



The Need for an 'Association' to Improve Night Entertainment Business Management Practices to Reduce Worst Forms of Child Labour

Nepal Action Research Group 11

June 2024

Theme:	Need for the 'Association' to improve night entertainment business management practices for positive change and to reduce WFCL
Country:	Nepal
Project:	Child Labour: Action-Research-Innovation in South and South-Eastern Asia (CLARISSA)
Organisation:	CWISH
Facilitator:	Ranjana Sharma
Documenter:	Pema Sherpa

DOI: [10.19088/CLARISSA.2024.035](https://doi.org/10.19088/CLARISSA.2024.035)

CLARISSA (Child Labour: Action-Research-Innovation in South and South-Eastern Asia) is a large-scale research programme on the worst forms of child labour. It aims to identify, evidence, and promote effective multi-stakeholder action to tackle the drivers of the worst forms of child labour in selected supply chains in Nepal and Bangladesh.

This paper has been funded with UK aid from the UK government (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, formerly the Department for International Development). The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IDS or the UK government.



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Suggested citation

CLARISSA (2024) *The Need for an 'Association' to Improve Night Entertainment Business Management Practices to Reduce Worst Forms of Child Labour*, Nepal Action Research Group 11, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: [10.19088/CLARISSA.2024.035](https://doi.org/10.19088/CLARISSA.2024.035)

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1. About the Action Research Group

Table 1.1: Key details

Action Research Group (ARG) name	Night Entertainment Business Owner Group (<i>Dohoris</i> and Dance Bars)
Theme of ARG (issue being worked on)	Need for the ‘association’ to improve night entertainment business management practices for positive change and to reduce WFCL <u>Specific issue:</u> Lack of document management systems within business venues leading to the prevalence of WFCL in <i>dohoris</i> and dance bars
Start date	6 February 2022
End date	18 July 2023
Number of meetings and average length	21. Average length per meeting 1.5 hours
Starting participants (N=total)	Males = 10 Females = 0 People with disabilities = 1
Ending participants (N=total)	Males = 9 Females = 0 People with disabilities = 1 (Note: One owner left the group as he went back to his village)



