



RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE PAPER 2

DESIGNING CONTRIBUTION ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPATORY PROGRAMMING TO TACKLE THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOUR

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ABOUT THIS RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE PAPER

This Research and Evidence Paper presents the theory-based and participatory evaluation design of the Child Labour: Action-Research-Innovation in South and South-Eastern Asia (CLARISSA) programme. The evaluation is embedded in emergent Participatory Action Research with children and other stakeholders to address the drivers of the worst forms of child labour (WFCL). The report describes the use of contribution analysis as an overarching approach, with its emphasis on crafting, nesting and iteratively reflecting on causal theories of change. It illustrates how hierarchically-nested impact pathways lead to specific evaluation questions and mixing different evaluation methods in response to these questions, critical assumptions, and agreement on causal mechanisms to be examined in depth. It also illustrates how realist evaluation can be combined with contribution analysis to deeply investigate specific causal links in the theory of change. It reflects on learning from the use of causal hotspots as a vehicle for mixing methods. It offers considerations on how to navigate relationships and operational trade-offs in making methodological choices to build robust and credible evidence on how, for whom, and under what conditions participatory programming can work to address complex problems such as child labour.

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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.

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ACRONYMS

AAR after action review

CIMO context, intervention, mechanism and outcome

FCDO Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

LSC&A life story collection and analysis

M&E monitoring and evaluation

MEL monitoring, evaluation and learning

PAR Participatory Action Research

SAR Systemic Action Research

WFCL worst forms of child labour

Section 1:

INTRODUCTION

1 INTRODUCTION

Child Labour: Action-Research-Innovation in South and South-Eastern Asia (CLARISSA) is a five-year participatory evidence- and innovation-generation programme, funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), initiated in 2019. Designed as an Action Research programme, it aims 'to use research to understand the dynamics which drive the worst forms of child labour (WFCL) and through the process to generate participatory innovations which help toward shifting these underlying dynamics and mitigating their worst effects' (Burns, Apgar and Raw 2021: 11). The rationale underpinning its Action Research design is the lack of understanding – particularly through children's lived experiences – of the complex underlying drivers of harmful work, coupled with the lack of evidence on which interventions work to reduce them (Apgar and Burns 2021; Oosterhoff *et al.* 2018; Idris, Oosterhoff and Pocock 2020). The CLARISSA programme represents a unique opportunity to include children's lived experiences, both to improve understanding of the drivers of WFCL and to develop appropriate responses (Miljeteig 2000; Imoh and Okyere 2020; Sändig, Von Bernstorff and Hasenclever 2018).

The programme's focus on participatory evidence-gathering, and its commitment to child-centred and safe programming, necessitates ongoing and emergent programme design. During the first year of implementation, scoping activities and literature and evidence reviews, together with the setting up of in-country operational teams, led to the identification of urban locations for intervening through Participatory Action Research (PAR) and a social protection pilot. In Dhaka, Bangladesh, the programme is focusing on the leather sector, and in Kathmandu, Nepal, on the adult entertainment sector – both of which have high prevalence of WFCL.¹ This early scoping enabled us to define overarching research questions on the following: the dynamics that drive supply/human chains to employ children; urban neighbourhood dynamics that mediate the pathways that children take into child

labour; and identifying leverage points to shift these underlying dynamics (see Burns *et al.* 2021 for details). As engagement with children and other stakeholders (including their parents, guardians and employers) is expanded in the current participatory phase of the programme, participants are themselves defining entry points for interventions (such as children in Action Research groups focusing on the relationship between family breakdown and pathways into child labour).

As already described in Apgar *et al.* (2020a), responding to emergent programme design, embracing the systemic and complex nature of WFCL and acknowledging the dearth of evidence about what works, creates both an opportunity and a challenge. The opportunity is to use evaluation within the programme to understand how the interventions are implemented (implementation research) and why they work differently in different contexts for different stakeholders (evaluation research). The challenges with building and using such theory-based² (e.g. Rogers and Weiss 2007) and complexity-aware³ (e.g. Gates *et al.* 2021) evaluation designs are twofold. On the one hand, there are technical challenges in deciding an appropriate mix of methods that respond to specific evaluation questions to ensure credibility and confidence in conclusions that can be drawn. On the other hand, methodological choices are also political decisions calling for appreciation and negotiation of the different values held by different stakeholders (implementation teams, evaluation experts, the funder, policymakers) and their diverse learning needs. We propose that contribution analysis, with its iterative use of theories of change (Apgar, Hernandez and Ton 2020b; Ton 2021) and a focus on identifying and working with nested 'causal hotspots',⁴ is a useful framework for navigating these challenges while embracing the opportunity.

In this research and evidence paper, our intention is to bring to life our evaluation design process, showing how we are navigating and negotiating methodological

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- 1 Originally the programme also planned to work in Myanmar, where scoping activities identified the waste and fishing sectors in Yangon and the Hlaing Thar Yar neighbourhood as possible intervention areas, but due to a reduction in FCDO funding in 2019, coupled with the military coup in February 2021, Myanmar activities have not continued.
 - 2 Theory-based evaluation refers to evaluation approaches that explicitly use a theory of change to guide analysis of if and how an intervention has achieved results.
 - 3 Complexity-aware evaluation refers to evaluation approaches and methods that are suited to evaluation when cause-and-effect relationships are not well understood at the outset due to non-linear system dynamics, and emphasise learning as emergent change unfolds.
 - 4 The concept of causal hotspots builds on John Mayne's work on 'nested' theories of change and has been described in a CDI blog series [Finding and using causal hotspots: a practice in the making](#).

choices to build a coherent and robust design. Given the necessarily iterative nature of our design and implementation processes, we describe the design as it stands at the time of writing, with the programme in full implementation.⁵ While the macro designs of all programme interventions have broadly been agreed, different processes and activities are at different stages of participatory design and implementation. Consequently, in some sections, we share the design we are yet to operationalise – one that is forward looking – while in others, we report on processes that have already been completed – that is, backward looking. We discuss how crafting and nesting theories of change leads to methodological choices and mixing of different evaluation methods in response to specific evaluation questions, critical assumptions, and definition of the

causal mechanisms we will examine. First, we introduce contribution analysis as an overarching approach and reflect on what constitutes evidence within it, recognising diverse starting points. We then discuss the programme-level theory of change and the high-level pathways to impact that it articulates, as well as the evaluation questions that frame the research. In subsequent sections we summarise the design and methods that respond to specific programme activities organised within the three pathways, spending more time on the first pathway linked to the two main interventions of the programme (where most budget is allocated). We conclude by discussing the use of causal hotspots to support methodological choices, and offer considerations for others building evaluation designs for participatory programmes implemented at scale.

5 At the time of writing the programme was facing some uncertainty regarding full budget due to the reduction in UK Aid funding and strategic review within the FCDO.

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Section 2:

**BUILDING ON
DIVERSITY WITH
CONTRIBUTION
ANALYSIS**

2 BUILDING ON DIVERSITY WITH CONTRIBUTION ANALYSIS

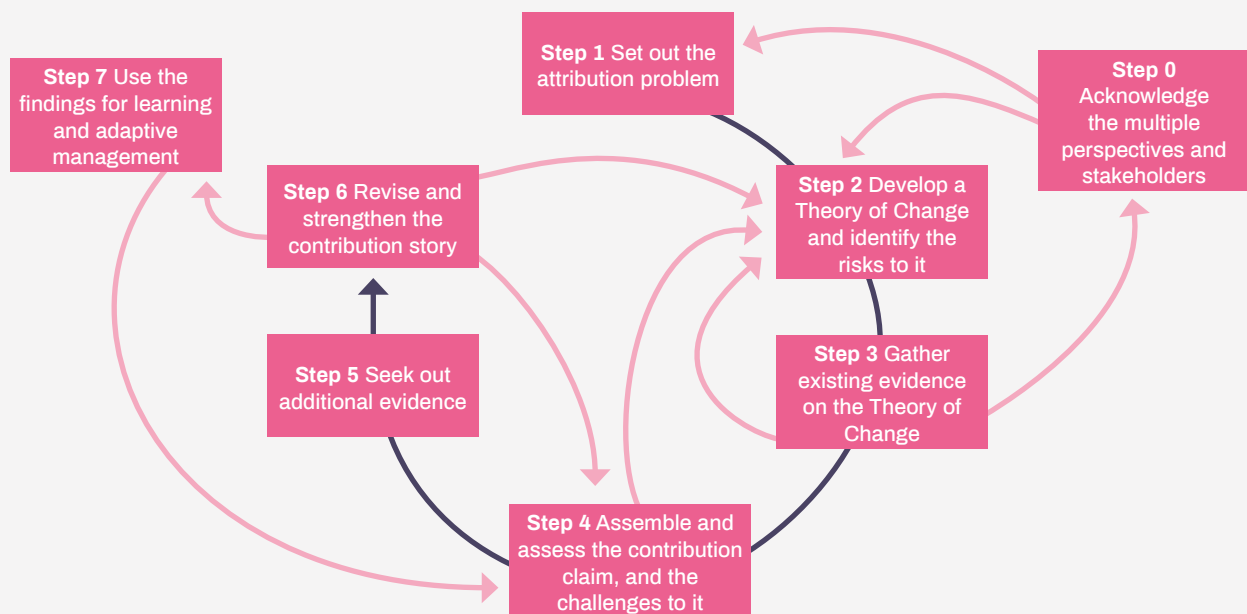
Recognition of the systemic nature of WFCL, coupled with the dearth of evidence of the lived experience of pathways into harmful work, led us to build an evaluation research agenda for the CLARISSA programme. We wanted to understand, firstly, if and how change is unfolding for whom, and secondly, how programme activities can help tackle the drivers of WFCL (Apgar *et al.* 2019). We use contribution analysis as the overarching evaluation approach. We expand on the original methodology established by Mayne (2001) to highlight iterative use of theory of change and acknowledge multiple perspectives as central to contribution analysis (Ton 2021). Figure 1 illustrates this expanded view of contribution analysis with eight steps that we will refer to throughout this paper to illustrate its iterative nature.

As a theory-based evaluation approach, contribution analysis aims to refine and/or build theory on specific relevant causal pathways and assumptions about movement from outputs to outcomes to impact. Rather than focusing solely on evaluating intended pathways to impact, we use evaluation research to explain how

and why (intended and unexpected) causal pathways take shape, within which contexts, and for whom. This ability of the design to capture emergent change supports the participatory nature of the programme itself. Iterative use of theory of change has been shown to support learning in adaptive programmes with multiple interventions implemented in a diversity of contexts (Apgar *et al.* 2020b). The starting conditions for using contribution analysis in CLARISSA are promising, given the adaptive nature of the programme, implemented by partners from across the research and implementation sectors who share a commitment to bringing their diverse experiences and ways of valuing learning and evidence-generation to reflexively learn through implementation (Widmer *et al.* 2022).

