



RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE PAPER 1

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT IN A PARTICIPATORY ADAPTIVE PROGRAMME: THE CASE OF THE CLARISSA CONSORTIUM

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ABOUT THIS RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE PAPER

Doing development differently rests on deliberate efforts to reflect and learn, not just about what programmes are doing and achieving, but about how they are working. This is particularly important for an action research programme like Child Labour: Action-Research-Innovation in South and South-Eastern Asia (CLARISSA), which is implemented by a consortium of organisations from across the research and development spectrum, during a rapidly changing global pandemic. Harnessing the potential of diverse skills and complementary strengths across partners in responding to the complex challenge of the worst forms of child labour, requires capacity to work together in novel ways.

This Research and Evidence Paper documents how CLARISSA approached capacity development, and what we learnt from our challenges and successes. From the start, the programme incorporated a capacity development strategy resting on self-assessment of a wide range of behavioural and technical competencies that were deemed important for programme implementation, formal training activities, and periodic review of progress through an after-action review (AAR) process. An inventory of capacity development activities that took place during the first year of implementation reveals a wide range of additional, unplanned activities, enabled by the programme's flexibility and adaptive management strategy. These are organised into eight modalities, according to the individual or collective nature of the activity, and its sequencing – namely, whether capacity development happens prior to, during, or after (from) implementation. We conclude with some reflections on the emergent nature of capacity development. Planning capacity development in an adaptive programme provides a scaffolding in terms of time, resources, and legitimacy that sustains adaptiveness. We also recognise the gaps that remain to be addressed, particularly on scaling up individual learning to collective capabilities, and widening the focus from implementation teams to individuals working at consortium level.

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

is a consortium of organisations committed to building a participatory evidence base and generating innovative solutions to the worst forms of child labour in Bangladesh and Nepal.

CONTENTS

1 Introduction	4
2 Capacities – what are we talking about?	6
Competencies, capabilities, and capacity	7
Who develops capacity?	8
What competencies are needed?	9
3 Assessing capacity	12
Developing a self-assessment tool	13
Findings	14
Learning and implications	16
4 Responding to gaps	18
Modalities of capacity development	19
Learning for action	20
Learning in action	21
Learning from action	22
To plan or not to plan	23
From cyclical to complex capacity development	23
Formulating capacity development plans	25
5 Conclusion	28
References	30
Figures	
Figure 1: Capacity, capabilities, and competencies	8
Figure 2: Aggregated country team responses	15
Figure 3: Steps of reflective practice	20
Figure 4: Complex capacity development process	24
Figure 5: Capacity development planning flowchart (February 2021)	25
Tables	
Table 1: CLARISSA competency framework	9
Table 2: Classification of capacity development modalities	19

Section 1:

INTRODUCTION

1 INTRODUCTION

Thinking explicitly about capacity development matters in a multi-country, innovative participatory action research programme implemented by a consortium of organisations from across the research and development spectrum. Team members – whether recruited specifically for the programme or only devoting part of their time to it – must negotiate and get used to new ways of working together. Common standards need to apply across the consortium in terms of how key principles and pillars of the action research programme modality are understood, and what competencies are required to uphold them. This is not without challenge; the heterogeneous organisations that comprise a consortium will have evolved their own ways of doing things from within their own field of expertise, and need to learn from each other as they co-create a new, shared programming space where standards and principles align. Staff turnover means that these efforts need to be continuously renewed. Furthermore, a programme that embraces a systemic approach through adaptive management principles needs to manage the conflict between an iterative approach responding to capacity needs as they arise, and more holistic, comprehensive planning of capacity development.

The CLARISSA programme is trying to meet these challenges through an explicit and ongoing capacity development process embedded in its implementation and learning strategy. CLARISSA uses participatory action research to generate innovative solutions for children in Bangladesh and Nepal to avoid hazardous, exploitative labour. The programme focuses on the leather sector in Bangladesh, and the adult entertainment sector in Nepal. Led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and implemented by a consortium of organisations that includes ChildHope, the Consortium for Street Children, and Terre des hommes, it was launched in January 2020 and is due to run until December 2023. Capacity development activities are embedded in the programme and supported, among other processes, by a cycle of facilitated learning moments called after-action reviews (AARs) that enable regular reflection on progress

towards and learning about key programme objectives of being participatory, child-centred, and adaptive. For example, while all partners commit to a child-centred approach, they may understand the concept differently and their practices may diverge. The same is true for adaptive management, which is now a fashionable approach to development programming that is interpreted differently by different agencies – including donors, who have a significant influence on grant recipients. Surfacing these subtle differences is important in order to co-create a common vision and approach. As well as different organisational starting points, country programmes may also diverge over time in their approach to implementation. In CLARISSA, for example, the Nepal team is characterised by greater fluidity of roles – which allows them to be flexible and nimble, but also places a greater burden on individuals in terms of the competencies they need to master.

This Research and Evidence Paper outlines the approach to capacity development evolved by the CLARISSA programme over its first two years of implementation, drawing out lessons for similar programmes. Consortium partners reflected about the role of capacity development during the programme set-up phase, and produced a concept note to focus early discussions. The approach was then refined and adapted as implementation began. In this paper we outline how the competency framework was expanded to encompass both behavioural and technical skills. We present the original capacity self-assessment tool that we developed, and discuss findings that emerged from this exercise. The paper then offers a new classification of capacity development modalities drawn from the programme's experience. This factors in all forms of learning, whether individual or collective, and whether occurring prior to, during, or after an activity. Finally, we reflect on how capacity is developed in a participatory adaptive programme. Capacity development is essentially endogenous and emergent, but we argue that planning plays an important role, so we offer some pointers on how to plan for capacity development.

Section 2:

**CAPACITIES –
WHAT ARE WE
TALKING ABOUT?**

2 CAPACITIES – WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

The CLARISSA programme was constructed, from the outset, as an innovative action research programme. Its central aims are: (1) to generate new evidence on the dynamics of the worst forms of child labour (WFCL) in supply chains and in urban neighbourhoods; (2) to generate innovation in response to WFCL through participatory research; and (3) to explore how to scale those innovations. As such, the programme:

...is neither a typical research programme, nor a typical NGO [non-governmental organisation] implementation programme. The aim, therefore, is not primarily direct beneficiary support, nor to just generate and publish academic evidence alone, but rather to use research to understand the dynamics which drive WFCL and through the process to generate participatory innovations which help towards shifting these underlying dynamics and mitigating their worst effects.
(Burns, Apgar and Raw 2021: 11)

Underpinning the design of such a hybrid research and implementation programme is a partnership that brings together expertise from across development research and programming, with locally grounded experience and expertise in child labour and supply chains in specific urban neighbourhoods in Dhaka and Kathmandu, and cross-context programming and participatory action research experience. Embracing the innovation in this programming modality, an explicit goal of the partnership is to learn, through self-reflection, from the implementation process, and in particular from the child-centred and adaptive approaches – neither of which have been implemented at such a scale in response to WFCL.

Consolidation of the partnership and agreement on ways of working was supported in the early phases through the development of an evaluative rubric that describes seven partnership performance areas: (1) communications; (2) team identity; (3) openness, honesty, and mutual trust; (4) impact orientation; (5) inclusivity and equitability; (6) adaptability and flexibility; and (7) entrepreneurial culture (see Apgar *et al.* 2020 for further details). This emphasis on ways of working illustrates a recognition that alongside the technical skills required to implement the programme (on supply chains, participatory methods, etc.), a broader set of skills would be needed to enable

collaboration across all partners to work in adaptive and child-centred ways.