Caption: An ARG workshop

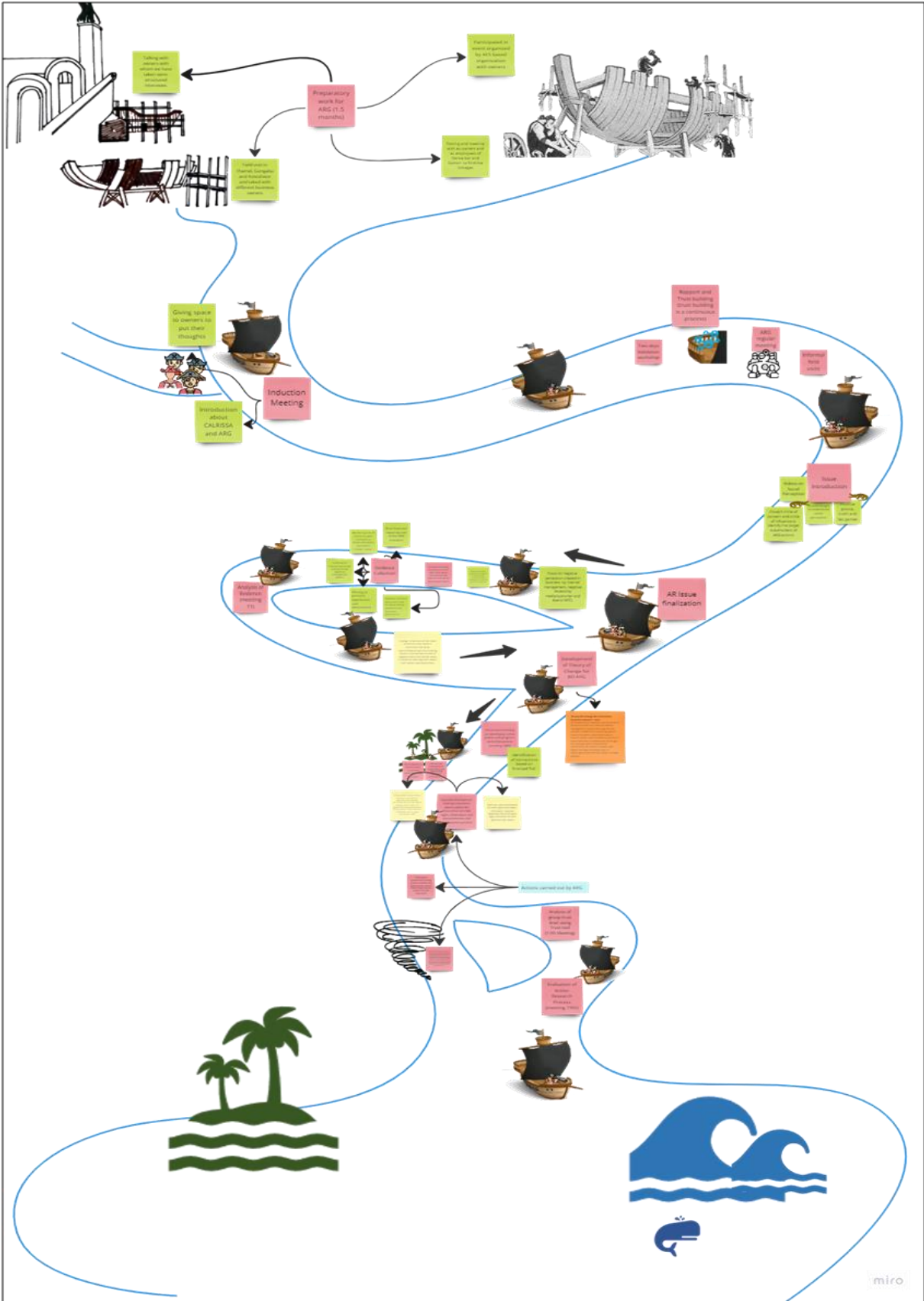
1.1 Background/introduction

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

Through 13 Action Research Groups (ARGs) in Bangladesh and 12 groups in Nepal, the programme is generating a rich understanding – particularly through children’s lived experiences – of the complex underlying drivers of harmful work, and working children and their employers are themselves defining, piloting, and evaluating their own innovative actions that aim to increase children’s options to avoid WFCL.

2. The story of the ARG

Figure 2.1: River of life



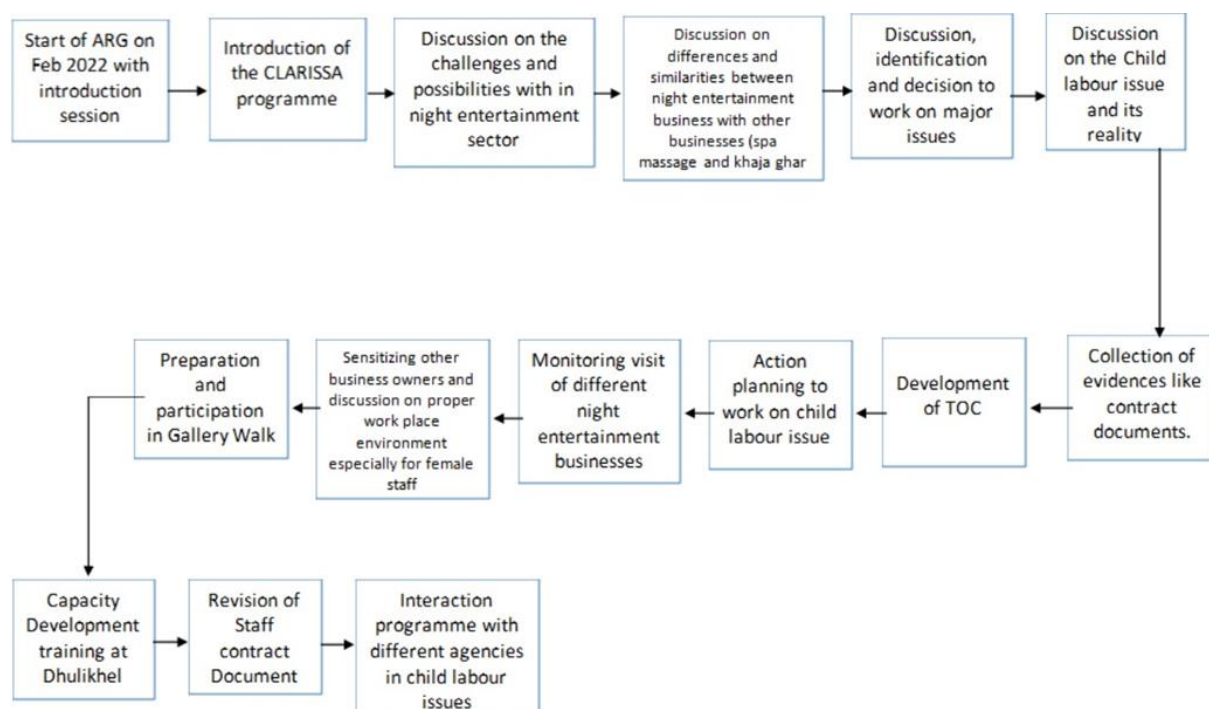
Source: Author's own.