We began by building a programme theory of change collaboratively with all partners (Step 0 and Step 1). The resulting theory of change diagram (Figure 2) has an accompanying narrative describing three high-level pathways through which programme activities are theorised to lead to outcomes and eventually to impact.⁶

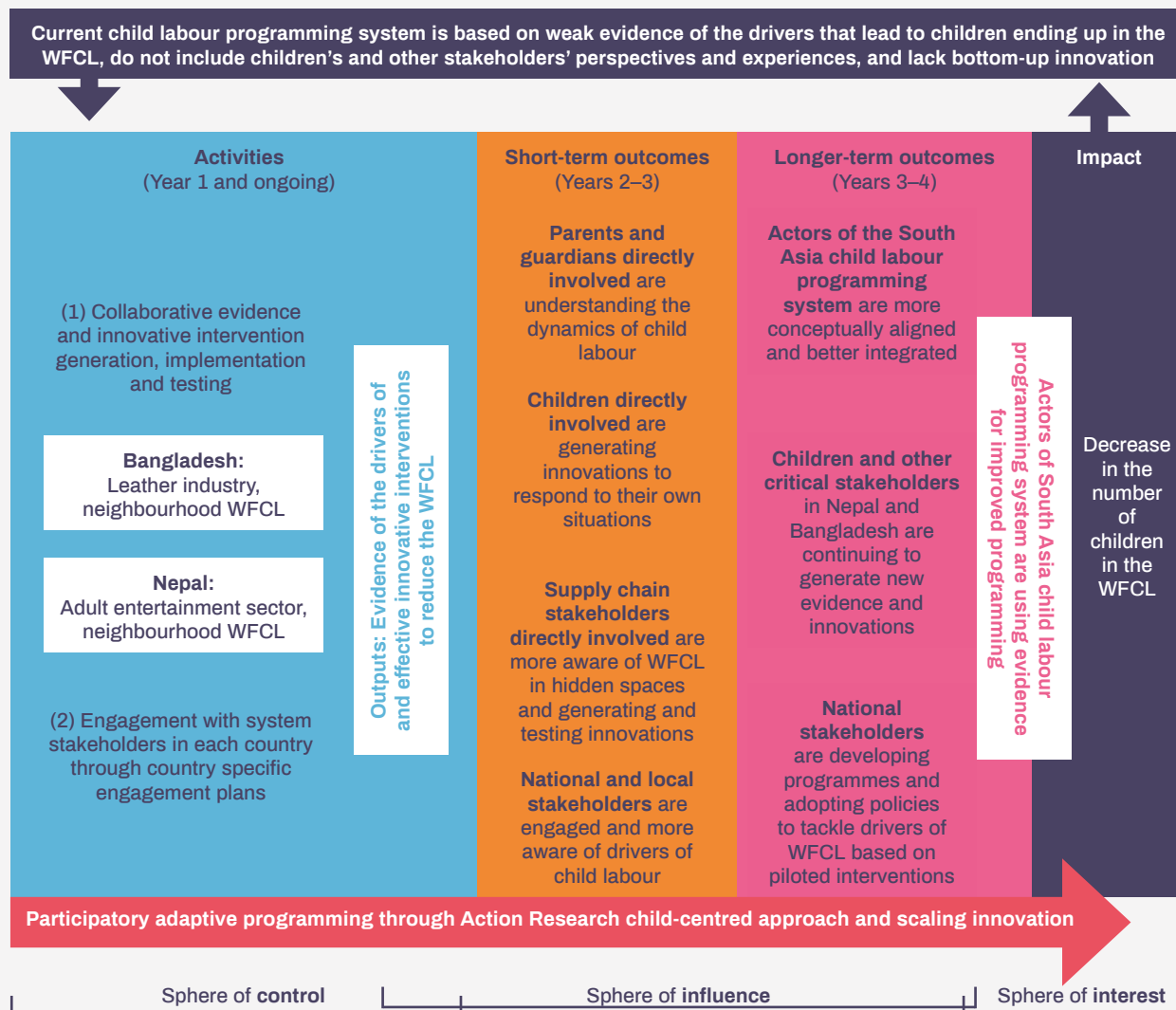
Figure 1: The eight steps of learning-oriented contribution analysis with feedback loops



Source: Authors' own. Adapted from Ton (2021) with permission.

6 See Apgar and Snijder (2020) for further details.

Figure 2: Programme-wide theory of change



Source: Authors' own. Adapted from Apgar and Snijder (2020).

Theory of change narrative: Through working in selected sectors and specific neighbourhoods in each country, three interrelated pathways will support movement from activities to short- and long-term outcomes in order to influence child labour programming of national and other regional stakeholders in South Asia and Southeast Asia to be more child-centred and focused on the underlying drivers of children ending up in WFCL.

Pathway 1: Evidence-generation, innovative intervention design, implementation and testing with children, their guardians and other stakeholders in specific sectors and neighbourhoods to address underlying drivers of WFCL.

Pathway 2: Engagement and advocacy activities with and by children and with other stakeholders – including policymakers and other civil society actors – in each country will use CLARISSA-generated evidence to advocate for shifts in practices and policies that will, in the long term, reduce the number of children in WFCL.

Pathway 3: Using a participatory adaptive management approach to the CLARISSA programme, delivered through effective partnership working within and across countries, will enable learning from the ground to inform ongoing programming, ensuring that it is meeting stakeholders' needs and in turn supports effective evidence-generation and innovation.

Box 1: Initial CLARISSA evaluation and learning questions

Overarching evaluation question: **How, in what contexts and for whom can effective innovations to tackle the worst forms of child labour be generated and how can they be scaled to reduce the worst forms of child labour?**

Process learning questions:

- 1 In what ways can multi-stakeholder participatory processes generate innovations that impact on the worst forms of child labour? How do they work and for whom do they work? How can they be scaled?**
- 2 What does a child-centred approach look like in the context of a large-scale innovation programme? How can it be operationalised in relation to child labour and how can it contribute to the reduction of the worst forms of child labour?**
- 3 How does the participatory adaptive management approach contribute to more effective programming in the context of an innovation- and evidence-generating programme?**

Source: Apgar *et al.* 2019.

Deliberations at this stage engaged with the critical questions: **What should the overall focus of the programme evaluation be, what would be measured, and what would be explained through the programme's evaluation research?** Development of the evaluation and operational learning questions alongside the original theory of change involved all partners, responding to their diverse needs (see Box 1). At this early stage, there was already agreement on the desire to learn about the programme process innovations – being adaptive and child-centred. Yet, some partners had little prior experience with contribution analysis or evaluation as a research endeavour, and some held on to assumptions that evaluation would be framed around upward accountability only and measuring predefined impact targets. These discussions were, at times, somewhat tense, particularly as they included the funder, and partners with operational responsibilities in-country were naturally concerned about responding to national accountability demands that require predefined activity and output targets. The innovation and Action Research framing of the programme were useful reminders of the potential to use evaluation as a research endeavour rather than a measurement tool only, and this was seen as an exciting opportunity for all partners to learn together through the process of co-design described in this paper.

Detailing the theory of change along the spheres of control, influence and interest proved to be a useful framework to help reach agreement on the appropriate

focus – to understand the programme contributions to outcomes within the sphere of influence. This does not mean that the desired end impact of improved livelihoods and working conditions for children is not a motivating driver, but rather, that as an innovation programme, we cannot *a priori* know if and how end impact will be achieved. As the overarching evaluation question indicates, as innovations emerge through implementation of participatory interventions, the evaluation will then focus on how they might be scaled to reach the desired end impact through specific scaling pathways.

With this agreed starting point at a programme level, it was possible to then detail the next level of specific activities to operationalise the three pathways in the two countries of operation. As Mayne (2015) discusses, a causal theory of change sits below, or nested within, a summary theory of change to detail the specific steps along the causal pathway. There are multiple ways in which theories of change can be nested; as Davies (2018) suggests, they can be nested hierarchies in which an activity fits within a higher-level pathway, which fits within a higher-level theory of change, or heterarchies, in which an activity might contribute to more than one outcome. In CLARISSA, our approach to nesting theories of change follows a broadly hierarchical logic – detailing within each of the higher-level pathways the specific activities and interventions that will be implemented in particular geographies. At the intervention level, then, the causal pathways through which outcomes and impact will

be generated for specific stakeholders can be described. In the next section, we show how the evaluation design has been refined through detailing these nested pathways and identifying key assumptions and causal hotspots within them (Step 2 contribution analysis); how existing

evidence has been gathered (Step 3 contribution analysis); and how specific contribution claims (Step 4 contribution analysis) are now shaping the empirical research strategy.

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Section 3:

**DETAILING NESTED
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3 DETAILING NESTED PATHWAYS AND DEFINING CAUSAL HOTSPOTS

The use of existing and programme-generated evidence (through scoping studies and evidence reviews) allowed us to zoom in and focus on specific causal hotspots to identify where more evidencing is needed. We use the term ‘hotspot’ to describe areas within the causal pathway where evidence is weak or contested, and/or where there is particular interest by the evaluation stakeholders (which include the implementing partners and the funder). We have found that this is a useful way to decide where to focus evaluation energy and resources. The hotspots, therefore, specify the areas where evaluation questions are then defined by the programme team overall and with stakeholders at activity levels. These questions, in turn, inform the evaluation research design, which is necessarily a mix of approaches and methods as they fit with the specific questions. This approach to mixing methods is in line with the widely acknowledged need to select designs that are appropriate to respond to the questions and consider the attributes of the intervention (Stern *et al.* 2012; HM Treasury 2020).

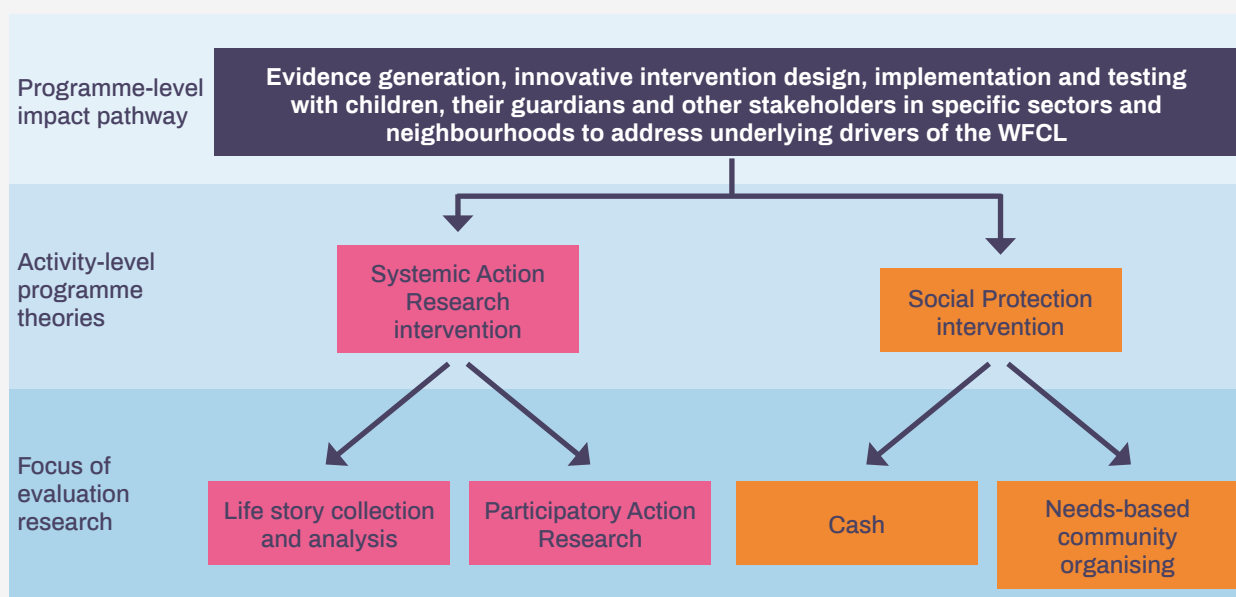
We structure the design around the three pathways, focusing first on the two largest programme interventions generating evidence and innovation through Systemic Action Research (SAR) and a social protection pilot

(providing more detail of this most important pathway); second, we describe the evaluation design of the engagement and advocacy pathway; and third, we detail the pathway focusing on evaluating the process innovations on adaptive management and partnership working. An overview is shown in Table 1 and illustrates the resulting methodological bricolage of the full design, which is necessary when working in conditions of complexity (Patton 2019; Hargreaves 2021).

PATHWAY 1: EVALUATING PARTICIPATORY EVIDENCE- AND INNOVATION-GENERATION

The first pathway of the programme’s theory of change hypothesises how its **participatory evidence-generation and development and testing of innovative interventions with children, their guardians and other stakeholders in specific sectors and neighbourhoods will address the underlying drivers of the worst forms of child labour**. Two main intervention modalities will be tested through implementation and include specific components within them that are the focus of evaluation research (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Levels of design for two main intervention modalities



Source: Authors' own.

