes. Perhaps move them around and group those which seem similar under each topic. Ask questions and discuss as a team what each idea is about, and if you consider it as still relevant, or feasible. Are there perhaps some new ideas you



now want to add? As an example, actions might be around team skills building or using a particular approach or method – that is for your team to decide upon. Aim to spend around 15 minutes discussing each board.

**3. Prioritising actions:** Once teams have been through all the boards together, each team member should decide their two top priority actions from all of the ideas shown. If you are a group of more than ten people, consider choosing only one priority per person. Use the coloured dots or simply mark an 'x' on the priority sticky notes. Be prepared to explain your choice to the team in the next activity. Consider aspects such as any existing organisational or programmes goals, objectives or plans, relevancy, feasibility, and opportunities. It may be helpful to consider 'small' but concrete actions to start with.

**4. Team review:** Next, it is suggested that teams aim to agree on one or two overall priority actions. As a team, review the actions which each team member has chosen, and make some observations. For instance, is there general agreement, or are the choices very diverse? Spend time discussing and reflecting. Perhaps there is already clear consensus on what the team should try?

**5. Reaching consensus:** If needed, discuss further as a team to try and reach a consensus about the 1-2 top priority actions which you could take as a team.

**6. Planning the action:** Once an agreement about the priority action(s) has been reached, spend time planning the action(s). This should include agreeing what you hope will happen (suggest short-term outcomes) as a result of the action, and which can be later reviewed during a mini-After Action Review. For example, if a team decides they would like to become more reflexive and keep reflective journals, several of the team members would hopefully report that they have been regularly writing in and using reflective journals during the mini-After Action Review. Agree a date in your calendars when you can come back together for a two-hour mini-After Action Review. Depending on the action, it might be helpful to identify a date which is far enough away to give time to implement, but not so far in the future that teams lose momentum. Make a note of the expected change and any plans in your notebooks for reference later.

## **Part 2: Mini-After Action Review**

*Purpose: Inclusive team reflection on the planned action(s) – what changed, what didn't change, for whom and why – in order to identify learning and integrate into future plans.*

**Preparation:** For this activity, it can be useful to go back and [revisit the video](#) and Brief 4. [After Action Reviews](#) to remind you of the key aspects of an After Action Review. Plan about two hours for this activity. Teams may also choose to facilitate this session, perhaps by taking turns as facilitator. Each person should bring their notebook.

**Suggested methods:** If there has been a relatively long interval between the action setting and this mini-After Action Review, for instance a few months, or the planned action was substantial, your team could consider using Rivers of Life to support the reflection process. In this case, you'll need to set up your meeting space accordingly.

For many teams, there may have been a relatively short interval between action setting and reviewing, for instance a few weeks, and the action may have been 'small'.

In this case, it is preferable to use a different method. For example, individual team members could answer the questions below (a,b,c) on sticky notes which are then stuck on the whiteboard or wall under each relevant question. The team could then review the different answers by using a gallery walk type activity before coming back together to discuss questions d-g and share thoughts and perspectives. Take up to 90 minutes for this part of the task.

Firstly, remind yourselves as a team what the precise actions were and what you expected to see change. Remind yourselves that being reflexive is not about judgement or fear of failure, it is about remaining objective, asking why something did or didn't work, and using this to inform a revised strategy as needed. Then, as individuals, use the river/sticky notes to reflect on and answer these questions:

- a. As an individual, what actually happened?
- b. As an individual, why do you think this was?
- c. As an individual, what were the highlights and the challenges? What were the reasons for each?

Then, as a team, discuss:

- d. Did everything go according to plan or were there deviations? What can we learn about why the deviations happened?
- e. The highlights and the challenges? How did different team members experience these?
- f. What can we learn as a team from this?
- g. What does the learning tell us about the specific steps we should take next?

Once the team has finished discussing, spend the remaining time – about 30 mins – discussing what the next actions will be. As with the first plan, be clear about what your team hopes to see happen or change. As a team, note if and how the revised steps you discussed today differs from the original plans, and how the learning has fed into these revised plans.

At this point, you may agree as a team that you'd like to come back together once more to undertake another mini-After Action Review at suitable date to review progress. Additionally, some teams or organisations might be seeking to go further, for instance, by working to institutionalise some or all of this approach within their organisational programme guidance. Where this is the case, the reflection sessions for each brief, alongside the final team action setting and mini-After Action Review can help orient and guide teams and organisations to undertake this process.

IDS would love to hear from anyone who has used this resource. Please get in touch here ([s.reddin@ids.ac.uk](mailto:s.reddin@ids.ac.uk)) if you'd like to share some feedback, or if you have questions regarding the resource.



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