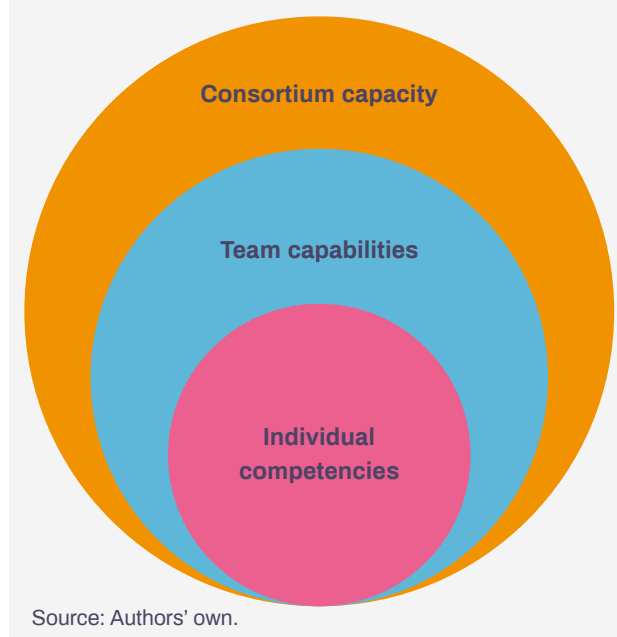
Initial discussions about what capacity would be required took shape as country operational teams were being established. A set of job descriptions were agreed to build the operational teams based on need. The roles were filled by recruiting staff from within partner organisations that matched the skills and availability, and recruiting externally for specific programme roles, such as full-time country coordinators. Early on, the programme recognised that capacity development was a foundational component for programme success, and so had to support the combination of technical and behavioural skills in teams that would be made up of existing and new staff learning to work as integrated teams. Furthermore, given the intention to learn from ways of working, it became necessary to establish a process for ongoing support, nurturing, and monitoring and learning about capacity.

These initial discussions fed into a concept note, written collaboratively by consortium partners, where CLARISSA committed to moving beyond a deficit approach to capacity development, instead basing 'our design of capacity development on adult education theories (e.g. Freire, Kolb, Mezirow's approach as described in Jarvis, 2004) which emphasise working with and through experience and embracing all forms of knowing – including tacit and practical knowledge' (Apgar and Oosterhoff 2019). The resulting strengths-based approach aligns with the action research ethos of the programme and was intended to further enhance collaborative partnership and implementation. In what follows, we describe how this initial approach was broadened to embrace a systems view of capacity and how it was operationalised through the first years of implementation.

CAPACITY, CAPABILITIES AND COMPETENCIES

In the CLARISSA programme, 'capacity' refers to the overall ability of the consortium to create value for others. The consortium is constituted of different roles and teams cutting across countries and thematic areas of work. 'Capabilities' refers to the characteristics that enable each of these teams to achieve their goals.

Figure 1: Capacity, capabilities and competencies



'Competencies' refers to the energies, attitudes, skills, and abilities of individuals within these teams – 'a set of behaviours that a person demonstrates based on their knowledge, experience and skills, as well as their attitudes and motivation' (The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action 2020). This view is inspired by conceptual elaborations by the European Centre for Development Policy Management (Zinke 2006; Baser and Morgan 2008). Figure 1 illustrates the nested nature of capacity, capabilities, and competencies.

Importantly, each level is more than the sum of its parts (Vallejo and Wehn 2016) identifying capacity development. Team capabilities are not a simple aggregation of individual competencies, as creative combination of individual competencies within a team can result in emergent capabilities that none of the team members had, and a shared understanding that goes beyond the sum of knowledge of individual members. Team capabilities may also be improved by lifting structural obstacles, related (for example) to how tasks are divided and to communication flows. There is something distinct about how the teams, and the consortium they are part of, operate.

Capacity development is defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as 'the process whereby people, organisations and society as a whole unleash, strengthen, create, adapt and maintain capacity over time' (Baser 2011).

The reference to broader society in this definition draws our attention to wider target groups of capacity development. In a programme like CLARISSA, these can be the staff of partner organisations, subgrantees, and broader stakeholders – particularly the children involved in the programme. Indeed, CLARISSA also aspires to develop the capacity of partner organisations to work in child-centred ways in the longer term. This shifts the focus of capacity development both in time (by stretching its temporal horizon beyond the programme cycle) and in subject matter (by emphasising **how** things are done as much as what is done). In line with participatory action research principles, capacity development is itself co-created from the bottom up. This paper, however, essentially focuses on the initial work of the programme, which was centred on implementation teams in Nepal and Bangladesh, as they were the target of priority capacity development activities to support putting the programme design into action.

WHO DEVELOPS CAPACITY?

This is a critical question. An older generation of deficit-based approaches to what was then termed 'capacity building' assumed that capacities had to be built up from scratch by outside 'experts' who would impart their knowledge and skills. Such views, however, reproduce colonial perspectives that see expertise as located in the global North, and related to particular forms of knowledge (de Bruin and James 2020; Lartey 2020). In CLARISSA, capacity development is approached as a process in which every partner and individual has something to learn, but also strengths to contribute. This asset-based approach recognises the competencies and capabilities already present in a team.

CLARISSA values tacit and practical expertise alongside more formal, theoretical knowledge and expertise (Brockbank and McGill 2003; Jarvis 2004) while recognising that capacity and capabilities are much more than the sum of knowledge. Furthermore, CLARISSA embraces an endogenous view of capacity development (Land, Hauck and Baser 2009; Brinkerhoff and Morgan 2010; McEvoy, Brady and Munck 2016). This sees capacity as emerging rather than determined, and arising from multiple complex and unpredictable processes. This means that capacity cannot be built by outsiders, even though they might design activities to stimulate this emergence.

WHAT COMPETENCIES ARE NEEDED?

What are the competencies and capabilities that need to be developed for a programme like CLARISSA to function effectively? Competencies include the skills required to achieve technical results, but also behavioural skills such as resourcefulness or willingness to learn and adapt.

A preliminary list of core technical competencies was drawn up during the set-up phase of the programme in late 2019 (Apgar and Oosterhoff 2019). This was built upon by reviewing similar frameworks developed

by consortium partners (ChildHope 2014; AAS Team Philippines 2015; Terre des hommes 2016; 2018; The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action 2020). It was finalised during conversations with CLARISSA country coordinators and partners from July to September 2020, to ensure common understanding and buy-in for the resulting framework.

Table 1 outlines the core competencies identified for the CLARISSA programme. These are organised into four areas. Competency areas are associated with both behavioural competencies (including values and attitudes) and technical ones. An effort has been made to give

Table 1: CLARISSA competency framework

Competency area	Behavioural competency	Technical competency
Operating safely, respectfully, and ethically	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrity, personal ethics • Self-reflection • Active, non-judgemental listening • Awareness of implicit bias 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research ethics • Data management • Case management • Working with children, safeguarding • Power analysis
Managing for innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing and maintaining collaborative relationships: embracing ambiguity and fluid roles, communication and sharing information • Growth mentality: embracing failure, willingness to learn • Stress management: coping and adapting • Evaluating and taking risks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme management and planning, including adaptive management • Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) (use of theories of change, designing learning architecture, evaluating innovation processes with specific tools; e.g. outcome harvesting and contribution analysis)
Conducting high-quality research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building rapport and trust • Integrity • Humility • Empathy, emotional intelligence • Working with children • Participatory mindset 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participatory methods (action research, narrative analysis, visual/performative, etc.) • Action research design, techniques, methods, and collective analysis • Recording, interviewing, transcripts, and note-taking • Child-centred methodologies • Facilitation • Qualitative data collection and analysis
Effecting change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrating leadership: self-awareness, critical judgement, taking responsibility, motivating others • Political savviness • Transparency and communication • Creating synergies • Using creativity to seek solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicating evidence-based messages • Advocacy and policy engagement • Child-centred communication

Source: Authors' own.

appropriate attention to questions of ethics, values, and power, which are central to participatory action research and working with children as equal partners, but also more broadly to building more equitable partnerships (Lepore, Hall and Tandon 2021). Although we make a somewhat artificial association of broad behavioural competencies with a specific competency area, the aim is to encourage capacity development activities to address both technical and behavioural competencies in parallel.