Table 1: Overview of impact pathways, intervention modalities, evaluation questions and approaches/methods/tools

Pathway	Core intervention modality evaluated	Evaluation and learning questions	Key evaluation approaches/methods/tools	Section in paper
1 Evidence- and innovation-generation	Systemic Action Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What outcomes does participating in life story collection and analysis processes contribute for children? • How, in what contexts and for whom does it generate these outcomes? • How, in what contexts and for whom does Participatory Action Research generate effective innovations? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realist evaluation • Process documentation • Within-Action Research evaluation • Outcome evidencing 	Evaluating Systemic Action Research as participatory intervention
	Social protection intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For whom do the impact pathways work, under what conditions, and why? • How does cash interact with the needs-based community organising to increase the capacity to take action and/or meet needs? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realist evaluation • Mixed qualitative and quantitative data collection methods 	Evaluating a cash plus social protection intervention
2 Child-centred advocacy	Children's advocacy groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What outcomes do children experience from participation in the advocacy groups, and how do these outcomes enable them to lead advocacy activities? • Does child-led advocacy influence policymakers' and decision makers' willingness to meaningfully listen to children and take action that reflects the views, needs and concerns that children share, and how? Are the outcomes effective? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring of advocacy through advocacy tracker and stakeholder engagement tool, process documentation and mixed methods for additional data collection 	Pathway 2: Evaluating child-centred advocacy
3 Adaptive programmatic approach implemented through partnerships	Adaptive management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At what levels and in what ways has the participatory adaptive management design been operationalised in practice, and what challenges were faced and overcome? • What types of enhanced evidence-generation and learning have resulted from these practices? • How has the learning influenced programme decision-making? • How have resulting decisions contributed to the programme achieving its goals (effectiveness)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case studies 	Evaluating the effectiveness of participatory adaptive management
	Consortium partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the partnership developing and functioning to support a culture for child-centred and adaptive programming? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership evaluation rubric • Partnership surveys • Case studies 	Evaluating the CLARISSA partnership

Source: Authors' own.

Systemic Action Research (Burns 2007) is a form of Participatory Action Research (PAR) that aims to understand and intervene in the underlying system dynamics that lead to patterns of exclusion and exploitation of marginalised groups; it is informed by complexity theory. It posits that when the system actors themselves (marginalised people and others) make sense of their own experiences and build their own systemic understanding, they can become motivated to identify leverage points for action to shift the system dynamics through a facilitated process. In CLARISSA, this is implemented through the systemic analysis of the life experiences shared, collected and analysed by children, and the formation and facilitation of PAR groups with children who work in WFCL and business owners who employ children.

The social protection intervention is a 'cash-plus' pilot in Bangladesh that seeks to enhance children's and families' ability to resist and refuse children's involvement in hazardous work. It has been designed to address an evidence gap around how social protection can contribute to reducing the drivers of children ending up in WFCL. In particular, the programme will evaluate if and how the combination of unconditional cash transfers and a relational intervention based on identifying and responding to needs shifts the push and pull factors of WFCL, for whom and under what conditions.

While these two interventions are different, both are made up of component parts that are interconnected and work at the levels of the individual child, the household and group. A common feature across the evaluation design of these two main intervention modalities is, therefore, the use of realist evaluation. Realist evaluation has been selected because it focuses precisely on how and why an intervention makes change, for whom and in what circumstances. It provides the evaluator with a high level of specificity in the causal pathways, which is useful for refining the theory of change (Rolfe 2019). It is not interested solely in whether an intervention works or not, but in its ability to trigger specific mechanisms (chains of resources and reasoning) in specific contexts to generate the desired outcomes (change). Realist thinking posits that 'social regularities' (e.g. societal problems such as WFCL) are driven by underlying mechanisms (underlying causal forces) that are contingent on a specific context. Interventions aim to change these social regularities

(e.g. reducing the number of children engaged in WFCL) by introducing new mechanisms within the specific context. The goal of realist evaluation is to uncover these context-specific mechanisms to understand how the intervention is (or is not) working to generate the anticipated change. Mechanisms in realist evaluation are the underlying causal forces that explain how and why an intervention works to generate the observed outcomes (a changed social regularity) within the context. Mechanisms can be seen as a chain of resources – that is, what the intervention provides participants with (e.g. understanding of how to complete a task, a peer support network, a moment to reflect) – which influences participants' reasoning and the choices they make based on the resources (e.g. to complete a task differently, to reach out to their peers).

We describe the realist approach in detail for each of the two interventions in turn.

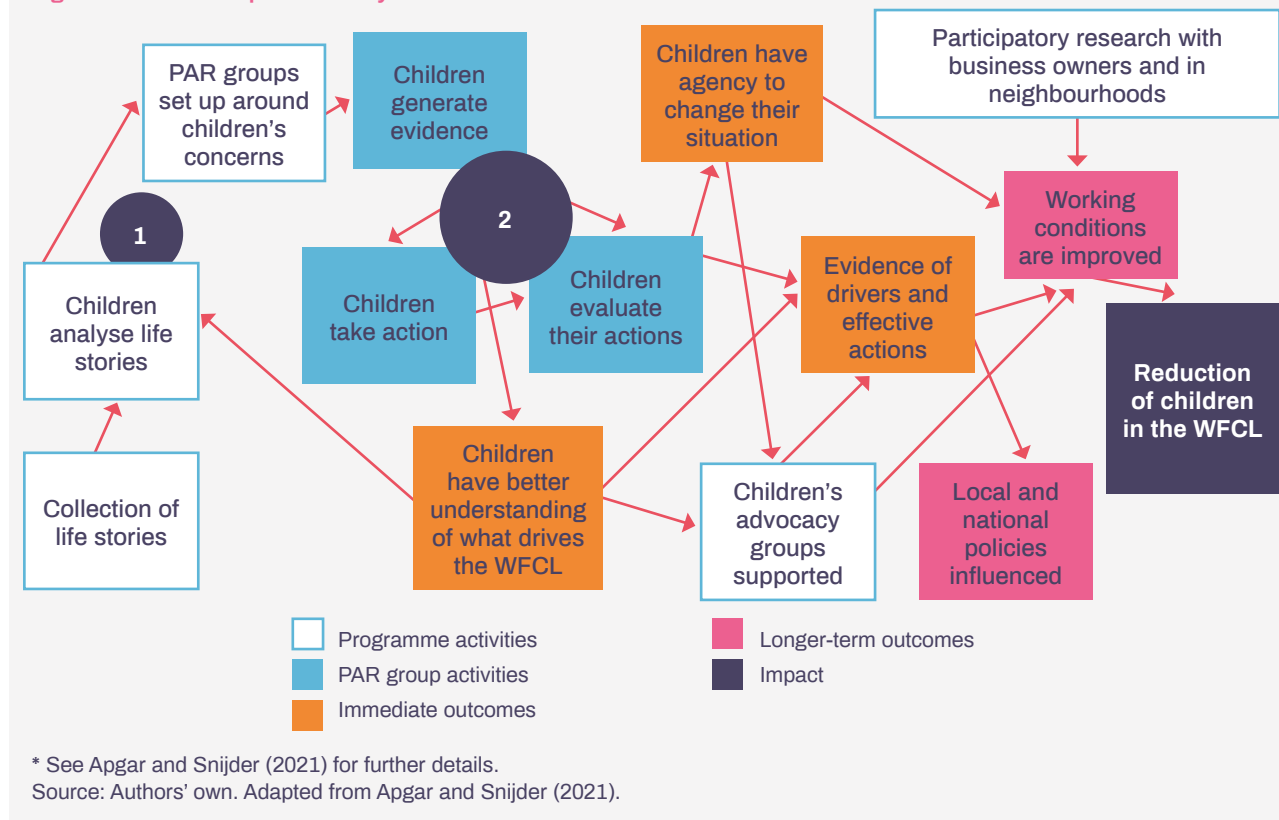
Evaluating Systemic Action Research as participatory intervention

Life story collection and analysis (LSC&A) and subsequent formation and implementation of PAR groups were initiated in Nepal and Bangladesh in 2020. LSC&A is a participatory process in which children engaged in WFCL share their life stories with CLARISSA facilitators or trained peers (Sayem *et al.* 2022).⁷ The research team documents their stories, and then facilitates discussion of the causal relationships between factors in the stories that contribute to children ending up in WFCL. The causal analysis leads to development of systems maps, which the children use to identify potential leverage points for Action Research to address specific causal relationships. These are the themes that children and other stakeholders subsequently address through formation of PAR groups and their iterative learning processes (Hacker and Sharma 2022, forthcoming).⁸ The PAR groups will then become the engines of innovation, developing their own local evidence base and then taking actions to address concerns. For example, a main theme identified through the analysis in Nepal was that children enter WFCL in dance bars and restaurants through friends or relatives who recruit them. A subsequent Action Research group might aim to deepen understanding of why friends and relatives invite others into WFCL and identify opportunities to address this.

⁷ See [CLARISSA OpenDocs Collection](#) for other forthcoming Learning Notes on life story collection and analysis.

⁸ See [CLARISSA OpenDocs Collection](#) for other forthcoming Research and Evidence Papers with full details of causal hotspots children selected.

Figure 4: Causal hotspots in the Systemic Action Research intervention*



In addressing the programme-level evaluation question, **how, in what contexts and for whom can effective innovations be generated?**, we are interested in evaluating all the participatory processes that together form SAR as an intervention. Using the causal hotspot approach, we detailed further the steps in the LSC&A and PAR processes and identified two specific hotspots (shown in Figure 4). The first hotspot is the inclusion of children in the LSC&A process and how that results in outcomes for those children; the second focuses on the inner workings of the PAR groups.

The first step in detailing the causal theories of change for these linked and sequenced participatory processes (and the causal hotspots) was a rapid realist review. We used literature to refine our own rough initial programme theories (based on the views of programme managers and staff) into initial programme theories that can be tested and refined in evaluation of the SAR interventions (Snijder and Apgar 2021). Rather than identifying whether or not PAR as an intervention works, the rapid realist review sought to find out how, for whom and under what conditions it generates innovations. The initial programme theories resulting from the rapid realist review are constructed through context, intervention, mechanism and

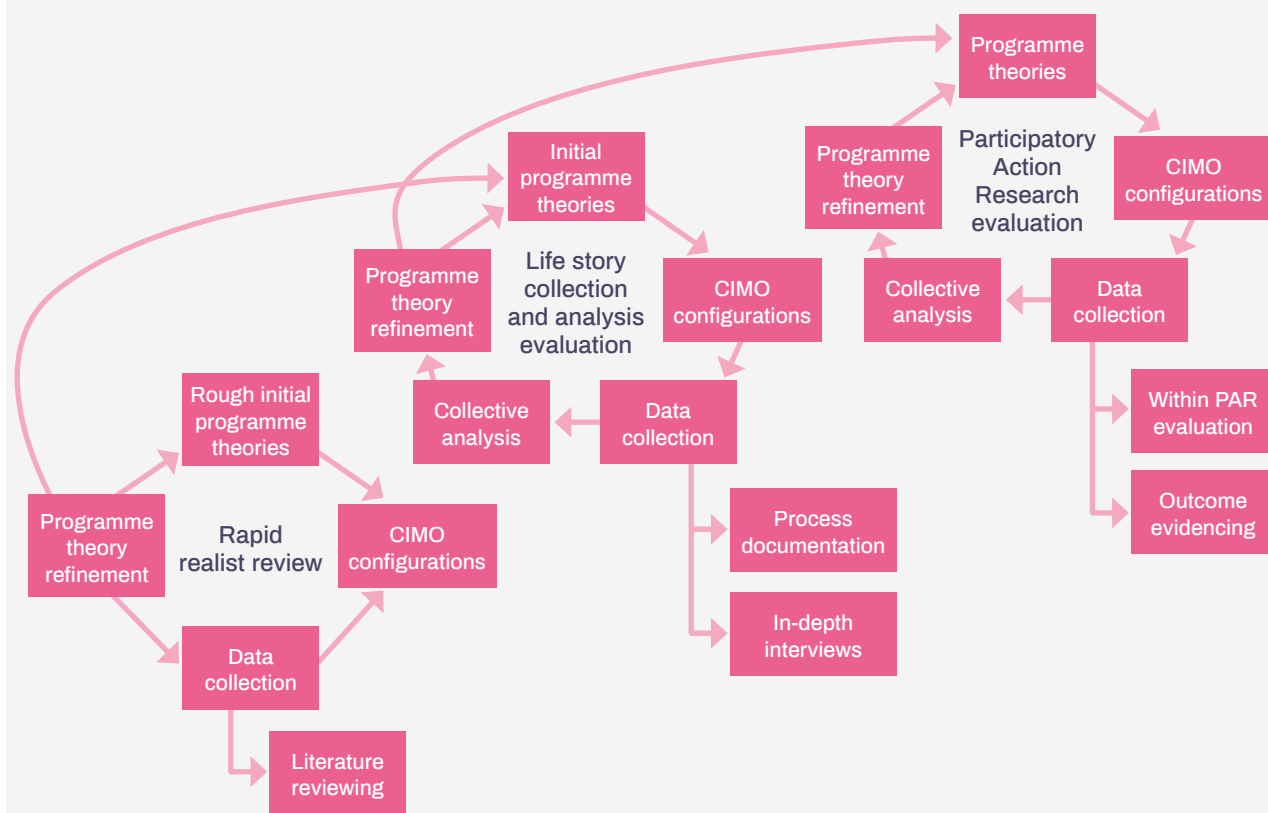
outcome (CIMO) configurations, which will be tested and refined through collecting data on the CIMOs throughout the SAR intervention. The analysis of this data will enable the evaluation of the contribution 'story' of the different participatory activities of the programme by improving understanding of how the process of change unfolds, what triggers change for whom, and what conditions are required to do so (Figure 5 illustrates the iterative nature of the realist evaluation of the connected LSC&A and PAR processes). We now describe how three initial programme theories (described in Snijder and Apgar 2021) are informing the evaluation design for each of the phases of the programme's participatory interventions.