2.1 Creation of the ARG

In late 2020, CLARISSA undertook scoping studies and literature reviews into supply chain/human chain/urban neighbourhood dynamics in Kathmandu, and their impact on WFCL. To address the evidence gaps identified, the team developed a research framing for exploring in greater detail how small Adult Entertainment Sector (AES) businesses were being run – exploring factors such as managing seasonality, relationships between informal and formal businesses, loans and debts carried by small businesses, and business norms in the sector – and how these factors can perpetuate WFCL. Twenty-five AES business owners running *dohoris*, dance bars, *khaja ghars* (small eateries), and massage and spa venues were then interviewed, and the findings were analysed and validated by business owners. The next step was the formation of three Action Research Groups (ARG) with AES business owners, to undertake further evidence gathering and then formulate and deliver actions and innovations to reduce WFCL.

It was decided that one ARG would focus on owners of *dohoris*¹ and dance bars². Initially, individual owners were approached, then they helped the CLARISSA team find others (snowballing method) and other owners were approached. The selection criterion for the group was running an informal business (plus consenting to ongoing participation). The chosen location for this group is a major entry point into Kathmandu from the eastern side of Kathmandu Valley, and this has led to a large number of new AES businesses being set up.

Figure 2.2: ARG timeline



Note: Link to the Annexe: Visual description for Figure 2.2. Source: Author’s own; diagram produced by the group.

¹ A venue that offers traditional folk music and dance plus alcohol and food. Some offer a family-type environment, whereas others have a sexually charged atmosphere. While sexual services are not usually provided on the premises, arrangements may be made with waiting staff to meet for sex after hours.

² Customers are entertained by dancers who perform to music – waiting staff sit with customers to increase revenue from alcohol. Staff often earn commission from the beverages sold. There may be indirect sexual activity (e.g. flirting, touching and kissing). Customers may arrange to ‘go out’ (outside the venue) with dance bar employees for more direct sexual activity. Dance bars are generally more expensive than cabin restaurants and attract a more affluent clientele.

2.2 Rapport- and trust-building

There was an initial three months of rapport-building and preparation. The group started without any specific theme so initial meetings were focused on exploring group members' perceptions of their sector alongside the WFCL. The group also discussed ethics, confidentiality, and safeguarding in relation to the ARG. The group identified a set of themes initially, including social perceptions towards AES/nighttime businesses, customer behaviour, and a lack of effective monitoring mechanisms in the sector in relation to checking children's age (children looking older than they are and a lack of documentation showing their age).

2.3 Evidence gathering and preparing for actions

After a few meetings the group spent two days together in a workshop validating the findings from the 25 interviews with business owners and discussing possible themes for the group. They integrated their own identified themes with themes that had emerged from the validation, and discussed business setup, business activities, staff hiring practices, employer–employee relationships, community norms, finance, risk, and resilience in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Members then chose the broad theme 'perceptions about nightlife business and bringing about change in system dynamics relating to *dohoris* and dance bars' to work on. The group wanted to look at systems around registration and set up for small businesses, monitoring mechanisms, management practices, and improving the quality of venues.