Many competencies also require thematic and contextual knowledge – for example, on children's agency, social norms, urban neighbourhood dynamics, and supply

chains, as well as specific understanding of the leather sector in Bangladesh and the adult entertainment sector in Nepal. This thematic and contextual knowledge is critical for conducting high-quality research and providing technical support to action research processes. These core knowledge areas are not explicitly listed in the competency framework, although they also inform the design of capacity development activities.

This competency framework, agreed in October 2020, formed the starting point of an assessment¹ of the consortium's capacity, based on which capacity development plans would be elaborated.

1 'Assessment' and 'evaluation' are two closely related terms that nonetheless convey different objectives and emphases. For the purposes of this paper, 'capacity assessment' is about identifying how capacity can best be developed, recognising that a level of competency already exists; 'evaluation' seeks to determine whether capacity development has been effective against a particular benchmark.

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Section 3:

ASSESSING CAPACITY

3 ASSESSING CAPACITY

Assessing and measuring capacity is challenging because capacity is latent, only becoming apparent when actors exercise particular competencies (Brinkerhoff and Morgan 2010). One approach used in human resources management relies on supervisory relationships and performance evaluations to periodically review individual competencies, with gaps also coming to light retrospectively when evaluating the quality of outputs. Due to the consortium's partnership arrangements, with staff employed by different partner organisations, CLARISSA had to forge a different path.

Capacity evaluation and assessment were de-linked from human resources management, with the consortium investing instead in a dedicated capacity self-assessment process. The aim was to identify capacity development needs and strengths ahead of programme implementation, based on an assessment rooted in operational teams' realities linked to specific areas of work rather than consortium-led prioritisation of training needs. A self-assessment was preferred to an externally administered one, as a way to encourage reflexivity in a horizontal rather than top-down approach, supporting the intended strengths-based and learning-oriented approach. However, the self-assessment process also has limitations, which we discuss below.

DEVELOPING A SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

The consortium decided to develop a structured assessment tool, rather than a more informal assessment approach – for example, through discussions among/with implementation teams. From an evaluation perspective, a formal self-assessment is more likely to provide baseline data on consortium capacity, and allow for comparisons across country teams. As already noted, priority was given to assessing the capabilities of country teams, rather than consortium partners involved in programme management and governance, or downstream subcontractors working with the country teams, because these were the front lines of the programme becoming operational. Even within these boundaries, a formal assessment of capacity assets and needs in a programme as extensive as CLARISSA had to overcome several difficulties.

First, the competency framework features numerous behavioural and technical competencies, requiring a lengthy assessment tool if it is to be comprehensive. This length is further compounded by the level of granularity aimed at by a self-assessment. A detailed self-assessment tool can directly inform the content of capacity development activities, much like a pre-training assessment would. However, the longer the resulting assessment tool, the heavier the cognitive load on the team. In contrast, a more general assessment is easier and quicker to complete but will be less useful from a capacity development planning perspective. CLARISSA decided to aim for a quite detailed tool, but to split the assessment into two phases, restricting the first phase to the competency areas deemed most crucial to early implementation steps.

Second, although the competency framework is common to the entire programme, in reality not all competencies are equally relevant to all roles. Administrative roles, for example, do not require a detailed understanding of research methodologies. Similarly, while all roles are expected to have a basic understanding of communication and advocacy skills, expectations are much higher for communication and advocacy focal points. The consortium therefore had to decide whether the assessment would establish a common baseline, or whether the tool would be tailored to specific roles. A uniform assessment tool was preferred, as by that point the programme had experienced delays due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and it was thus not yet entirely clear how roles would play out in practice, or how these would evolve in line with adaptive management practices.

Third, assessments can be either subjective, allowing individuals to evaluate their own competencies, or objective, by testing these competencies. An objective assessment can be intimidating or overwhelming if respondents fear there may be consequences if they do not respond correctly. A subjective self-assessment is not threatening, but does not allow a benchmark against which answers can be gauged. People may, for example, feel very confident with their ability to perform certain tasks, without realising that they are making mistakes or flouting certain standards. Differences in culture, gender, and positionality can influence an individual's willingness and ability to reflect honestly on their strengths and weaknesses. There is also a difference between knowing and doing (Vallejo and Wehn 2016).

The CLARISSA assessment uses a bespoke survey that mixes both approaches: a subjective self-assessment of confidence performing specific technical skills, as well as a range of questions devised to objectively test relevant knowledge, attitudes, and skills. An attempt was made to ensure that the tool was not perceived as threatening, by including some questions that most people would be able to respond to, as a way to build confidence in people's ability to answer. Questions were developed by thematic leads at consortium level, sometimes on the basis of existing competency frameworks, and reviewed for clarity by country coordinators; to facilitate analysis of results, open-ended questions were excluded. Responses were then aggregated by country team, and results were presented in workshops, providing teams with an opportunity to reflect on their competencies, and how these could be strengthened, as a prelude to a further step to plan capacity development.

The first phase of the survey was completed by nine respondents in Nepal in December 2020, and by 50 respondents in Bangladesh in January 2021.² It covered competency areas related to operating safely, respectfully, and ethically; and conducting high-quality research.

Debriefing the first phase of the self-assessment with the country teams revealed some issues. First, despite covering only parts of the competency framework, this first phase still carried a heavy cognitive load. This suggested the need to break it down further. Some also doubted the value of including questions that most people would answer correctly, because it felt like a waste of time. Clearly, the risk of the self-assessment being perceived as threatening had been overestimated. The fact that the survey was in English posed some difficulties, as technical terms had to be explained and unpacked. Also, the internal validity of the survey may have been compromised by ambiguities in some of the questions/statements. For example, the questionnaire refers to data 'manipulation', which could be understood as either a regular step of data treatment (cleaning, anonymising), or an unethical attempt to alter the data. The tool could benefit from testing to minimise such ambiguities and ensure that it measures what it intends to measure.

On the positive side, team members reported that the self-assessment provided an opportunity for reflection and learning, sparking discussions within country teams on some of the issues covered, notably around power and

bias. In a sense, the assessment itself also constituted a capacity development activity. And, as we will see, it brought to light some important but hitherto hidden competency gaps.

The feedback received informed the development of the second part of the self-assessment tool. In particular, the survey was translated into Nepali and Bangla. As there are no open-ended questions that would have required translating answers, survey results could still be analysed as a whole by the capacity development coordinator. Paradoxically, some of the English jargon, once translated, was difficult to understand. The second phase of the survey was completed by 14 respondents in Nepal in June 2021, and by 33 respondents in Bangladesh in August 2021.