Evaluating children's experiences and outcomes through life story collection and analysis

We have two evaluation questions to guide the research into children's experiences of participating in the LSC&A processes in relation to the first hotspot:

- **What outcomes does participating in the life story collection and analysis processes contribute for children?**

Figure 5: Realist evaluation approach of Systemic Action Research



Source: Authors' own.

• **How, in what contexts and for whom does this generate these outcomes?**

The LSC&A evaluation is designed to identify context-specific mechanisms that are triggered by participation in the processes that lead to the observed changes among the children and young people taking part, following the realist approach. The conscientisation initial programme theory⁹ was contextualised to inform which data needed to be collected for the intervention, mechanisms and outcomes we might observe during the LSC&A processes. Context variables were primarily centred around the children's characteristics. Data was gathered from children and young people through feedback forms, review and reflection sessions and in-depth interviews throughout the phases of implementation. Along with additional data gathered through observations of the facilitators and documenters, all data was analysed collectively with the team members involved in delivering the LSC&A

intervention. This collective analysis followed the realist evaluation perspective that implementers' 'hunches' should be directly included in the analysis of the data.

Evaluating if and how Participatory Action Research generates innovation

For the second causal hotspot, the focus is on the 15 PAR groups aiming to generate innovative actions that will be facilitated in each country. The main evaluation question for the PAR phase is: **How, in what contexts and for whom can PAR generate effective innovations to tackle the worst forms of child labour?** As Figure 6 shows, this question responds to Action Research as a programme-level intervention. Nested within this is the second level of participatory evaluation that happens within the PAR groups themselves focused on the evidence generated, actions planned and effectiveness of the actions they take. This within-PAR

9 See Snijder and Apgar (2021) for a full description of this programme theory, which is based on the popular education concept developed by Paulo Freire of building critical consciousness through action and reflection.

evaluation will feed the higher-level programmatic question and will be designed around the specifics of each group. We describe both levels and illustrate the relationship between them.

The within-PAR evaluation is based on embedding a participatory monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system into the design of the PAR processes (Apgar *et al.* 2017; Apgar *et al.* 2020a). The backbone of this embedded M&E is the data collected through ongoing documentation of the implementation process – how the groups are working (quantitative and quality criteria process indicators) as well as what they are learning and achieving (documented during key moments in PAR processes). Data on how the groups are working is immediately useful for learning and adaptive management for the programme and for the PAR group – to ensure quality in the process – but will also be a central data stream to understand how, for whom and under what circumstances the groups are generating innovative actions. The ongoing documentation was designed to help capture variables that are included in the three programme theories resulting from the rapid realist review. We will undertake periodic analysis workshops with the PAR facilitation and documentation teams to make sense of the data and iteratively refine the programme theories.

We will employ a case study design to test and refine programme theories within the realist evaluation of PAR, where the cases are PAR groups. This will be a multi-case approach where we select a representative sample of PAR groups across the two countries of operation. For this, we have developed a PAR typology (see Table 2). We will also pay special attention to groups that encounter difficulties (e.g. those that do not implement actions, those that stop meeting) to help us find disconfirming cases that can contribute to an explanation of how PAR works in different contexts.

Outcomes related to PAR that we are interested in will emerge at three levels: (1) the individual (PAR group member); (2) the group (PAR group); and (3) the system (changes external to the PAR group). Individual- and group-level outcomes include innovative actions, ownership and shifts in power dynamics (i.e. children seeing themselves as change agents). These outcomes will be captured through the ongoing documentation of the groups and through periodic interviews with PAR participants.

Evidencing system-level outcomes and evaluating the contribution made by PAR processes is necessary for any contribution claims which state that CLARISSA's

Figure 6: Participatory within-Action Research group evaluation embedded within programme-level evaluation



innovative actions are tackling drivers of WFCL. It is not possible at this stage to define precisely which drivers might be tackled by PAR groups. We therefore require an evaluation methodology that starts from observing outcomes and tracks the change backward rather than predefining indicators for intended outcome areas. We will apply the outcome evidencing method, an adaptation of outcome harvesting, which includes participatory analysis with stakeholders and critical scrutiny of contribution claims to specific, significant outcomes harvested (Paz-Ybarnegaray and Douthwaite 2017). This method will allow a focus on neighbourhood-level outcomes (changes in relationships between children and their families and their practices within specific locations that relate to drivers of WFCL) as well as sector-level outcomes (changes in the way businesses and others in the supply chains engage with drivers of WFCL).

Evaluating a cash plus social protection intervention

The realist evaluation of the social protection intervention will focus on the processes that lead to outcomes in individual, household and collective livelihood strategies. The CLARISSA social protection intervention will be implemented alongside the SAR interventions in one slum neighbourhood of Dhaka, Bangladesh. Its purpose is to

trial and evidence an innovative social policy intervention for tackling social problems, with a focus on WFCL.

The intervention supports people in the selected slum neighbourhoods with their individual, household and group capacities to meet their needs. The central hypothesis that drives its design is that participation will enhance people's freedom to choose alternatives to hazardous or exploitative child work. The intervention has two components. First, a relational component, which involves a group of community mobilisers placed at participants' service for a two-year period, which we refer to as needs-based community organising. Their goal is to collaborate with participants at the individual, family and group levels to identify needs, mobilise resources to attend to those needs, and to support people to develop agency and capacity in the process. Second, a cash component, providing one year of unconditional cash transfers to all households in the slum community, recognising that cash is a vital resource and can augment the process of building agency and capacity. The social protection intervention started in October 2021, with community mobilisers starting their work with initial interactions with households in the slum area. They will build on these initial interactions to formulate actions together with community members to respond to their needs.

This intervention is significant in size and reach, with 1,000 households targeted as part of the pilot programme to receive both components, and a total of £1 million investment. Transfer amounts will be based on a basic amount for all households, topped up for each child under 18. The cash transfer will be transferred to one person within the household on behalf of all members. While individual transfers (including to children) could have powerful effects on the intra-household bargaining powers of the recipient, they could also put individuals (and particularly children) at risk.

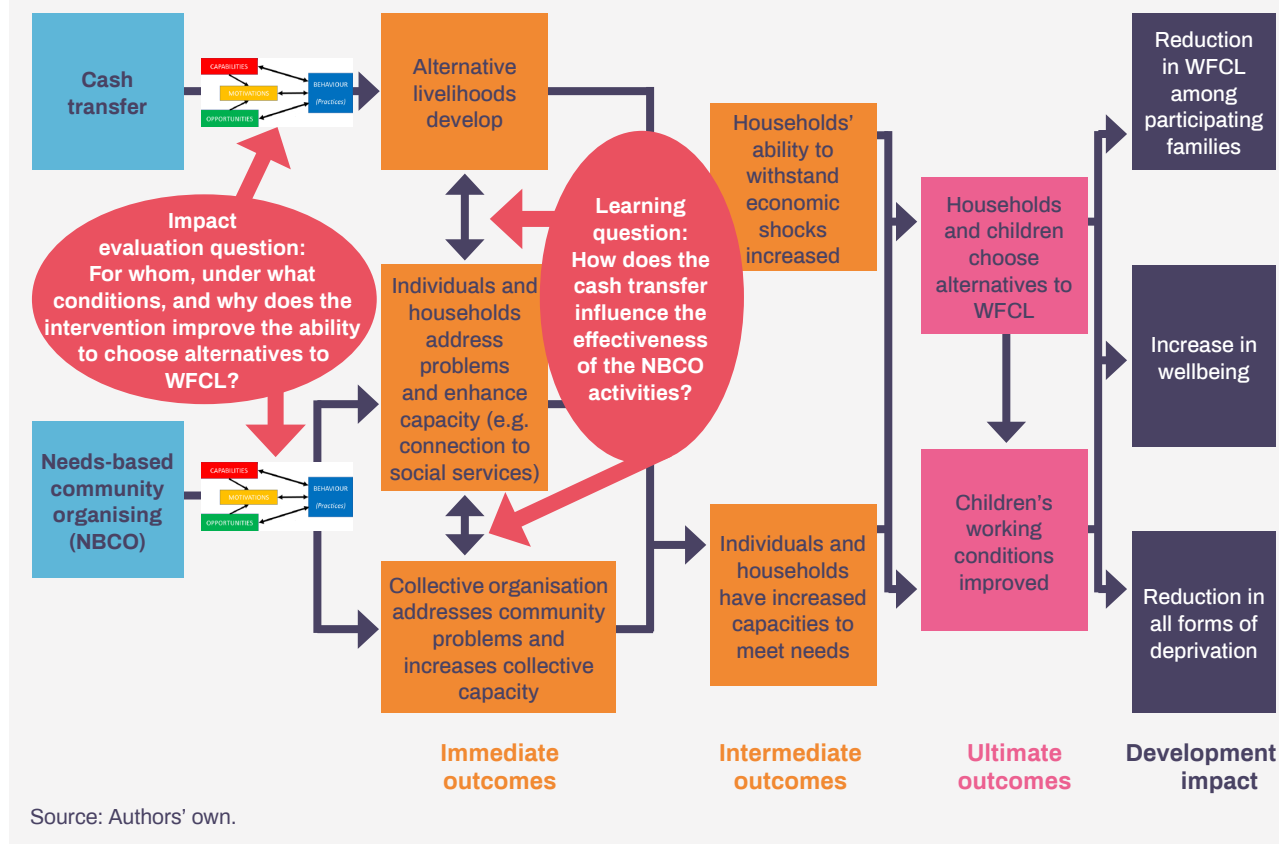
The evaluation will focus on the intervention's theory of change (see Figure 7). The two components are depicted on the left-hand side, and the figure shows the sequence of expected outcomes, moving from immediate outcomes on livelihoods and capacity to meet needs, to intermediate and ultimate outcomes, including (in the long term) a reduction in WFCL. Note that we consider intermediate outcomes to be within the intervention's direct sphere of influence, and ultimate outcomes and development impacts to lie outside of such direct influence (the latter are therefore not the focus of data collection).

Table 2: Participatory Action Research typology

	Name	Description
1	Built on life story collection and analysis process	Bottom-up participatory processes with children, themes will be based on the identification of leverage points for intervention in the system, based on the life story analyses. Groups that emerge from the analysis process will start out with a membership of children, and may later engage other critical stakeholders.
2	Business owners in leather supply chain (Bangladesh) and human chain (Nepal)	These PAR groups will take place with business owners of small enterprises that employ children. Early on in the process, a participatory workshop will facilitate dialogue around the key issues emerging from the semi-structured interviews. Participants will be invited to reflect on their lived experience as it relates to the key issues. Interviewees will be invited to join the groups, but membership will be expanded to other business owners.
3	Neighbourhood groups	These PAR groups will be driven by participatory analysis of the geo-spatial mapping exercise to identify the neighbourhood dynamics that push children into WFCL and keep them there.
4	Workplace-based	These groups will be facilitated dialogues between employers and children. They will begin later in the programme when groups with children and groups with business owners have been established.

Source: Authors' own.