The group discussed the stakeholders who impact their business and who they might influence to change. To do this they used Stephen Covey's 'circle of concern and circle of influence' tool. They identified that they could influence their peers through the Association and that collectively they would be able to bring about change, saying: 'first the Association should be strong and there should be uniformity and teamwork'. They felt that there was no documented evidence in existence beyond their personal experience, media publications, and YouTube videos to support their claim. One business owner said:

What made me think that people have a negative perception towards our business is that while we attend some meetings organised by different NGOs [non-governmental organisations], they mention about the business practices in AES, from those discussions also we came to realise that people have a negative perception towards our business.

As such, the group decided to work on the role of the Association for improving night entertainment business management practices for positive change and to reduce the WFCL. This was based on their feeling that it was best to focus on working towards internal changes and improving the image of their sector.

During discussion, one group member suggested that they conduct monitoring visits to *dohoris* and dance bars to check for child labour and assess management practices. It was then decided that a core team of three or four group members would conduct the visits, later including the CLARISSA staff team. Visits were then made to 16 *dohoris* and dance bars in the location and its surrounding areas. At the same time, they developed a set of questionnaires for Association members, in order to understand the role of the Association in running businesses, promoting better management systems, and promoting owners' knowledge of child labour law and policies.

Findings from these visits were as follows:

- Some venues were well-managed and had enough staff, while in others there was a lack of staff to manage the number of customers.
- It was challenging to identify child labourers as it was difficult to determine their age and employer and owners did not have documents to prove employer ages.
- Association member owners are supported in legal issues such as dealing with police–customer-related issues (fights, etc.) within the venue or billing issues.
- Very few owners are aware of child labour laws and policies.

In subsequent meetings group members discussed lack of systematic management and negative societal perceptions of their businesses as primary issues to address. The group discussed specific documentation systems such as employee contracts and codes of conduct, in the sense that they felt the existence of these documents demonstrated good management practice.

They also felt that Association membership could promote positive changes in night entertainment business management practices and could lead to a reduction of WFCL in *dohoris* and dance bars in the location. They also emphasised gaps in the knowledge of business owners about policies and laws in Nepal related to WFCL.

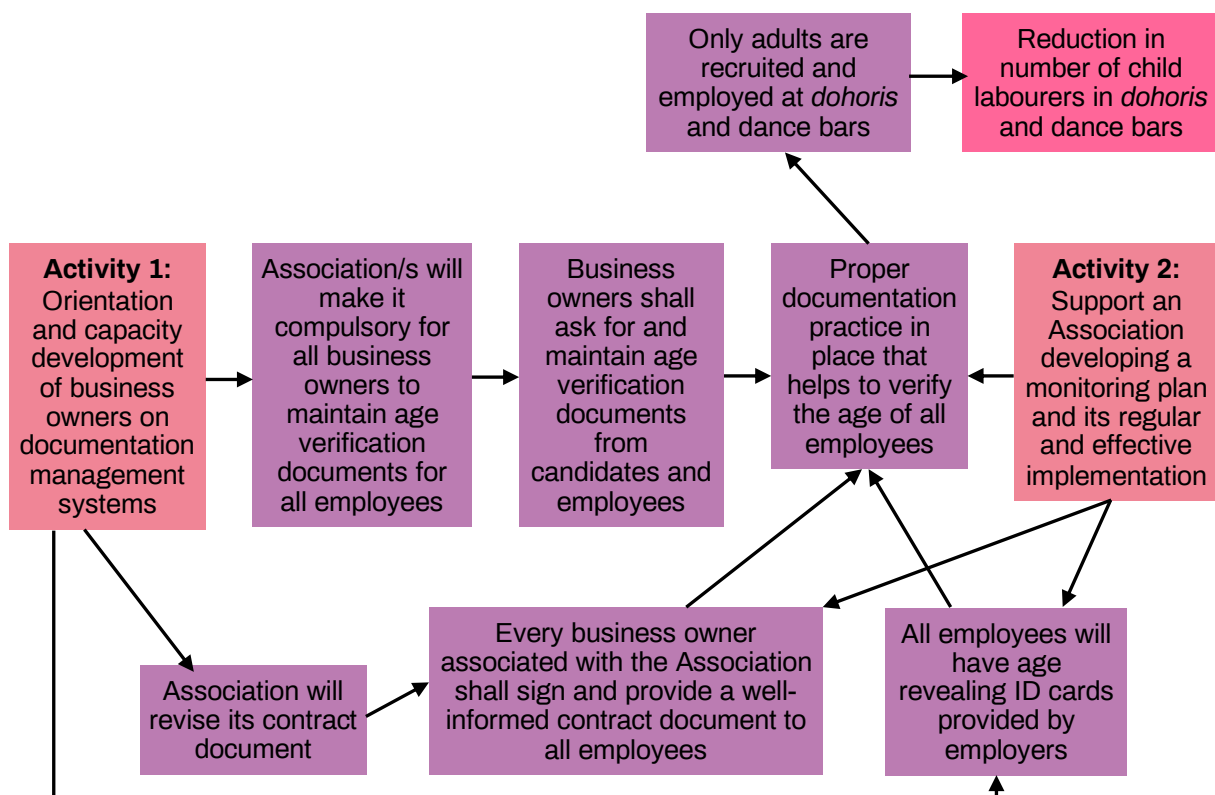
The group then decided to work on the lack of a document management system within business venues and how this was leading to the prevalence of WFCL in *dohoris* and dance bars.