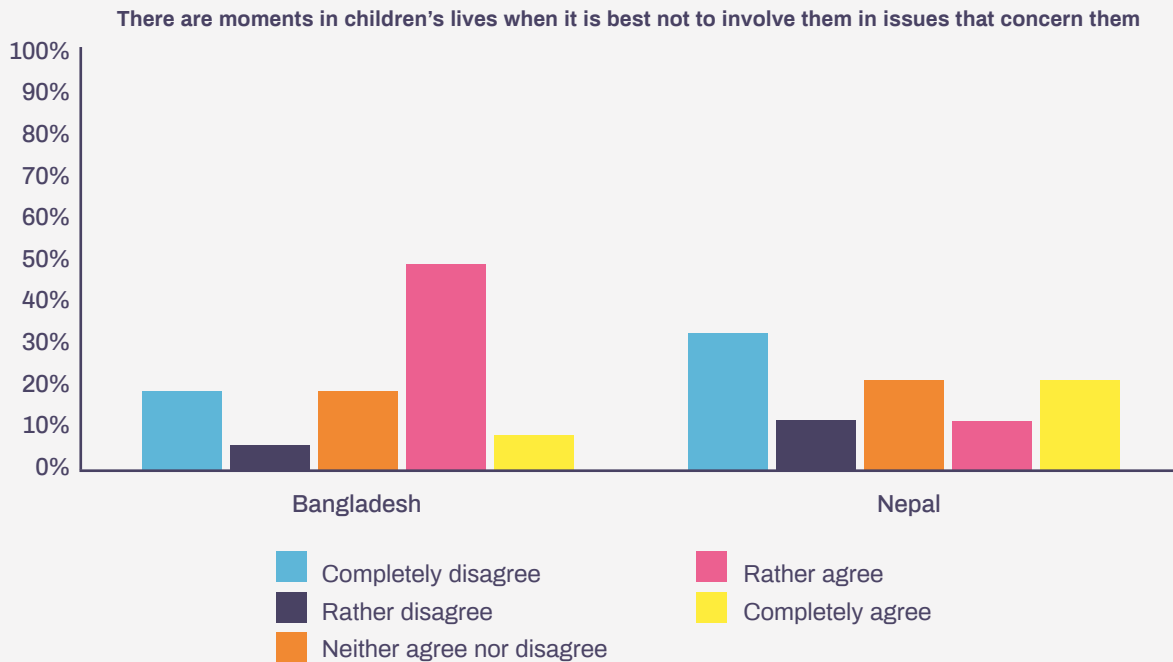
FINDINGS

An explicit focus on capacity development was justified in the programme set-up by the participatory, adaptive, and child-centred approach adopted by the CLARISSA programme. The self-assessment confirmed that these approaches are not straightforward; we begin here by reviewing some key findings around these core principles.

Participatory practices were assessed through several questions, and the teams generally scored highly on these points. Nevertheless, the self-assessment revealed some contradictions. To give one example, most respondents considered that they actively encourage others to contribute opinions in meetings, yet many also considered that if people want to say something in a meeting, it is up to them to speak up. This second opinion does not recognise that power relationships and structural barriers may make it difficult for some individuals to participate. This discrepancy was important to note, not only for how we operate as a team, but also given the importance of facilitation skills for the success of the programme. Relatedly, bias awareness varied across country teams, with many not recognising gender, age, or ethnicity as a source of power. Further discussion of these points during AARs in Bangladesh, for example, emphasised how promoting a learning culture within CLARISSA depends on individual ability and willingness to speak openly and candidly, which in turn involves navigating power dynamics, including those based on gender.

2 The self-assessment survey was also administered by the Myanmar country team in January 2021, but a military coup in February the same year disrupted the process.

Figure 2: Aggregated country team responses



Source: Authors' own. Created using project data.

Competencies related to adaptive management were measured in the second phase of the self-assessment, over a year into programme implementation. Here, too, the self-assessment revealed some confusion about what adaptive management means in practice within CLARISSA. 'Adaptability' and 'flexibility' may be synonymous in common English, but in CLARISSA, they refer to different faculties and intentions. 'Flexibility' refers to changes provoked by external circumstances – the vagaries of a worldwide pandemic comes to mind – in order to enable implementation to proceed in some form. It is an important competency, but it is different from adaptive management, which refers to a proactive process of iterative learning and adaptation based on programmatic experiences and feedback received. Similarly, many respondents placed a heavy emphasis on planning, believing that planning enables one to predict the outcome of activities, and that failure results from insufficient planning. In fact, adaptive management recognises that the complexity of the social world means that the outcome of activities is not (entirely) predictable, and that while planning can spur action, it should not be adhered to at the expense of understanding what is and is not working in practice. Encouragingly, group discussions held in December 2021, four months after the second part of the self-assessment was administered,

suggested that the role of planning in adaptive management was, by then, better understood through learning in and from action.

Assessment of child-centredness revealed divergent views, which are not necessarily problematic, but invite further discussion within the teams. For example, opinions differed significantly (across as well as within country teams) on whether or not children should always be involved in issues that concern them (see Figure 2). While there may be cases and moments when children should **not** be involved in issues that concern them, such divergence signals an opportunity to ensure that basic principles of child-centredness are widely adhered to, and to explore whether the teams are harbouring biases that influence their responses. Children's rights are well-understood in the absolute; how to apply them in practice is trickier.

In general, people are not always aware of their own capacity gaps, over-reporting some skills and qualities while under-reporting others. This is evidenced by the discrepancy between the subjective self-assessment of particular competencies, and objective assessments of the same. A case in point is informed consent: the vast majority of respondents declared themselves very confident in administering informed consent processes,

yet none answered correctly that informed consent has to be sought not only before activities, but also during and after them. Similarly, most respondents thought that informed consent always had to be obtained in writing, even though verbal consent makes more sense for illiterate populations and is, in fact, part of the CLARISSA programme guidelines and practice.

Another interesting finding emerged around research ethics. Encouragingly, key ethical principles are widely understood among implementation teams. However, people appear less confident in managing the necessary balance of interests required in applying them, generally erring on the side of caution. For example, data protection requirements are paramount for ethical and safeguarding concerns, but should be balanced with the equally important case for making research data as open, accessible, and transparent as possible. The self-assessment results instead suggest a tendency to restrict communication – for example, refraining from sharing images of research activities even when participants cannot be recognised and images thus do not constitute personal data subject to data protection rules.

LEARNING AND IMPLICATIONS

Overall, the self-assessment reveals the challenges faced by implementation teams in balancing principles and imperatives that sometimes pull in different directions – such as between planning and adaptiveness, transparency and data protection, empowerment and quality control, and inclusiveness and expediency. The choices we make, expressed through countless micro-decisions and some larger programmatic ones, ensure that the programme remains truly adaptive,

child-centred, and participatory. The importance of balancing principles and imperatives, beyond any specific knowledge or skills, should therefore not be underestimated, and is likely also influenced by organisational-level capacities.

Does the self-assessment tool build an accurate picture of the teams' capabilities? A more complete assessment would undoubtedly diversify the sources of information. CLARISSA meant to supplement this information with 'periodic engagement of the [MEL] team with stakeholders (and children in particular) to inquire in to how the implementation approach is experienced and perceived' (Apgar and Oosterhoff 2019). Such perspectives are key to a more holistic assessment of capacity strengths and weaknesses. This is being implemented through the participatory evaluation of programme activities, with feedback sessions with children as well as interviews producing new insights on how the children have experienced the implementation team. While the full data set is still being analysed, initial analysis indicates an appreciation for the care that facilitators have taken when working with children, in particular children's sense of being heard and valued.

Another weakness of the self-assessment is that its confidential nature did not enable us to identify individuals with the necessary expertise to support particular aspects of the work. The danger, then, is that these existing competencies are not properly recognised in the resulting capacity development plans. This runs counter to the asset-based approach to capacity development embraced by the programme (see previous subsection, *Who develops capacity?*). The next section discusses how the CLARISSA programme seeks to build on existing competencies.

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Section 4:

RESPONDING TO GAPS

4 RESPONDING TO GAPS

The self-assessment is not an end in itself; responding to the gaps identified is important to justify the teams' time invested in completing the assessment. As a first step, the presentation of self-assessment results to the teams can be arranged as a reflection and learning moment. CLARISSA did this with some success in December 2021 when presenting the results of the second phase of the self-assessment to the Bangladesh team. Beyond this, responding to gaps requires an ability to imagine capacity development activities beyond training, and securing the resources and time to implement these activities. This section first proposes a classification of capacity development modalities, before outlining the process adopted by CLARISSA to formulate related capacity development plans.

MODALITIES OF CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Just as learning can occur without teaching (Jarvis 2004: 42), capacity can be developed outside of formal, dedicated, explicit capacity development activities – for example, in conversations and reflections, and through practical experience. The CLARISSA programme deliberately fosters this learning culture through processes such as AARs (Apgar *et al.* 2020). Team capabilities are also developed through activities not primarily devoted to capacity development, such

as planning meetings, or where discussions and engagement between thematic leads at consortium level and implementation teams at country level can develop competencies at both ends.