Figure 7: Social protection theory of change, including key learning and evaluation questions



The overarching theory of change in Figure 7 is the starting point for the evaluation design, with two leading research questions:

- 1 **Impact evaluation question: For whom do the impact pathways work, under what conditions, and why?**
- 2 **Learning question: How does cash interacting with needs-based community organising increase the capacity to take action and/or meet needs?**

The impact evaluation question zooms in on the effect of the two programme components on behaviour change, and the heterogeneity of these effects – the causal hotspot. The learning question addresses the interaction between programme components and their effects in changing participants' capacity to meet their own needs.

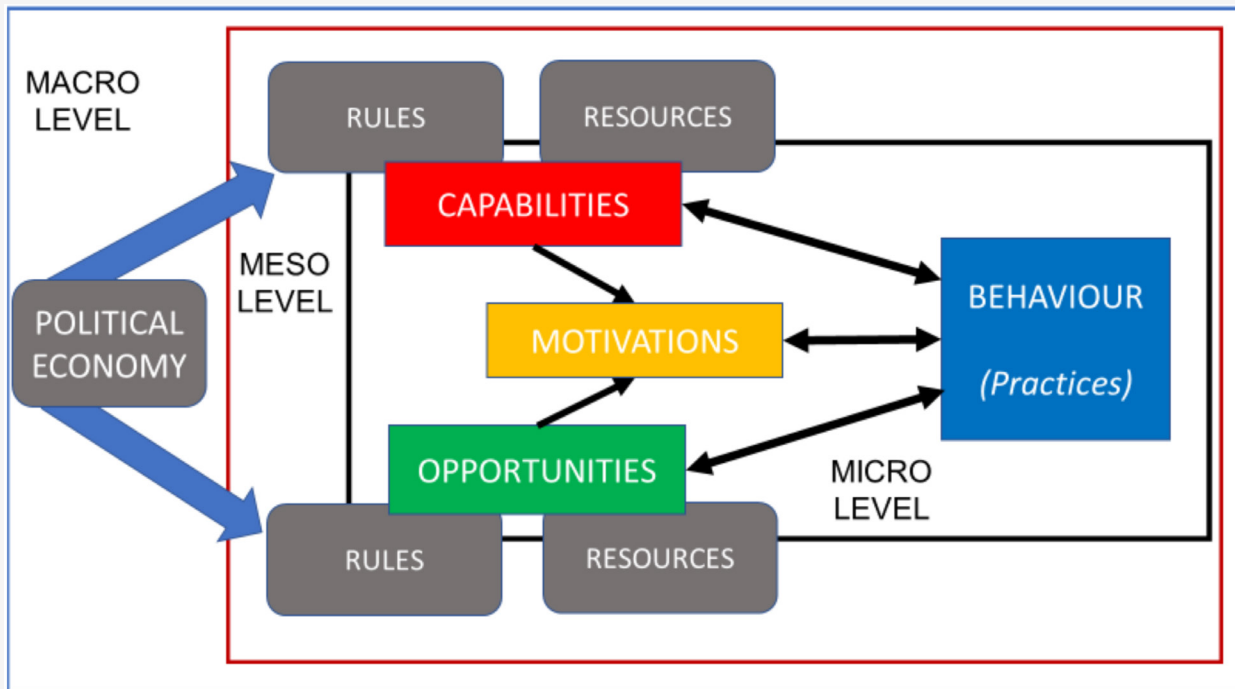
Impact evaluation of the social protection intervention

To understand the relevant contextual conditions and mechanisms that explain why the interventions work for

certain subgroups and do not work (or at least not to the same extent) for others, we look at three interlinked components using a simple behaviour change model (Figure 8) known as the capability, opportunity and motivation model (Michie, Van Stralen and West 2011; Mayne 2019). The behaviour change process will be different for different individuals, households and groups. Figure 8 shows the model located on the two main arrows that link the intervention's components with the related immediate outcomes. Compared with CIMO configurations described in **Evaluating Systemic Action Research as participatory intervention**, capabilities and opportunities can be perceived as context, motivation as mechanisms, and behaviours as outcomes.

The evaluation will focus on behaviour change at the individual, household and group levels; at each of these levels, the behaviour change in question will vary. First, at the individual level, we consider adoption of alternative livelihoods. Second, at the household level, we consider the ability to resolve intra-household problems or tensions. Third, at group level, we consider participation in collective action. For each of these behaviour change outcomes, we want to understand:

Figure 8: The capability, opportunity and motivation for behaviour (COM-B) model



Source: Ton (2021). Reproduced with permission.

Why does the intervention work, for whom, and under what conditions? These realist analyses are iterative. As the specificity of the intervention unfolds in context, data collection will be adapted to explore and understand unexpected emergent changes.

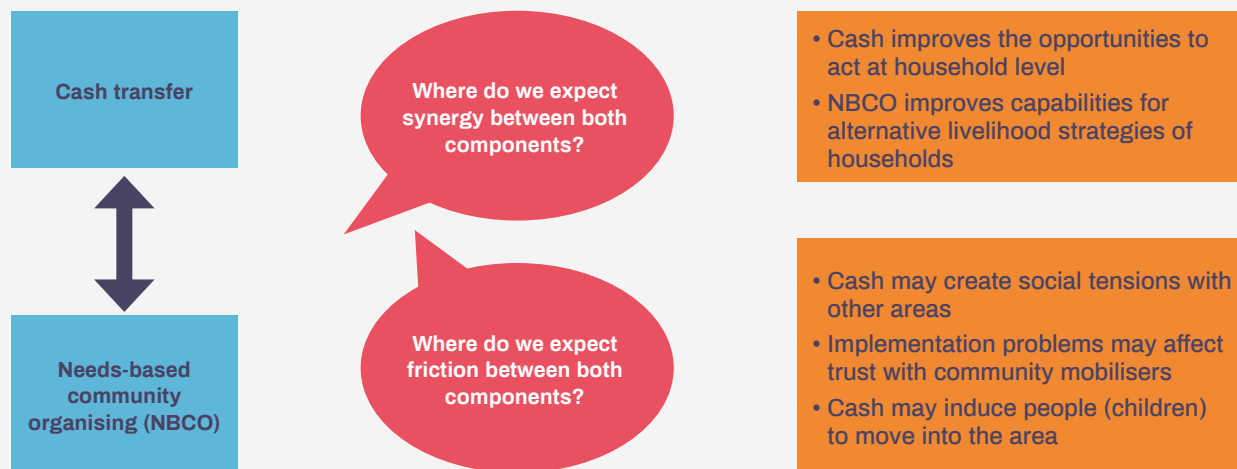
The impact evaluation will reflect on the theory of change and initial capability, opportunity and motivation models, and monitor whether they adequately correspond to the reality that unfolds. As exact outcomes will emerge in the process of implementing the social protection components, the impact evaluation will identify those outcomes when they are registered by the community mobilisers, and apply a process-tracing approach to verify whether the social protection interventions seem to have played a non-redundant role. The outcomes selected for the process tracing need to be important enough to influence the ultimate outcomes in the theory of change: improved working conditions for children; and families and children that choose alternatives to WFCL.

We will use a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Following Brady, Collier and Seawright (2006), causal inference (showing whether

the intervention components are indeed important contributory causes to the process) requires both causal process observations (detecting plausible mechanisms that explain the change process) and data set observations (detecting patterns to assess the importance of the change process). The causal process observations will be collected primarily through qualitative interviews, focus group discussions, ethnography and participatory methods, while the data set observations are largely derived from bi-monthly quantitative monitoring and periodic in-depth surveys. On the qualitative side, we will combine life stories and case studies to offer an in-depth picture of children's working lives, household decision-making, and intervention impact. These will be supported by multiple rounds of key informant interviews and subject-specific focus group discussions. Ethnography will also be used in each participant community, with an ethnographer dedicated to obtaining the rich, thick description characteristic of a method so rarely used to examine social protection interventions. The data collected through these different methods will be triangulated with focus group discussions and reflection and learning moments.¹⁰

10 See Ton *et al.* (2022, forthcoming) for a more detailed presentation of the evaluation approach, survey instruments, and qualitative research methods used.

Figure 9: Focus on synergy or frictions between intervention components



Source: Authors' own.

Learning about the synergies between intervention components

The learning question relates to the double arrows (feedback loops) in the theory of change. A key assumption is that combining the needs-based community organising and cash components provides synergies: these components are considered as mutually reinforcing (see Figure 9). Understanding the extent to which this assumption proves to be true is of particular interest to the funder and policymakers who want to learn from this social protection pilot for future cash transfer programmes.

In Bangladesh, the evaluation research implemented on the SAR and the social protection interventions – both under Pathway 1 – will generate insights that need to be verified and refined by the stakeholders involved. Programme-wide after action review (AAR) workshops¹¹ will enable collaborative reflection on what is emerging within and across both interventions. During these workshops, we will review progress made or roadblocks encountered, discuss changes needed in the plan, and identify the contextual factors that require more in-depth research. Along with this more structured way of capturing learning, we will also record discussions through informal and unstructured conversations with the implementing teams. This may include monthly meetings, reflexive conversations among the implementation team, as well as more informal chats/conversations in 'safe spaces'.

PATHWAY 2: EVALUATING CHILD-CENTRED ADVOCACY

The second high-level pathway of the programme's theory of change hypothesises how **the programme's engagement activities with and by children and with other stakeholders – including policymakers and other civil society actors – in each country and across countries, will use programmatic evidence to advocate for shifts in practices and policies to ultimately reduce the number of children in WFCL.** The pathway is fuelled by the programme's advocacy strategies and activities.

The central objective of the advocacy strategy is to harness the evidence, as well as child-centred, bottom-up solutions generated by the programme, to bring about positive change for children affected by WFCL. This will contribute to a reduction in the danger, exploitation and abuse faced by children in WFCL, and so ultimately reduce the numbers of children engaged in WFCL. Central to the strategy is a commitment to children's meaningful participation. Advocacy activities are implemented at three levels: within the countries of operation, and at regional and international levels. The activities are grouped under five advocacy objectives (see Table 3). Figure 10 shows how we hypothesise the activities under the different advocacy objectives to contribute to the ultimate impact of reducing WFCL.

11 See Apgar *et al.* (2020a) for a more detailed explanation of these facilitated reflection and learning workshops, which form the backbone of the programme's evaluation strategy. See also [Evaluating a cash plus social protection intervention](#).

Table 3: Advocacy objectives

	Objective
1	Through the CLARISSA programme, children engaged in WFCL are given the space and opportunity to understand their rights, make use of child-generated evidence, develop and communicate their own views, and participate in decision-making processes that affect them.
2	Shine a spotlight on WFCL, especially in the informal sector and small businesses, rooted in the lived experiences of children, within child labour narratives.
3	Organisations and institutions are persuaded to develop and/or adapt their programming and policies on child labour to incorporate learning from CLARISSA's methodologies.
4	Key laws and policies are developed, adapted and/or implemented to: (1) be child-centred; (2) tackle the key drivers of and responses to WFCL; and (3) reduce exploitation and abuse of children in informal and unregulated sectors.
5	Safe and inclusive child participation mechanisms are developed by governments for all children to express their views, including in finding solutions to WFCL.

Source: Authors' own.

The causal theory of change for the advocacy activities draws from two theories: (1) the Multiple Streams (or Policy Window) theory, developed by John W Kingdon (2014); and (2) the Advocacy Coalition Framework, developed by Hank Jenkins-Smith and Paul Sabatier (1994). The Multiple Streams theory identifies ways in which windows of opportunity – times when policy can be changed – can be opened, drawing our attention to how social problems are framed and new ‘policy solutions’ developed. The Advocacy Coalition Framework holds that core beliefs of individuals drive policymaking and decision-making. From this starting assumption, then, it is by connecting across individuals and their core beliefs that coalitions of the ‘willing’ are formed and can create the momentum for broader change. It theorises that different strategies – employed in coordination with others with similar policy beliefs and beyond – contribute to different areas of change, which is why coalitions work with multidimensional strategies.