2.3.1 Theory of Change (ToC)

From the thirteenth meeting onwards, the group was focused on the development of their ToC. Over four meetings they thought through all the activities they had done so far including theme/issue selection, evidence gathering, and what success looks like for them, and they identified actions to achieve success (and pathways to success) and agreed on a timeline and responsibilities.

Figure 2.3: Theory of Change

Issues identified:	Evidence:	Desired outcome:
<p>Major issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor management systems in <i>dohoris</i> and dance bars leading to WFCL • Negative perceptions of public towards <i>dohoris</i> and dance bars • Prevalence of child labour in <i>dohoris</i> and dance bars <p>Specific issue:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor documentation of employees' age leading to the employment of minors in <i>dohoris</i> and dance bars 	<p>Evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different policy guidelines on child labour and national master plan on child labour • Major findings from interviews with business owners; validation workshop • Evidence collection visits • Brief description of monitoring visit by members of association • Videos/social media/news regarding child labour in the AES and people's perceptions of this 	<p>Desired outcome:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business owners will obtain and keep employees age verifying documents – prohibiting recruitment and employment of minors in <i>dohoris</i> and dance bars in the ARG location area



Source: Author's own.

The group articulated that success would look like all business owners of *dohoris* and dance bars that are associated with the Association requesting and keeping age verification documents for all their staff plus ongoing effective and regular monitoring by Association members of each other (to check age verification documents are in place). This will prohibit the recruitment and employment of minors in *dohoris* and dance bars within the ARG location area.

2.4 Key decisions on actions

One group member suggested that it might be helpful to orient business owners on policy and laws related to child labour, as many owners don't know about different policy provisions.

One group member added that it would be useful to orient business owners on staff recruitment and documentation management. Both suggested that these actions could be grouped together.

Another member suggested that a standard contract document should be used by all business venues within the Association. The contract should include information regarding working times, salary and benefits, code of conduct, etc. It should be signed by both parties: employer and employee.

Another member suggested effective and timely monitoring by the Association as another action. It was suggested that the ARG could help the Association plan their monitoring process. One member said:

Well if there were appropriate documents being collected by owners from staff and maintained properly then business owners could easily verify the age of staff so that it prohibits the recruitment and employment of minors in our sector.

A final discussion on changes to the ToC was initiated in the fourteenth meeting with some business owners and it was agreed that none were needed. They concluded that the best way to prevent child labour is to put in place age verification processes and proper contracts with staff during hiring processes. They also discussed revising the staff contract of the Night Entertainment Business Association to specify that staff must be Nepali citizens and to require proof of citizenship or a passport copy. This would allow the Association to monitor owners' hiring practices to control against hiring minors in the sector. Two major actions planned were: orientation and capacity development of business owners on documentation management and support the Association in developing a monitoring plan and support its regular and effective implementation.