Here, we focus on dedicated capacity development activities that aim to build individual competencies and team capabilities, acknowledging the subjective nature of the distinction between activities whose primary objective is capacity development, and other activities. Some meetings, for example, brought the teams together with a primary purpose of planning a next phase of activities, but discussions on how to proceed also contributed to developing capacities.

Based on an inventory of capacity development activities that took place in the CLARISSA programme between October 2020 and August 2021,³ we have clustered capacity development activities along two dimensions. The first is the individual or collective nature of capacity development activities, with a further distinction within the programme (because CLARISSA is a multi-country programme) between collective activities restricted to (parts of) a single country team, and those fostering cross-country exchanges. The second dimension pertains to the sequencing of a capacity development activity, and whether learning is meant to occur 'for' action (prior to a new implementation phase), 'in' action (during implementation), or 'from' action (after implementation).

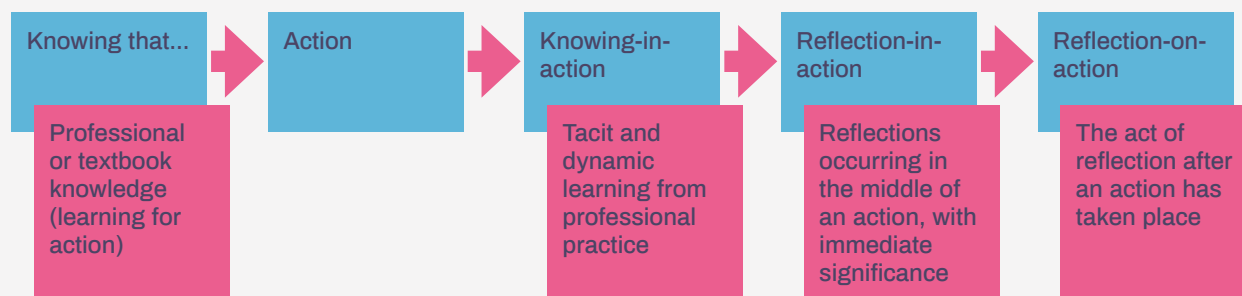
Table 2: Classification of capacity development modalities

		Participants		
		Individual	Country team	Cross-country
Sequencing	Learning for action	Resources for self-directed learning	Training	
	Learning in action	Technical backstopping	In-country pilot exercises	Cross-country information exchange
	Learning from action	Reflexive practice	Collective reflection and learning spaces	After-action reviews

Source: Authors' own.

³ This is the period covered by two country-level after-action review (AAR) cycles in February and August 2021. The inventory of capacity development activities was based on the reports from these AARs.

Figure 3: Steps of reflective practice



Source: Authors' own. Created using information from Brockbank and McGill 2003: 96–102.

Indeed, Jennings and Wargnier (2010) find that only roughly 10 per cent of learning is acquired through structured courses and programmes; 20 per cent comes from interacting with peers, while the bulk of our learning (about 70 per cent) stems from practice and experience. Capacity development activities can foster all forms of learning. Table 2 presents the resulting classification of modalities.

We recognise that the resulting modalities are not mutually exclusive, as different dimensions overlap. This is particularly the case of sequencing: both learning in and from action ultimately feed into learning for action as their aim is to improve future practice. Indeed, Zuber-Skerritt (2013: 14) defines learning for action as learning 'for future action by drawing from and adapting our learning from past experience'. Similarly, the distinction between learning in action and learning from action is thin, with reflection already happening in action, while in the process of doing something. Brockbank and McGill (2003) further unpack the process through which action can lead to learning, first through tacit experience, then immediate, explicit thought processes, to delayed meta-reflections. Figure 3 illustrates this process.

Next, we describe how each capacity development modality plays out in the CLARISSA programme.

Learning for action

'Learning for action' is about imparting new (or refreshing previous) knowledge and technical/behavioural skills that are expected to be necessary for a particular programmatic phase (such as collecting life stories, conducting narrative analysis, or setting up action research groups) as well as any other needs that may arise in the course of implementation. Two modalities appear under this heading: training, and identifying/producing resources for self-directed learning.

Resources for self-directed learning

Within CLARISSA, self-paced and self-directed learning relies on a variety of resources, such as background reading, audio-visual material (podcasts, videos), on-demand online training, existing resources from consortium partners, or programme-specific guidance documents that outline the steps that need to be taken to complete particular tasks. Self-directed learning also requires that the teams have the motivation and time to build their knowledge and capacity.

In Bangladesh, community mobilisers undertook online courses on social protection, and on psychological first aid. As an incentive, a collective element was added, as the community mobilisers who took the training were then invited to reflect on the learning as a group. Documents were also produced specifically for the programme, such as responsibility charts or flow documents, or operational guidelines for narrative analysis and action research. Handouts provided before or during training activities also constitute useful resources during programme implementation.

Training

Training activities are understood as requiring a substantial amount of time (generally more than one day, although refreshers may be shorter) for activities whose main purpose is to develop the technical and behavioural skills that will be required in an upcoming programmatic activity. These involve several members of a country team (one-on-one training is considered technical backstopping) but may also bring together members of different country teams.

In CLARISSA, an intensive schedule of online training sessions and webinars was put together in May 2020 after the Covid-19 pandemic halted or delayed all other programmatic activities, and travel restrictions prevented

in-person training. Not all training sessions combined different country teams, but when they did, participants appreciated the exchanges they had with people working in different contexts. Once activities started on the ground, further training was developed and implemented by consortium partners. This focused on specific programmatic activities, such as collecting life stories, conducting narrative analysis, facilitation, communication and advocacy, or enumeration, social protection, and case management in the case of the Bangladesh team.

Training is not inconsistent with an asset-based approach to capacity development if value is placed on inviting participants to contribute their own knowledge and experience, potentially revising programmatic approaches on this basis. A compilation of feedback gathered from training participants highlights how group discussions by the country teams are particularly appreciated as they provide opportunities for peer learning, regardless of age and hierarchy, and enable participants to explore the issues in their own language. Also, while training activities were at first initiated, designed, and facilitated by consortium partners, country teams gradually initiated an increasing number of training activities, inviting local experts to facilitate the sessions. This was the case, for example, with two training sessions on facilitation and on non-violent communication, which were organised by the Nepal team and offered by trainers from India. The Nepal team also invited a local counsellor to facilitate a workshop on stress management at the height of the second Covid-19 wave in May 2021, when many team members were grappling with pandemic-related anxiety.

Learning in action

'Learning in action' refers to capacity development activities that take place in the course of programme implementation, often with a short-term, problem-solving outlook. Clustered under this heading are one-on-one technical support, in-country pilot exercises, and cross-country exchanges.

Technical backstopping

'Technical backstopping' refers to semi-regular, one-on-one technical support and quality control, in person or in writing, between individuals in the country teams and individual advisors generally from among consortium members. In CLARISSA, such support is mainly provided for particular roles with a clear lead at consortium level, such as monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL), communications and advocacy focal points, and country

coordinators. Technical backstopping for MEL country leads is offered on an ongoing basis, often taking the form of co-design and co-facilitation of specific activities, such as designing data collection tools or facilitation plans for reflection meetings in-country. Consortium members with MEL leadership responsibilities (and therefore holding programme management roles) are the designated providers of this technical backstopping, while a consortium-level MEL team, including representatives from across all partners, offers a broader space for quality control. In this example, and as is the case in other programme areas, the MEL technical support is different from supervision and direct line management, which sits within the specific organisation.

In-country pilot exercises

Pilot exercises involve several members of a country team and aim to guide the application of technical and behavioural skills to concrete programme activities. They are generally implemented at the onset of a new phase of programming, and help refresh and contextualise theoretical learning.