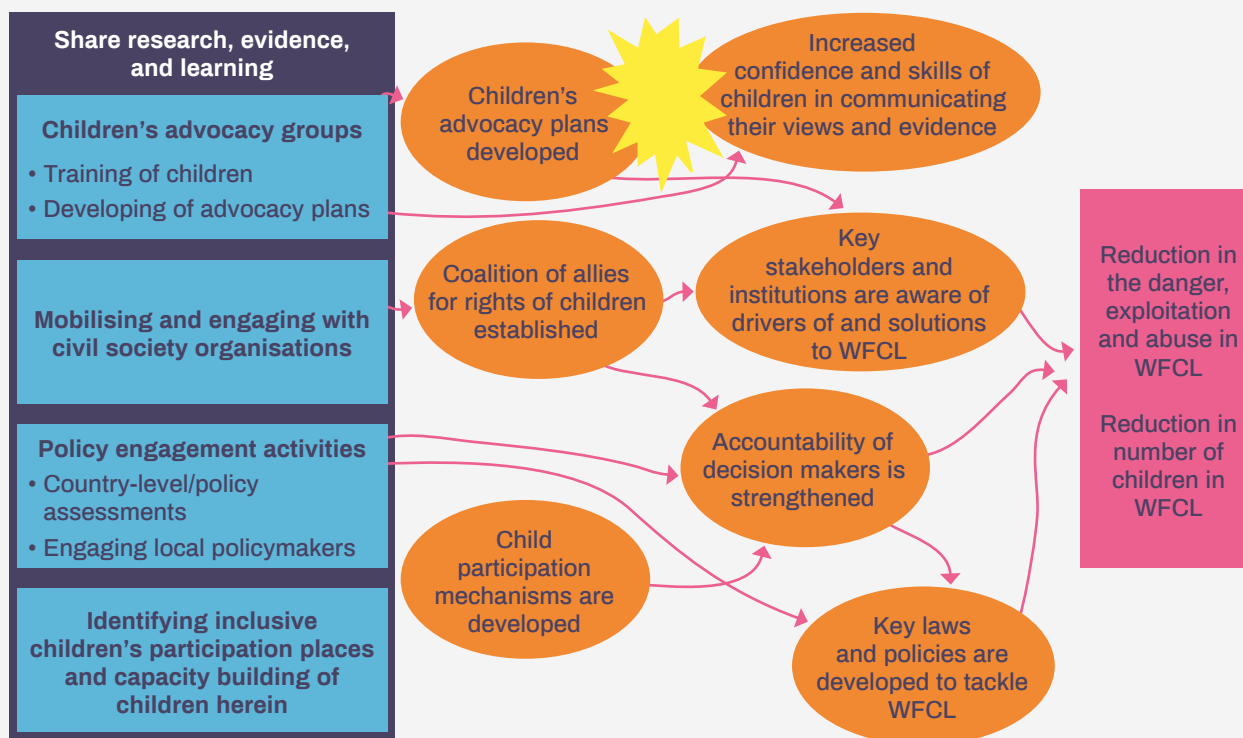
We identified a causal hotspot (indicated by the yellow star in in Figure 10) to focus evaluation efforts around Objective 1, as this is where we lack strong evidence, and where there is most energy and enthusiasm in the team. The core intervention under Objective 1 is to establish children’s advocacy groups in Nepal and Bangladesh to empower children to better understand their rights, and build their skills and confidence in developing and communicating their views and ideas to decision makers and policymakers at all levels (from parents and

employers to local and national government officials, and international institutions). Children will be trained to work with their peers (i.e. other children in WFCL) to help them understand their rights and feel more confident to speak out about any issues. The children’s advocacy groups will develop and implement advocacy plans and feed into the wider advocacy work of the CLARISSA programme.

In keeping with the overall contribution analysis approach, this part of the evaluation does not focus solely on measuring end impacts (actual policy changes leading to fewer children in WFCL), which is often the case with advocacy evaluation. Rather, it is concerned with if and how involving children directly in advocacy activities influences the way advocacy is shaped and the types of outcomes it can contribute to. The evaluation will focus on how the children’s advocacy groups work, and how children’s participation contributes to advocacy outcomes. The two evaluation questions that the children’s advocacy group evaluation aims to answer are:

- 1 What outcomes do children experience from participation in the children’s advocacy groups and how do these outcomes enable them to lead advocacy activities?**
- 2 Does child-led advocacy influence policymakers’ and decision makers’ willingness to meaningfully listen to children and take action that reflects the views, needs and concerns that children share, and if so, how? Are the outcomes effective?**

Figure 10: Advocacy activities and their intended outputs and outcomes



Source: Authors' own.

For each of these two questions, we have detailed causal programme theories that inform the evaluation design and the data to be collected. The programme theories are roughly based on the programme theories described above. For the first question, we theorise how the children's advocacy groups work to generate outcomes for children as follows: children who have received advocacy training (including how to develop an advocacy plan) will now feel that they have the skills and confidence to develop their own advocacy solutions. Participating in training has also given children an opportunity to build relationships with their peers and CLARISSA facilitators. The new skills, relationships and confidence triggered by this participation will motivate children to work together (with the CLARISSA facilitators and their peers in the groups) and see themselves as a group of people who can develop and implement advocacy solutions (i.e. agents of change). Through a facilitated process, they will then develop their advocacy solutions. Once the children have developed their advocacy solutions, their skills, confidence and empowerment will allow them to implement their solutions themselves. When the solutions are successfully implemented (which will require resources, support from powerful others and enough time), children will have

increased confidence and improved life skills related to the solutions they implement. When advocacy solutions are unsuccessfully implemented (e.g. due to a lack of resources, unsupportive policymakers, conflict within the group or poor facilitation) this may reduce the children's confidence. Children's training will include how to cope with and react to situations where actions do not lead to the intended outcomes, with a focus on adjusting plans and trying again. This will help to mitigate against knocks to children's confidence when success is not immediately achieved.

For the second question, on how children's advocacy groups influence policymakers and other stakeholders, we theorise the following: when children have the required skills and are given the opportunity to participate in policymaking (e.g. by advocating for policy change, expressing opinions, contextualising by reflecting on personal experience, presenting initiatives and activities, and reacting to questions or other comments made in the meeting), their participation can lead to a variety of responses from adults. Responses can include promising, discussing, supporting, fawning, questioning, dismissing and ignoring – not all of which include their views being taken into account. Where adults are surprised by

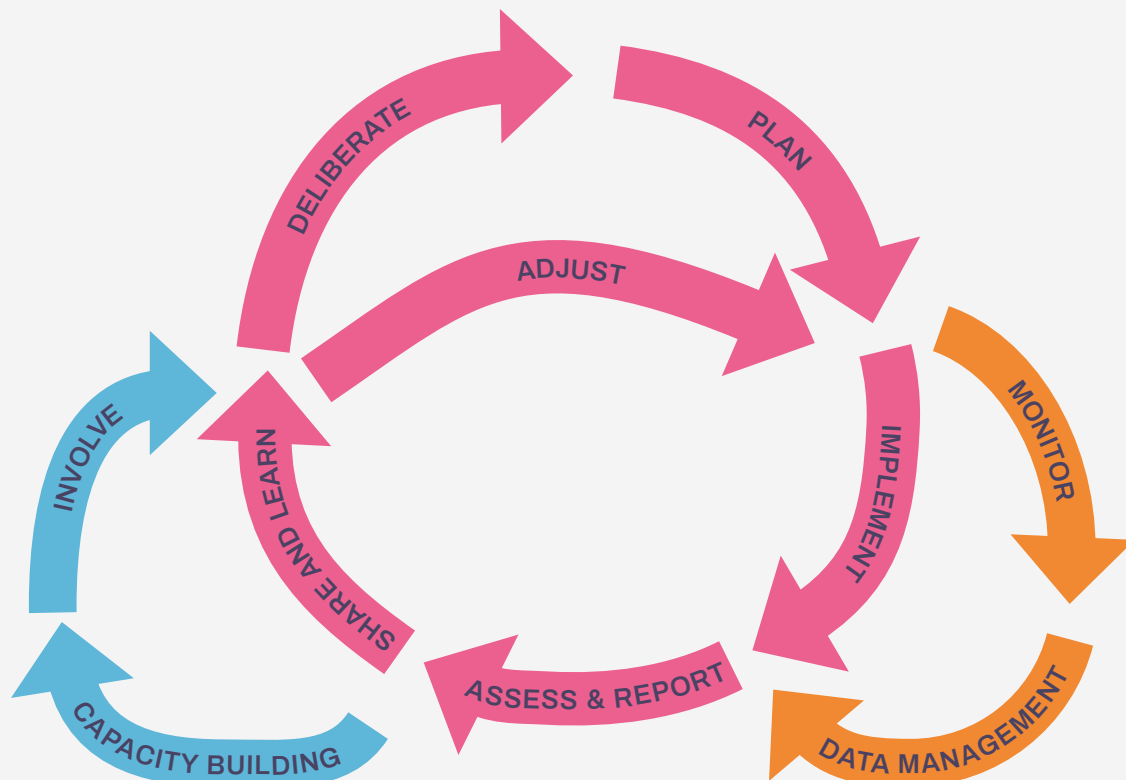
children's ability to advocate for their own rights, they may be more inclined to listen. Where children advocate for change, adults may respond by making promises (though these may be vague or not followed through), while discussions frequently result from children contextualising issues with their own experiences. Promising and discussing responses by adults indicate that they are meaningfully listening to children. When children share their opinions only but do not engage in advocacy directly, they have less influence on the adults listening to them (Perry-Hazan 2016).

These programme theories define which types of data will be collected to evaluate how children's involvement in advocacy works to generate effective outcomes. Data collection mechanisms will include an advocacy progress tracker, built for each activity area, and a stakeholder engagement tool that will provide monitoring data to support evaluation. Tracking of children's experience in advocacy-related activities could also include similar designs to those described above for the PAR processes.

PATHWAY 3: EVALUATING THE PROGRAMME'S PROCESS INNOVATIONS

The third pathway of the programme's theory of change hypothesises **how the programme's participatory adaptive management approach supports effective programming**. One of the programme's central aims is to model a participatory and child-centred approach to generate innovations that tackle WFCL. It is therefore explicitly part of our objectives to develop and learn from new ways of programming that support learning-oriented programming (Yanguas 2021; Teskey 2022). In this third pathway, our central assumption is that linear programming is not fit for purpose, given the complexity of WFCL. Two interconnected components make up the programme's process innovations: (1) the participatory adaptive management approach; and (2) working in partnership. We detail the evaluation and learning design for each.

Figure 11: The participatory adaptive management process



Source: Authors' own. Adapted from Vugteveen *et al.* (2015). CC BY-NC 4.0.

Evaluating the effectiveness of participatory adaptive management

Adaptive management in the international development sector is embraced as an approach that helps programmes become more learning-oriented and so, it is assumed, more effective in addressing complex development challenges. Programmes using this approach tend to put more resources (time, personnel and funds) into evaluation and learning strategies, activities and processes (see Figure 11).

For example, such programmes might collect more data and more in real time, analyse data more frequently, organise more learning and reflection meetings with a wider set of actors, and have more evaluation staff and larger evaluation components in general. These investments are expected to support programmes and teams to make more evidence-informed adaptations, leading to improved programme effectiveness, thanks to an early recognition of issues and opportunities while there is still time to address them effectively. Our first key assumption in relation to our participatory adaptive management approach is that **investing in evidence-generation and learning, and using that learning to make timely and evidence-informed adaptations, will lead to improved programme effectiveness.**

As outlined in Apgar *et al.* (2020a), the CLARISSA approach aims to create opportunities for meaningful participation of its key stakeholders in the processes that support learning and inform programme decision-making. The design focuses on creating space for the

drivers of WFCL (the 'problem' space) to be defined by children, their parents and guardians, and other actors in the supply chains (such as small business owners), as well as the local teams directly working with them, and using their experiences of change as it unfolds to inform programmatic decision-making throughout implementation. The approach is operationalised by feeding learning into decision-making at the three levels at which the programme operates – adaptive delivery, adaptive programming and adaptive governance (see Figure 12). These are also described in Table 4, together with details on CLARISSA's main activities supporting participation, adaptation and learning at each of the levels. The approach is underpinned by our second key assumption: that **the participation of children and other stakeholders in programmatic processes that support learning and adaptation will allow their views to drive programme decision-making.**

Figure 13 brings together the two key assumptions into a causal programme theory showing how the participatory adaptive management approach leads to increased programme effectiveness. In short: the intensified knowledge and evidence generated by all components of the programme provide the basis for various types of learning, which is used to improve different aspects of the programme – improvements which, in turn, promote increased effectiveness and long-term impact.