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

The first action taken was the **orientation and capacity development of business owners on documentation management** action – through a two-day workshop with sessions on legal provisions related to child labour and discussions about the benefits to businesses of not hiring children. It also addressed hiring, age documentation and data management, contract development and employee codes of conduct for ethical business practice.

Their second action, **monitoring visits to Association members** was delivered by task groups consisting of the chairperson, general secretary, treasurer and general members of the Association, and was conducted on a weekly basis.

After their first action and second actions the group revisited their ToC and reviewed and reflected as below.

Members shared the changes they had made in their businesses after training and learning. One of the significant changes made by the Association was revising its employee contract documents and code of conduct for employees, which were shared with 30 businesses in the Association in the Association's monthly meeting. Group members confirmed that most business owners implemented the changes, except for two or three who were notified of potential penalties for non-compliance. One member said:

We had knowledge of child labour, but after training, we got even more information on child labour. We learnt that each business should be registered and renewed. We have to be updated about legal aspects. Based on the information received, we also revised our contracts. We included information like employers must be

above 18 (must submit a copy of their citizenship certificate or passport) and they should be Nepali citizens in the contract document. The business owners who had not renewed their registration also have done that.

Regarding the second action, one member said:

During our recent monitoring visit at a dance bar in [location anonymised] we saw two employees. They looked like minors, so we asked for their legal documents from the owner, [but] they were adults. So, in most of our area, there are no issues of child labour.

Their learning was that regular monitoring visits are required to make businesses strictly follow the rules and regulations set by the Association and to allow action if any malpractices are observed. All the participants said that there were no such incidents after the training as there were no minors in the location area.

Upon successfully conducting the two actions the group was enthusiastic and wanted to extend their first action of orienting business owners about ethical business management practices and legal provisions related to child labour to all the businesses and key management staff affiliated with the Association. As such they invited 48 participants to attend a second session. Afterwards positive changes were shared, and one group member reported that around five businesses had renewed their registration. Business owners stated that they now realised the benefits of proper documentation and resolved to call an auditor to manage their financial and data management matters. They learned about other changes happening in more of the Association members' businesses in relation to renewals of business, registrations in VAT, paying taxes and conducting employee age verification documents along with contracts.

However, monitoring visits were paused:

Well, we have not done it yet. As I have said before in previous meetings, when we go to do monitoring we do an observation on behalf of both employee and employers and we ask employers to make proper arrangements and systems that benefit employees more than employers. Thus, due to some concern from the owners, we have not prepared the monitoring plan by the Association yet.

At the end of the ARG process, however, the members had resumed their regular monitoring visits.

Beyond their planned actions derived from the ToC, group members also conducted an interaction programme with stakeholders such as law enforcement and local government (with whom they directly interact while running their businesses). This action was a platform for them to open a dialogue with these agencies on how their businesses are bringing about changes in their area, what can be done better according to them and how these agencies can support them to be more dignified and systematic. They also shared their ways of running their businesses ethically and about how the Association functions to regulate owners of *khaja ghars* (owners of *khaja ghars* were in the process of forming their own Association.)

Further reflecting on their learnings on how they are bringing change in their businesses through their actions, one member suggested making the *dohoris* and dance bar sector dignified and systematic by keeping contracts with supporting age verification documents, registering and renewing businesses and paying their regular taxes. The group also wanted to carry out actions in addition to meetings and to explore opportunities beyond the Kathmandu Valley. They plan to take beyond CLARISSA, monitoring documentation, working against owners engaged with child labour and intervening where required.

3. Reflections from the facilitator/documenter

The group consisted of adult males, making it difficult to rely on traditional facilitation methods such as direct questioning and sharing; also, our goal was to make it more participatory so that they would discuss and contribute more in the process. Through their discussion, we understood that there are three female owners in this location who are wives or relatives of male owners and act as cashiers and singers and look after the day-to-day management of *dohoris*. We learned that there are no dance bars in the area that are owned or handled by females. We had hoped that the women owning/running *dohoris* would be part of the ARG group before the process started but they sent their male representative on their behalf and later when we asked the men why that happened, they said it was because women don't engage in extra activities and only focus on family and work.