In CLARISSA, to give one example, practice sessions were organised on how to collect and analyse life stories. In Nepal, when life story analysis workshops were delayed by the second Covid-19 wave in April 2021, the team used the opportunity to organise three days of simulations. Using ten real-life stories, they practised facilitation of analytical workshops, including time for group reflections on lessons learned from this exercise. This pilot session was instrumental in developing an appropriate plan.

Cross-country information exchange

Cross-country exchanges are contacts, conversations, or joint activities whose main and deliberate purpose is to compare and cross-fertilise learning between the Nepal and Bangladesh country teams (or between implementing partners in the larger Bangladesh team) during parallel implementation phases in both countries. They are generally conducted for team members doing the same role, but can also revolve around a particular activity.

In CLARISSA, cross-country exchanges were fostered through semi-regular formal campaigns and MEL meetings, and a Skype group (involving lead participatory facilitators) to share methodological advice, initially with the involvement of participatory action researchers from the consortium. Similar informal contacts are

now taking place among thematic researchers from Bangladesh and Nepal to discuss GIS (Geographic Information System) mapping, for example. As well as live exchanges, knowledge and experience are also shared between country teams through blogs and bulletin posts. Blogs have been written by country teams to exchange information and experiences around ethical issues that have arisen during action research (Kakri *et al.* 2021) or non-violent communication (Aktar *et al.* 2021).

Learning from action

'Learning from action' is related to reflective practice (Schön 1987; 1992). As Brockbank and McGill (2003: 94) note, Schön refers to this as 'professional artistry, where professionals deal with the unique, the unanticipated, the uncertain, the value conflicts and indeterminate conditions of everyday practice for which there is no "textbook" response'. Learning from action can occur individually, or in groups, and indeed both modalities are found in the CLARISSA programme.

Learning from action can be particularly important for some behavioural skills that are difficult to convey theoretically, such as awareness of implicit bias, ability to embrace ambiguity and failure, and willingness to learn. As Brockbank and McGill state (2003: 104), reflection-on-action⁴ can lead to a paradigm shift when: (1) the person 'recognises a paradigm she has been in without realising it; (2) recognises/realises there is another paradigmatic framework other than the one she is in; (3) shifts her paradigm; and (4) understands and works across paradigms'. They cite the example of a difference between espoused and in-use notions of sexism, when we declare espousing principles of gender equality and equity, but do not realise that our practice is not consistent with these principles. In CLARISSA, it is interesting, for example, that by August 2021, the Bangladesh country team reported a shift in perception of the capacity of children as they witnessed them transforming into capable facilitators through the action research process. The fact that the team became aware of this shift could indicate that previous beliefs in terms of children's agency had been challenged, further reinforced, or that team members were now better able to connect concepts and practice.

Individual reflexive practice

'Reflexive practice' refers to a conscious, deliberate effort to think about events and generate insights from them. In CLARISSA, this is encouraged through journaling, particularly for researchers and documenters involved in narrative analysis and action research. In Nepal and Bangladesh, country teams were given a template to guide reflections, which are recorded daily, on an individual basis, during narrative analysis and action research groups. Reflexive journals can be accessed by everyone in the team. Journaling is an unfamiliar activity for many team members, and requires discipline. In Bangladesh, the community mobilisers team also use reflexive journals to record their learning and insights. These remain private, although team members are invited to share key insights with the rest of the team during monthly meetings if they feel comfortable doing so.

In a recent reflection session on documentation in Bangladesh, some team members expressed frustration with the use of templates for journaling, while others found the template useful for recording important insights in the early phases of the programme. Monitoring progress with this reflection tool and how it is used by country teams will be important to provide further support for individual reflexive practice.

Collective reflection and learning spaces

According to Brockbank and McGill (2003: 101), individual reflection is essential but not necessarily sufficient; critical reflective learning is more likely in dialogue with others.

Collective reflection and learning spaces are a diverse type of capacity development activity relying primarily on peer support. They generally foster learning from action by stepping back from programming and collectively reflecting on learning that emerges from practice. Some sessions also aim to develop new capacities (learning for action). Examples of collective reflection and learning spaces for CLARISSA in Nepal include Friday learning sessions and review and reflection meetings. In Bangladesh, afternoon learning sessions were initiated for community mobilisers during the Covid-19 lockdown when the team was not allowed to go into the field. Community mobilisers would use the time to participate in online training sessions and reflect together on their learning. Individual community mobilisers also took the lead in facilitating conversations in their areas of

⁴ Brockbank and McGill use 'reflection-on-action' to refer to the act of reflection after the action has taken place. See Figure 3.

expertise, such as disability inclusion, casework, and social protection and Covid-19, among others.

Activity-level reflection meetings, dubbed 'mini AARs', are a more structured process within the broader MEL architecture, but also represent a collective reflection space from the point of view of capacity development. They are implemented after important programmatic phases, such as the census conducted in Bangladesh by the social protection team, or specific steps in the life story collection (as discussed earlier in relation to piloting).

After-action reviews

The most obvious 'learning from action' activities in the CLARISSA programme that bring together country teams are consortium-level after-action reviews (AARs). Indeed, the original programme design stipulated that 'capacity development will be a standing agenda item within the AARs, ensuring that collectively we take the time to identify any new or ongoing capacity challenges and take a strengths-based approach to overcoming them' (Apgar and Oosterhoff 2019). Consortium-level AARs are scheduled yearly after two cycles of country-level AARs. The most recent of these two-day meetings, in August 2021, opened with a summary of key learning that has emerged from the most recent Nepal and Bangladesh AARs.

TO PLAN OR NOT TO PLAN?

As illustrated above, a wide range of capacity development activities are taking place across the CLARISSA programme in an organic way, signalling that its reflection and learning culture is strong and embedded throughout activities. Is there value, then, in more comprehensive planning of capacity development?

From cyclical to complex capacity development

Taking a systemic approach to capacity development, Brinkerhoff and Morgan (2010) consider that capacity development can be planned in advance, can be incremental, or emergent. In their view, planning capacity development is appropriate when there is consensus about overall direction, when objectives are clear, where resources are available, and where control can be exerted. In less stable contexts, when strategies are difficult to clarify, an incremental approach of small steps, trial and error, learning, adaptiveness, and flexibility might be more appropriate. Finally, capacity

development is emergent when it results from a largely undirected process of collective action. Such emergence can be fostered by nurturing relationships and seizing opportunities as they arise.