The point of departure is CLARISSA's focused efforts to generate and share multiple types of knowledge and evidence (I. Knowledge- and evidence-generation),

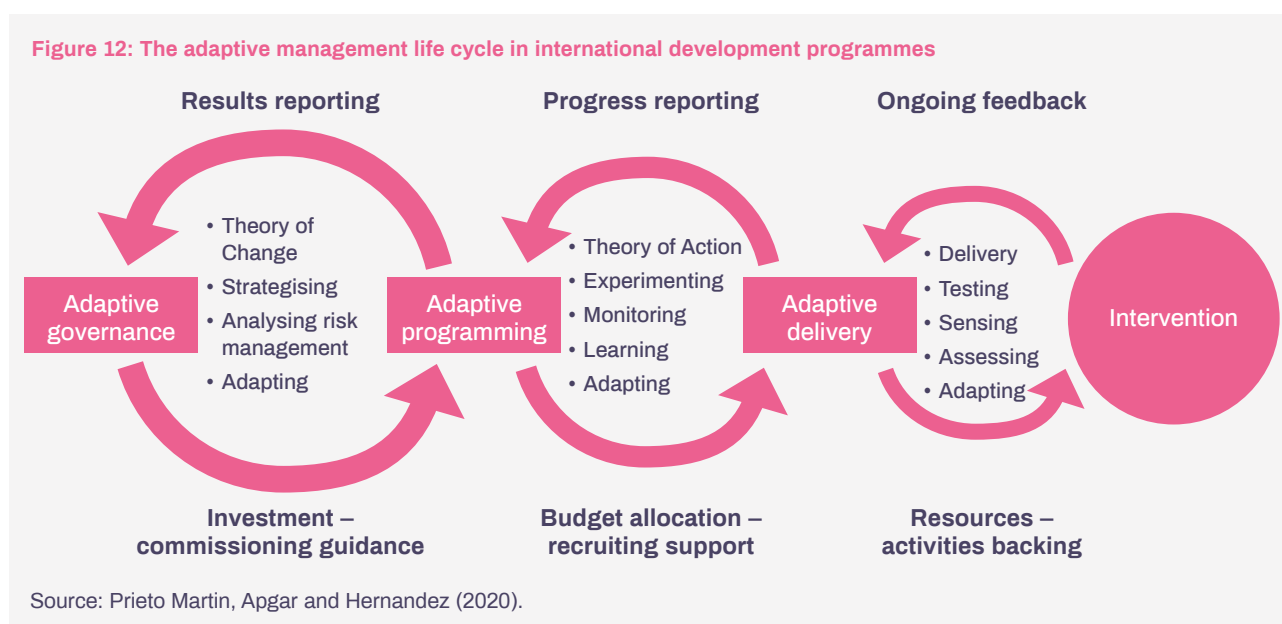


Table 4: Participatory adaptive management operational design

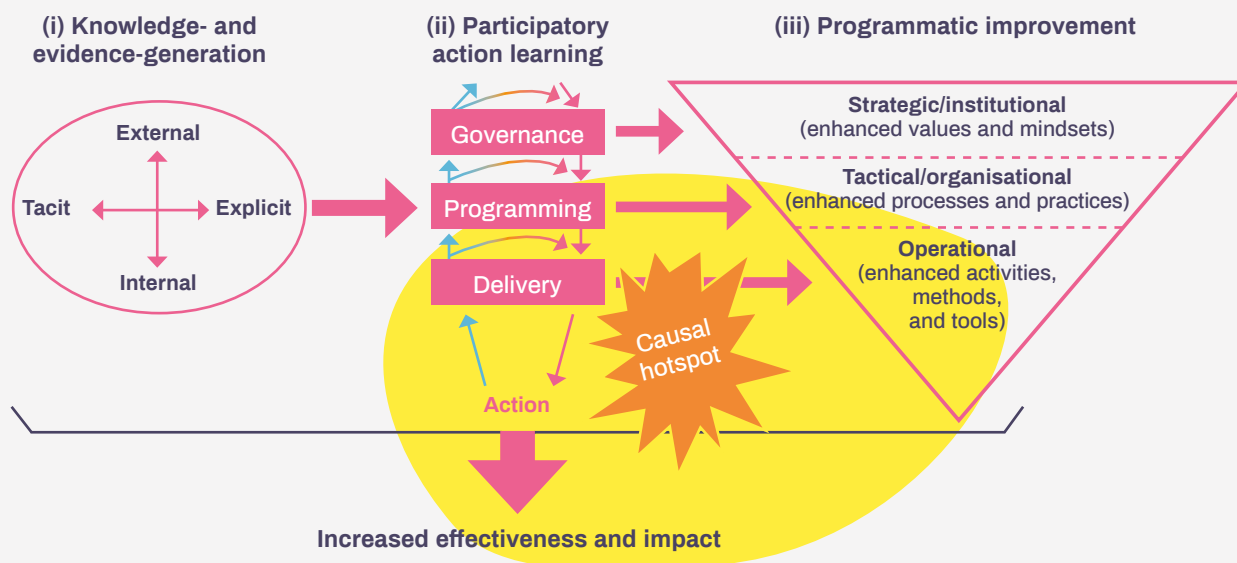
Participatory adaptive management level	General description	Participatory design in CLARISSA
Adaptive delivery	Activities that adapt programmes on the ‘front line’ and rely on field staff applying local evidence, emotional intelligence and curiosity to stay nimble and flexible in the face of ever-changing conditions. It requires an iterative process of engagement and learning for rapid adaptation.	Learning from PAR groups (children, other stakeholders and local implementation teams) is captured through programme-supported documentation, including monitoring qualitative and quantitative indicators to assess how the groups are working (performance and facilitation) and what they are achieving (innovations and outcomes). Local implementation teams (facilitators and documenters) periodically review the learning to adapt implementation in consultation with the country-level team. A participant feedback mechanism allows broader independent feedback to be captured and fed into programme sense-making.
Adaptive programming	A structured periodic learning process supported by the programme’s monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) system and led by programme managers. The cycles of iterative reflection and learning allow for more in-depth analysis of the programme’s effectiveness and the changes in its operating context, leading to adjustments of its plans and activities.	Facilitated AARs are implemented on a six-monthly and annual basis within each country and across both countries. Monitoring data and learning from programme activities are the main inputs for the AARs – this includes learning from PAR groups and synthesis of findings from the participant feedback mechanism. Learning reports are produced as outputs of the AARs to make the learning actionable. The sequencing of AARs is critical to ensure learning can be ‘fed upwards’ within the programme from country to consortium level, and to inform the adaptation of the programme plans.
Adaptive governance	Adaptive programming and delivery require an enabling and authorising environment, including contractual arrangements with donors that acknowledge the need for learning and provide flexibility to accommodate adaptations. Adaptive governance navigates the tensions between accountability and the delivery of results and impacts, enabling learning and decision-making that might shift the programme’s priorities and focus as a way to progress toward its ultimate aims.	Annual reporting feeds up to the donor through the Accountable Grant mechanism. A close relationship was established with FCDO through the co-generation phase, and continues through implementation. For example, in response to the impact of Covid-19 on the children the programme aims to engage, major adaptations were agreed at the adaptive programming level and approved by FCDO at this level.

Source: Authors’ own.

Figure 13: Theory of change of participatory adaptive management programme approach

Key assumption 1 Investing in knowledge- and evidence-generation promotes learning at various levels of operation. This leads to timely and evidence-informed adaptations (such as enhanced activities, tools and processes) which, altogether, result in increased programme effectiveness.

Key assumption 2 Participation of children and other stakeholders in the programmatic processes that support learning and adaptation, allows their views to drive programme decision-making.



Source: Authors' own. Created with inspiration from Yanguas (2021).

including both tacit and explicit forms of knowledge amassed by the programme's staff, stakeholders and participants. This knowledge, moreover, may originate from internal and external sources. Internal sources include knowledge and evidence resulting from CLARISSA's own activities and processes, such as emerging contextual knowledge about the programme's operating and organisational environments and about the changes taking place within them, as well as evaluative knowledge, typically based on the programme's M&E data, which evidences the effectiveness of its programmatic approaches. External knowledge, by contrast, refers to knowledge that is relevant for the programme but is provided by external actors such as researchers, or by programme partners and stakeholders based on other programmes and activities they are involved in (Prieto Martin *et al.* 2017).

CLARISSA's participatory adaptive management approach (see Table 4) periodically feeds the generated evidence into reflection and learning events, which allow for in-depth analysis of the programme's effectiveness

and the implications of changes occurring in its operating environment (II. Participatory action learning). The basis for the learning primarily originates from the (participatory) activities carried out with children and stakeholders, and thus learning initially takes place at the adaptive delivery level, thanks to reflective activities carried out regularly by the local implementation teams. Facilitated AARs also happen on a six-monthly and annual basis within each country and across countries to promote learning that is relevant for the adaptive programming and the adaptive governance levels. The learning is meant to happen in a coordinated way across the programme's levels of operation, where the learning that originated in each contributes to the others.

A key element of adaptive approaches lies in how the learning stimulated by the programme is turned into adjustments and improvements to its plans and activities (III. Programmatic improvement). These improvements are expected to affect, in turn, the different dimensions of the programme, from the operational dimension (with enhanced activities, methods and tools), through

to the more tactical, organisational dimension (with enhanced policies, practices and streams of activities), up to the more strategic, institutional dimension (which operates at the level of mindsets, values and programme components). The accumulation of all these evidence-informed adaptations throughout the lifespan of the programme is expected to result in increased effectiveness and impact.

We will focus our evaluation efforts, at least initially, within the area highlighted by the yellow causal hotspot in Figure 13. The hotspot relates to how children and other stakeholders are able to influence learning, and thus drive decision-making. We will, therefore, focus our attention on the adaptive delivery level and its interface with the adaptive programming level, exploring how the ongoing evidence-generation, learning and decision-making processes translate into tactical and operational changes in activities, and how they have contributed to improve the programme's overall effectiveness.

The following evaluation questions are related to this causal hotspot:

- 1 At what levels and in what ways has the participatory adaptive management design been operationalised in practice (with a focus on adaptive delivery and adaptive programming), and what challenges were faced and overcome?**
- 2 What types of enhanced evidence-generation and learning have resulted from these practices?**
- 3 How has the learning influenced programme decision-making?**

We will use case studies to analyse how the participatory adaptive management processes have (or have not) generated learning and how the learning has (or has not) led to programme adaptations. The theory of change will guide the analysis of data based largely on experiences of the programme team. We will identify cases where programme-generated learning has influenced decision-making through a review of existing programme documentation, including: insights collected through participant feedback; documentation of the PAR groups; change requests held at country level; and AAR reports, among others. We will select a number of examples to develop as case studies, ensuring a spread across adaptive delivery and adaptive programming levels and the two countries of operation, and appropriate representation of the general types of challenges and learning for action identified, potentially including cases

where learning seemed absent or was not transformed into action. An emphasis on uncovering challenges encountered by key actors will mitigate team bias towards positive stories as cases are selected. The case studies will be developed through interviews and focus group discussions with the key actors involved. Retrospective timelines (e.g. Prieto Martin and Faith 2017) will be used as a tool to explore the causal process from generation of learning to its use in programmatic decision-making and challenges encountered. Guided critical reflection will explore whose voices were heard throughout the learning and decision-making processes.

A subsequent phase of the evaluation will focus on **if and how resulting decisions and changes contributed to the programme achieving its goals (effectiveness)**. Evaluating the causal link between an adaptive decision made within the programme (informed by learning from the ground up) and its consequences in terms of effectiveness is particularly challenging in a programme designed to generate innovation and evidence, where there is no simple measure for effectiveness. Effectiveness here does not refer to a measurable increased achievement of end impact (reduction of children in WFCL) but rather a contribution to the participatory generation of innovative responses to the drivers of WFCL, as well as a reflection on what the benefits of the improved course of action were compared with what would have been achieved if the original path had been followed.

A contribution claim will need to be established and evidenced between programme adaptations and their use of learning, the perceived efficiency of the programme processes through which innovations are generated, and the extent to which they tackle the drivers of WFCL. The evaluation of the programme's participatory processes (as discussed earlier) and, in particular, documentation of the quality of PAR processes, will provide a useful data stream on efficiency of participatory processes and their link to the underlying drivers of WFCL. We expect that the realist evaluation of the programme's innovation-generating processes (Pathway 1) will also offer evidence on the role that programme processes played in supporting innovations to emerge.