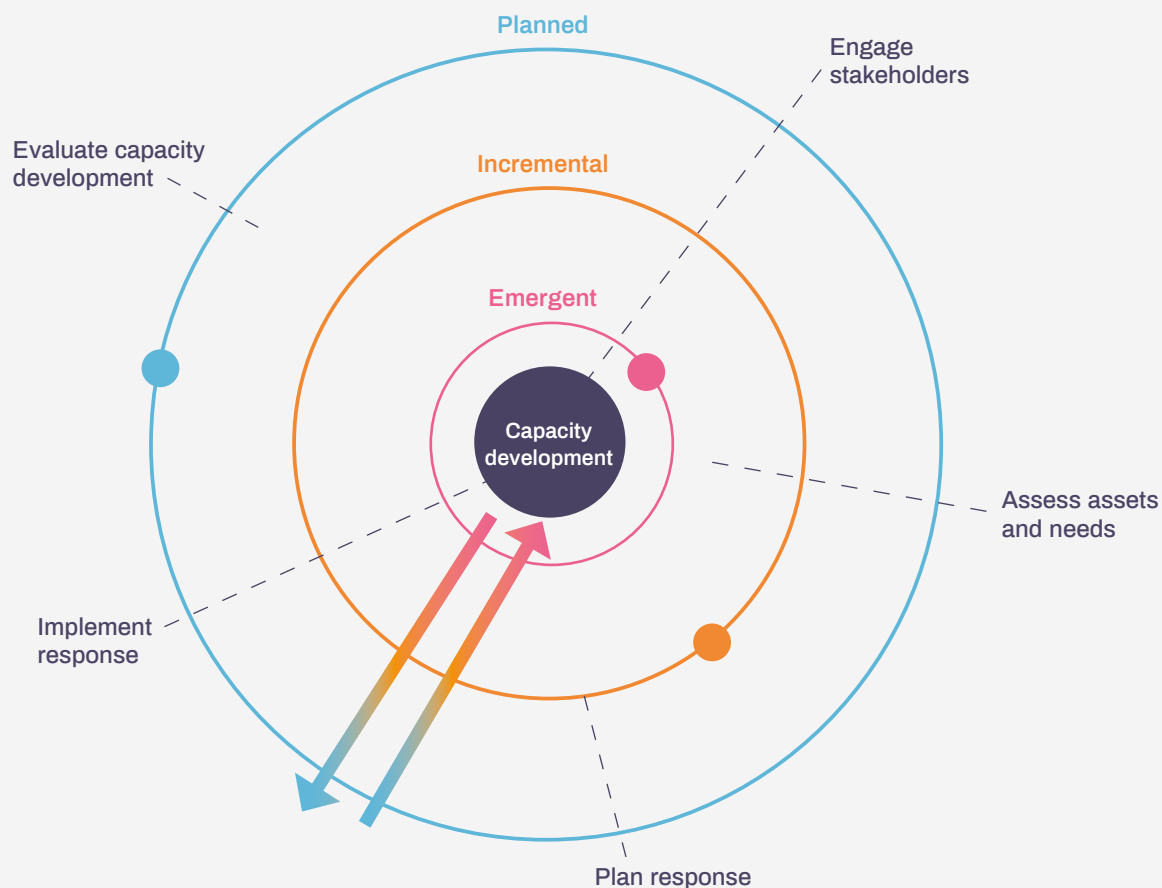
CLARISSA originally tabled a planned approach to capacity development such that capacity was to be assessed during the programme set-up phase, before the beginning of implementation of action research and social protection activities. The rationale behind this plan was that '[it] is important to understand what the capacities and training needs are before any capacity building is proposed to enhance performance' (Apgar and Oosterhoff 2019). This assessment would then lead to the formulation of a capacity development plan that would then be implemented, evaluated, and reviewed together with the stakeholders following a fresh assessment of capacities.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, reality did not allow the programme to implement these steps in neat sequence. The pandemic upended implementation plans, and drove management to fast-track training activities even though capacity was yet to be assessed. Indeed, some competency gaps could be assumed even in the absence of a formal assessment of capacity. In this sense, capacity development became incremental rather than planned. Similarly, once the results from the self-assessment became available, thematic leads, who helped develop the assessment tool, were able to factor the analysis of results into their workplans. As new individuals came on board at different moments in the programme, in part also due to staff turnover, a more staggered approach to capacity development was in order. A focus on coaching and mentoring spread capacity development in time, and enabled the programme to also consider changes in behaviour and practice. Eventually, as implementation progressed, many unplanned capacity development activities emerged from the country teams.

CLARISSA's experience thus challenges the cyclical approach advocated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2009). Brinkerhoff and Morgan (2010: 5) also note that in real life, capacity development generally combines planned, incremental, and emergent approaches. In our experience, emergent, incremental, and planned capacity development are like three parallel orbits gravitating around a common objective of capacity development. Figure 4 illustrates the revised capacity development cycle.

In the fastest, emergent cycle, stakeholder engagement is a continuous process of cooperation and discussion

Figure 4: Complex capacity development process



Source: Authors' own.

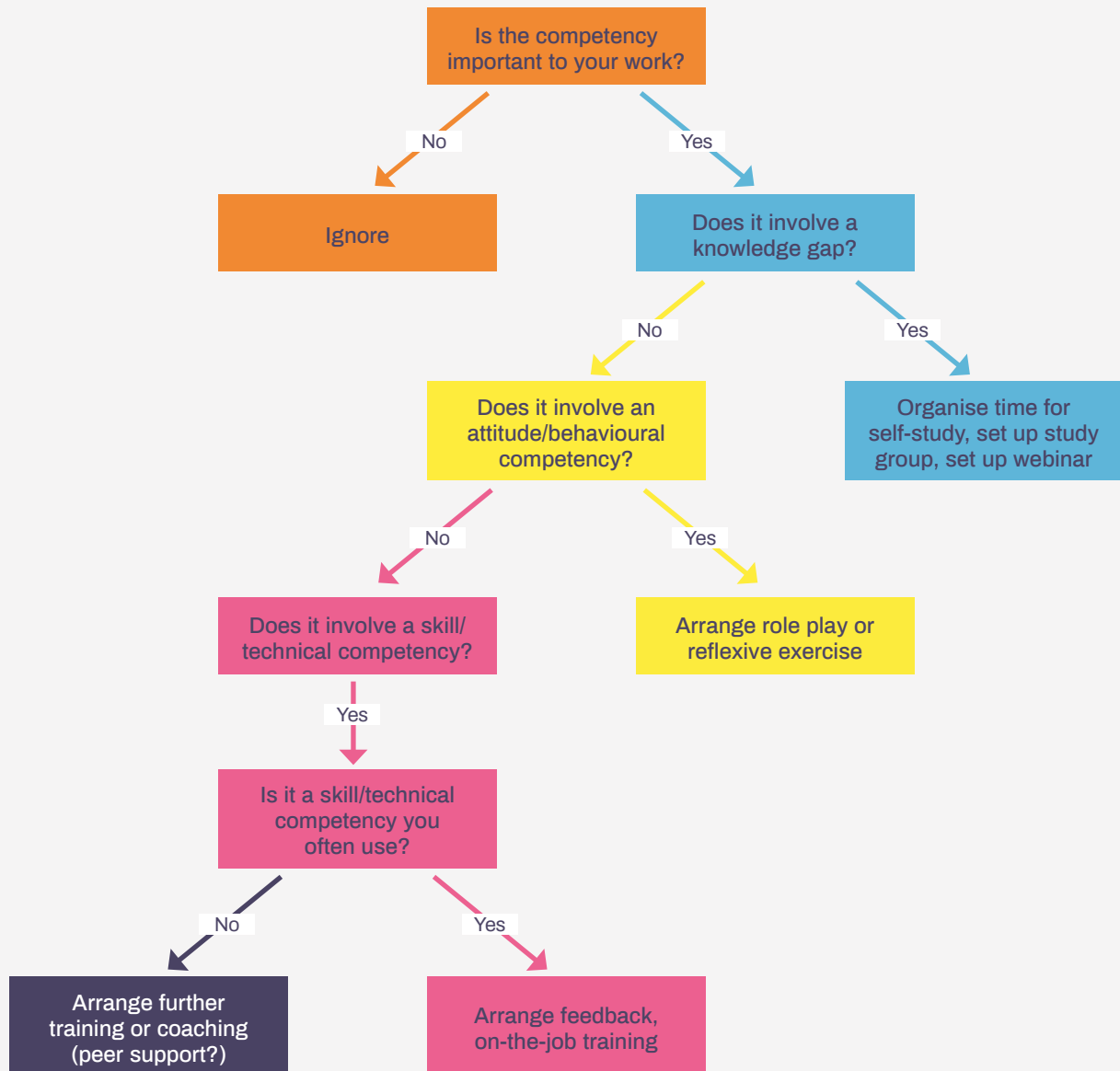
among implementation teams, which in itself already develops capacity. These interactions, as well as sporadic input and exchanges with management and consortium leads (including when controlling the quality of outputs), then feed up into more formal, incremental assessment of capacity assets and needs, and the development of responses. This could be observed, for example, when thematic research work developed beyond original plans, and led to a fresh mapping of the teams' competencies in this area. The planned level of capacity development has the slowest of these cycles, starting from the formulation of a competency framework ('Engage stakeholders') followed by the development of the comprehensive self-assessment tool and process presented earlier in this paper.

A further difference is that the sequencing of the capacity development steps in the planned cycle must be responsive to feedback from the emergent and incremental cycles. Evaluation of capacity development

at emergent and incremental levels can, for example, precede planning in the outer, planned level. Relatedly, in shorter cycles in particular, several steps may be collapsed into one. In the incremental cycle, for example, assessment and planning will likely be merged in a single step.

The cyclical conception of capacity development includes a formal evaluation of it, seeking to identify links or pathways from capacity development activities to acquired capacity, and eventually social change (Gruskin *et al.* 2015; McEvoy *et al.* 2016; Vallejo and Wehn 2016; Aantjes, Burrows and Armstrong 2021). Vallejo and Wehn (2016) warn that evaluation of capacity development is difficult in the short term. It requires capturing intangible individual and social transformations, and recognising subtle distinctions between what individuals know and what they do – when ultimately it is the latter that matters.

Figure 5: Capacity development planning flowchart (February 2021)



Source: Authors' own.

In CLARISSA, evaluation of capacity development is linked to the programme evaluation design and the explicit objective of learning from the programme's innovative ways of working in partnership. In practice, learning documented through the AARs at different levels, as well as feedback received from training participants and action research groups, become the main data streams. Several authors concur in proposing outcome harvesting as an appropriate methodology to cast the net widely enough to capture unintended benefits and unforeseen consequences. This methodology has indeed been applied with some success to evaluate the

programme described by Aantjes *et al.* (2021), and will inform the outcome evaluation within CLARISSA.

Formulating capacity development plans

Comprehensive planning does retain its relevance in this systemic approach, particularly if done in a participatory manner. It punctuates the capacity development cycle with moments of reflection where the teams can take a more holistic look at gaps, including behavioural competencies not associated with a specific technical

step. It can foster the use of a broader variety of capacity development activities, drawing inspiration from activities implemented elsewhere in the consortium. It can ensure the buy-in of consortium members called to support particular capacity development modalities, such as training or coaching, and avoid duplication of activities. And finally, from a systemic perspective, it can alter initial conditions, setting the programme onto a new course (McEvoy *et al.* 2016).

The CLARISSA programme endeavoured to formulate country-level capacity development plans. After the first phase of the self-assessment had been completed, a two-hour session during the February 2021 country-level AARs sought to engage the teams in a participatory exercise to formulate a capacity development plan based on the results of the self-assessment. In order to encourage the teams to think beyond training, a flowchart was distributed, proposing different responses to gaps in knowledge, attitudes, or skills (Figure 5). Working in small groups, the teams were invited to first identify the main competency gaps revealed by the self-assessment, disaggregate these into knowledge, attitudes, and skills, and then suggest capacity development modalities to address these gaps.

The exercise proved problematic. The difficulty in distinguishing between knowledge, attitudes, and skills made the flowchart an awkward, overly abstract starting point for this reflection, certainly in the limited time provided. Also, using the self-assessment as sole input for the formulation of a capacity development plan is inadequate as it ignores emergent and incremental capacity development activities that would have in part already responded to some of the gaps. Finally, as they

were experimenting with this step for the first time, the teams lacked clarity and consensus on the format and scope of the plans they were meant to elaborate.

Nevertheless, the Nepal team later prepared a one-year capacity development plan based on various discussions held during the AAR, which notably led to them holding weekly learning sessions with an initial focus on disability inclusion, MEL, and child labour. This plan was roughly followed, until programme implementation focused the team's energy and attention on life story collection and narrative analysis.

In Bangladesh, the team conducted a retrospective assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of different capacity development modalities in February 2022. These modalities, rather than gaps in competencies, were then the starting point of a planning process. Participants were invited to reflect on how these different modalities can support each competency area, based not only on the self-assessment but also on a mapping of capacity development activities already implemented, in progress, or planned. The capacity development plan was then structured along a simplified version of these modalities: (1) one-off learning and sharing sessions relying mainly on peer support; (2) more in-depth training; (3) channels of communication for cross-country and consortium-level exchanges; and (4) a directory of in-country or consortium-level resource persons on particular topics for occasional technical backstopping. The advantage of this process is that it enabled the programme to highlight and draw on the rich expertise already present in the team, consistent with the asset-based philosophy of capacity development in CLARISSA.

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Section 5:

CONCLUSION

5 CONCLUSION

The participatory and adaptive nature of the CLARISSA programme and the constant changes in context require the teams to acquire new knowledge and capabilities throughout implementation, and perhaps unlearn some previously held competencies, such as using logframes for monitoring and evaluation. This warrants capacity development being an integrated component of such programmes, although doing so is not straightforward. Team members are eager to learn and share, but the question remains of how structured and planned this process should be, and how to embed it in a meaningful and efficient way throughout implementation.

In this paper, we have shown that capacity development operates simultaneously at different paces: a fast, emergent cycle; a more progressive, incremental cycle; and a slow, planned cycle. We argue that the planned cycle plays an important role in a complex, adaptive programme. A comprehensive capacity self-assessment can help team members question underlying assumptions (values) and behavioural skills, while providing a clear picture of a team's competencies at a point in time. Due to its time-consuming nature, the self-assessment was conducted in the slowest cycle. Comprehensive capacity development plans, then, can complement activities already implemented in the emergent and incremental cycles, identifying and filling gaps, disseminating learning, and countering the risk of duplication and 'reinventing the wheel'. Planning capacity development in an adaptive programme provides a scaffolding in terms of time, resources, and legitimacy that sustains adaptiveness.

Like other aspects of programme implementation, capacity development has to adapt both to external factors and internal learning. In CLARISSA, obvious adaptations to the pace and intensity of capacity development activities are related to the pandemic: as movement restrictions halted field activities, more attention could be given to training and capacity development. The substance of capacity development has to be synchronised with programmatic phases. Capacity development also depends on staff retention or

turnover: where teams remain largely the same, capacity development can more easily be cumulative, and venture into more specialised skills. The Nepal team is mitigating risks related to staff turnover by opening training activities not only to staff currently involved in the programme, but also to a small set of individuals to which certain tasks (such as documentation) are occasionally outsourced. This means that should they need to, the team can draw on individuals already familiar with the basic competencies required for programme implementation.

This conceptualisation of capacity development is currently biased towards individual competencies within country teams and could be masking implicit views of information and knowledge flowing top-down (which would be contrary to the action research ethos of the programme). In CLARISSA, team capabilities, as well as broader consortium capacity, are assessed separately through a partnership survey and a rubric exercise (Apgar *et al.* 2020). The underlying assumption that the development of individual competencies translates into greater team capabilities, and from there to programme capacity, should be questioned in the next phase of implementation. We did find that collective capacity development modalities provide team-building opportunities. However, as we have argued in this paper, each level of capacity development is more than the sum of its parts, perhaps warranting more deliberate scaling up of individual learning to collective intelligence. Gaps remain: for example, while in-country implementation teams are in the spotlight, partners at consortium level also form a team whose capabilities can be assessed and developed. Also, this paper does not address the enabling environment, at organisational level, which allows individuals to fully utilise their competencies. Such organisational dynamics largely fall outside the remit of the consortium, but their impact cannot be underestimated. These gaps and inherent biases should inform CLARISSA's next phase of capacity development work, thus helping to move closer to the aspiration of seeing capacity development as a reflexive and ongoing process embedded throughout the programme.

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CLARISSA works by co-developing with stakeholders practical options for children to avoid engagement in the worst forms of child labour in Bangladesh and Nepal.

The participatory processes which underpin the programme are designed to generate innovation from the ground which can sustainably improve the lives of children and their families.

The programme's outputs are similarly co-designed and collaboratively produced to enhance local ownership of the knowledge, and to ensure that our research uptake and engagement strategy is rooted in the direct experience of the people most affected on the ground.