Evaluating the CLARISSA partnership

The centrality of working as a consortium of research and development partners to the programme's culture and philosophy cannot be underestimated. As Pagar *et al.* note:

Given the partnership's key role in making the programme work, the functioning of the partnership is closely linked to the functioning of the programme as a whole. Indeed, it is theorised as a critical mechanism for success of the programme's innovative MEL design. It is, consequently, important to continually assess how the partnership is developing and functioning and whether it is building a supportive culture for PAM [participatory adaptive management].

(Apgar *et al.* 2020a: 16)

The consortium partnership is also a key aspect of our process innovation. This area of programmatic learning started to take shape early on as the partnership was being established through the development of and subsequent applications of an evaluative rubric that supports self-reflection on ways of working, and through the programme's capacity development processes (see Widmer *et al.* 2022 for full details of these activities). Here, we describe how these methods are supporting real-time reflection on if and how the partnership is supporting child-centred and adaptive programming.

Mixed-methods evaluation of the partnership

A programme-level partnership rubric was first developed through a participatory process with all partners during the co-generation phase. It identified that the following principles should guide quality in partnership working: (1) communications; (2) team identity; (3) openness, honesty and mutual trust; (4) impact orientation; (5) inclusion and equity; (6) adaptability and flexibility; and (7) entrepreneurial culture. For each principle, we defined qualitative evaluative descriptors for three levels of performance: working well, emerging, or needing help.

The initial programme rubric has been adapted to the two country contexts. Bangladesh is a larger programme country (due to the social protection intervention described earlier) and has more partners and staff, while Nepal is a smaller team with fewer partners. Furthermore, the nature of WFCL and specific sectors of focus in each country place particular emphasis on different elements of the rubric. The resulting country-specific rubrics support ongoing reflection and learning around key areas for partnership improvement. This process has generated

an increased sense of ownership over the contextualised partnership rubric. The rubric is a flexible tool that emphasises learning and so can be further contextualised as the partnership evolves.

The way the rubric has been applied for a self-assessment of the partnership has varied over the first years of implementation. On some occasions, the rubric has been used by individual organisations or staff members to reflect on their partnership experience before joint reflection sessions with other partners. At other times, it has been used live in workshop sessions (some online, some in person, and others in hybrid format) through breakout groups per organisation with plenary discussions focusing in on discrepancies between the organisations.¹² In a recent AAR in Nepal (April 2022), the rubric was applied collectively as a partnership team rather than by individual partners.

Across these different applications, in all cases, partners rate the partnership on performance on each element, and most importantly, are encouraged to provide evidence for why they think the partnership is functioning at a particular level. Participation in the assessment exercise is intended to generate dialogue across diverse experiences of how the partnership is experienced in practice. Early learning from these experiences suggests that an appropriate level of trust is required for partners to critically reflect with each other and to surface partnership challenges. Acknowledging that not all group processes are equally safe for everyone sitting around the table, and that power dynamics and language barriers can create blockages to generating open dialogue, the rubric must be complemented by other methods. To that end, an anonymous survey is conducted annually across the partnership to complement the rubric self-evaluation. The survey is designed around the rubric elements and complemented by other partnership assessment indicators from the Coordinated Action Checklist (developed at Wageningen University, see Wagemakers 2010) and the strategic partnership assessment tool (Hardy, Hudson and Waddington 2003).

Evaluating partnership capacities for participatory adaptive management

Recognising the relationship between partnership working and the participatory adaptive management approach,

12 See also [Reflections on if and how our partnership is working in Bangladesh](#).

Box 2: Capacities for adaptive management

Empowered people

- **Energised staff and teams:** Teams should be ambitious, trusted, creative, sustained and multifunctional, with open and honest communication within and across levels of action, and be largely self-directed.
- **Contextual embeddedness:** Plans and activities built-in continued engagement with partners, intermediaries, communities and problem-owners, monitoring both the external context in which the programme operates and the internal organisational context that enables the programme to function.

Continuous improvement

- **Promote experimental and action learning:** Acknowledging the need for cyclic, data-driven reflective deliberation among the different partners and stakeholders.
- **Focus on value-generation:** Aiming for early, frequent and incremental provision of value to recipients and relevant stakeholders, using a risk-aware and risk-avoidant iterative delivery.

Source: Authors' own.

it is important to combine evaluation across the two aspects of this third impact pathway. Certain elements of the partnership rubric (such as adaptability and flexibility, and entrepreneurial culture) already illustrate the intersection explicitly. To further ascertain the extent to which CLARISSA's participatory adaptive management approach is contributing to evolving the capacities of its partners and stakeholders, as part of the case studies developed for the evaluation of the effectiveness of the approach (described in the previous section), we will collect information on a series of traits that are considered core adaptive capabilities for adaptive management adopters across a number of sectors (Prieto Martin *et al.* 2017) (shown in Box 2).

A final area of interest in evaluating the relationship between partnership capacities and the participatory adaptive management approach is to explore whether (and, if so, why and how) individual consortium partners are experiencing organisational changes that are influenced by their work in the programme. For example, a partner organisation might be adopting elements of the CLARISSA evaluation and learning methodologies into their organisations, or building capacity in particular sectors (such as the leather sector in Bangladesh) to strategically pivot their programming focus. These organisational outcomes will be captured as part of annual reporting to the donor and will form an additional data stream for evaluation of the third impact pathway.

Section 4:

**USING CAUSAL
HOTSPOTS AND
NAVIGATING
TRADE-OFFS**

4 USING CAUSAL HOTSPOTS AND NAVIGATING TRADE-OFFS

Embracing evaluation as an opportunity to build deeper understanding of how complex programmes work, for whom and under what conditions, calls our attention to the challenge of choosing appropriate designs and ways of mixing methods to generate credible evidence. The discussion about appropriate designs is not new, and the ‘design’ (Stern *et al.* 2012) and subsequent ‘choice’ (Befani 2020) triangles suggest that evaluators’ choices should be driven by the specific evaluation questions, consideration for the attributes of the intervention, and the usability of results for multiple evaluation goals. In this paper we have shared our design journey using contribution analysis as an overarching approach to provide the structure and iterative process through which we chose appropriate methods in response to detailed causal pathways.

In a participatory programme, the choices that lead to mixing and matching of methods – increasingly being described as ‘bricolage’ in evaluation (Patton 2019; Hargreaves 2021) – highlight the relational and political nature of iterative design. Those of us responsible for programme evaluation do not have full control over what the focus is; intervention co-design is an ongoing iterative and emergent process, and so evaluation design must engage with and walk alongside co-design with all stakeholders. Evaluation is inherently related to programme design. Furthermore, a participatory epistemology can challenge deeply ingrained beliefs about knowledge hierarchies that continue to be prevalent in evaluation practice. Working with a consortium of research and development partners means working with a myriad of agendas and interests that do not always align neatly. Throughout the design process, we have had to identify and navigate potential trade-offs while searching for synergies across agendas to focus our limited resources while still building understanding at sufficient depth to produce robust and credible evidence. Our intention with this paper was to bring to life our evaluation design process, showing how contribution analysis and, in particular, applying the causal hotspots practice has enabled us to navigate and negotiate methodological choices.

Causal hotspots have helped us choose where to focus our evaluation efforts along nested causal impact pathways. Identifying hotspots has been a participatory

process, involving all partners in identifying evidence gaps and supporting multiple learning agendas. From the outset of the design process, prior to detailed intervention design, the programme’s evaluation and learning agenda was negotiated and agreed across all partners, including the funder. Negotiating the different uses of evidence – to measure success of particular interventions versus learning how they work – was an explicit part of early discussions. This built initial ownership of both the specific content and the programme’s approach to evaluation and learning, through agreeing the evidence to be generated. We have also learned, however, that ownership is not simply built at the outset, but must be nurtured throughout.

In a recent AAR in Nepal, when assessing how well the partnership is functioning on its ‘impact orientation’, it was revealed that the way in which the theory of change is used in the programme (and for evaluation design) is not fully understood by all team members, and confusion can breed frustration. Linear approaches to evaluation, with simple predefined indicator matrices at the outset, remain part of partners’ thinking and practice. Furthermore, working across locations and through a global pandemic has meant less direct in-person engagement to fully co-produce every step of the way. Reflecting honestly as an evaluation team, we could be doing better with engagement across all parts of this complex programme to continue to nurture ownership of the approach. The iterative nature of our emergent design approach does provide opportunity to keep working together as we build understanding, and a recognition of different institutional cultures associated with evaluation should drive how we seek integration. A researcher-driven approach to evaluation might push in directions that are not entirely welcomed by development partners who continue to operate in upward and often linear accountability landscapes that seek comparative ‘before and after’ measurement. Further barriers include the technical and conceptual language used by evaluation experts, which can be difficult to penetrate. On the other hand, opening up to more meaningful and learning-oriented designs is seen as a valuable opportunity. Our experience brings to life the reality of evaluation design as not simply a technical process, but also a relational and political engagement.

Narrowing down our focus on specific areas through causal hotspots means that we can work in-depth in analysing how change happens for these processes. That is particularly important given our use of realist evaluation, which requires detailed and in-depth analysis of the context, mechanisms and outcomes related to specific interventions, and its strength is the detailed theory building, testing and refining that results from the analysis. Using this approach allows us to also engage with the often overlooked 'for whom' question. Focusing in-depth means we necessarily cannot focus on all of the processes in such a large and emergent programme, requiring us to tackle trade-offs head-on. The depth of realist evaluation is often criticised for leading to insights about the micro level in the absence of conclusions at higher levels (e.g. Davis 2005) – in our case, at whole intervention and whole programme levels. Combining with the overarching contribution analysis approach is one way of mitigating this risk, through nesting of theories of change across levels to enable conclusions to be drawn across the chosen hotspots.

In focusing our attention on the evaluation of the stages and activities that are part of the SAR intervention, identifying causal hotspots was particularly useful. Given the multi-step nature of SAR, there are many points in the causal pathways that we could choose to focus on. There is little experience with evaluation of SAR (and PAR) through realist approaches that call for much higher levels of causal detailing than is often practised. Detailing the LSC&A process and theorising how it then links to the PAR process through the programme theories was necessary to then identify specifically what we want to inquire into. In the next phase of the SAR evaluation, we will need to make new choices around which PAR groups to follow in detail. The operational reality of documenting many participatory processes to the level of detail required for this evaluation is already pushing us to reflect further on what is really possible. This can conflict with our ability to fully embrace emergent design, as decisions we make at the outset entail a certain level of path dependence and could limit how deeply we can evaluate what later emerges as critical to stakeholders.

In designing the evaluation of the advocacy activities as part of the second impact pathway, we have had to make choices about what not to focus on as we decided on the main causal hotspot. This means we will not be focusing on evaluating our contributions to the coalitions that are formed with civil society organisations and engagement with policymakers to the same level of depth as the children's advocacy groups. This decision was not easy, given the commitment and interest of those involved in advocacy to understand how advocacy messages are influencing policy and decision-making processes. Our decision was based on: (1) the interest of the team in children's participation; (2) the opportunity to fill an evidence gap on children's participation in advocacy initiatives and especially on how this influences adult decision makers; and (3) efficiency through making use of the programme theories developed for PAR with children and adapting them to the advocacy groups, which meant we did not need to do a further evidence review.

Another trade-off was the decision not to include all of the participatory processes in the evaluation research design, thus leaving out the children's research groups (which includes the use of visual methodologies), participatory GIS mapping, and work shadowing with business owners. Deciding not to evaluate these processes in the same depth and to the same degree of rigour was also not easy, as we imagine that a great deal of important and interesting learning about participatory processes can result from these activities too. These processes are being implemented alongside the PAR group processes so will become part of the context within the realist evaluation. Furthermore, there is likely to be an overlap between children who are involved in the different participatory processes that take place in the same geographical locations. This illustrates the need, and so the value, of combining methods and using realist evaluation, which acknowledges that one intervention is part of the context of other interventions. Although it is challenging to decide which trade-offs to make, it does provide the evaluation team with the ability to hone our efforts and limited resources to contribute to building our understanding of how participatory processes work in tackling WFCL through Action Research, adaptive management and advocacy.

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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.