Collaborative approaches were necessary to engage owners in meetings and address the issue of WFCL. We also contributed to issues that they were interested in talking about, such as their business-related issues, which helped us to learn about the issues they faced day-to-day. The group was unhappy about society's perceptions of them and wanted to reduce child labour in their sector through better management practices. Non-profit organisations made them wary, so we tailored an approach to business owners to achieve CLARISSA's goal of preventing child labour. The facilitator and documenter strategised the meeting's discussion points and ways to address the issues after each meeting. We adapted a facilitation style that was situational to the group's different levels of strength, sometimes being persuasive to channel the discussion.

Peers helping others was fruitful (helping others understand) so we allowed that to happen with ample time. Furthermore, we changed venues to prevent fatigue and maintain energy during meetings. We developed patience by building trust and rapport with the owners and understanding their focus on profit and business. We learned about the AES, including *dohoris* and dance bars, through visits to their venues, watching videos on you tube and seeing on local news how *dohoris* and dance bars venues are stigmatised by the public and media. Our capacity for using games and tools in meetings, including trust tools, the Covey Circle of Concern, and the River of Life, was also developed. We avoided judgment and bias to learn about the realities of running businesses and about the factors contributing to WFCL.

3.1 Challenges and mitigation

The group members had negative perceptions towards non-profit organisations and were hesitant about trusting and collaborating with us. To address this, we held several meetings to build rapport and gain their trust. We explained our approach by being part of their informal conversation such as any ongoing social issues, by allowing them to take the lead in discussions and delaying discussing the core issue of CLARISSA. During these informal meetings, our goal was only to let them be comfortable with us and talk as much as possible about anything they wanted to.

The biggest challenge faced during the ARG process was finding a suitable time for meetings. As the owners owned businesses that operated from 6pm to early morning, managing time for meetings was difficult. To accommodate their schedule, we organised meetings in the late afternoon and included fun games and refreshments to keep them engaged. We also followed up regularly and went with them to their planned activities, even if it was nighttime.

The group often got distracted by their own business issues and lost focus on the issue of WFCL. To address this, time was given to them to discuss their issues, but we eventually brought the discussion back to the focused agenda. In some instances, we showed them motivational videos on how they can work towards a goal as a team to bring changes to this sector, why people fail in their attempts and played simple fun games like 'let us gossip', 'two truths and lie', 'positive and negative talk' to keep them interested and motivated during the process.

3.2 Proud moments

Owners in the night entertainment business have been avoiding the issue of WFCL in their sector. However, after working with CLARISSA, they have begun to acknowledge that the issue exists, and that they need to collectively work towards addressing it. We supported the group in developing a ToC, which was challenging as it was their first time doing so, but we broke down the process step by step and gave them time to understand it. As a result of their engagement with us, ARG members invited other business owners from the Association to discuss WFCL and how to minimise it through strong management and documentation practices. They also shared information on laws and regulations that they need to follow to address the issue of WFCL. In addition, they initiated the creation of an umbrella organisation 'The Federation of Dohoris' to better regulate this sector and work towards minimising WFCL.

Group members said that they have started implementing proper documentation practices, have renewed contracts, and have developed a code of conduct for employees that combined can contribute to minimising WFCL. They now feel confident that they can present all necessary documents if required and that these documents showcase their achievements in reducing WFCL in their area through requirements of age verification documents while hiring.

Being a member of an Association is voluntary for businesses in this location. A primary motivation for businesses to be members of the Association is to get support when required, especially during legal issues. Board members of the Association can make rules and regulations to be implemented by all the affiliated members of the Association. However, if not monitored by the board members regularly there is the possibility of default by owners.

In case of default, the Association has limited power over individual businesses. In such cases individual owners can be fined for misconduct or their membership can be terminated. Three owners in the location and the periphery area have not been members of the Association and have been running their businesses independently due to this. Such businesses create challenges for the Association (to bring them under the rules and regulations). This is a learning for owners – that without bringing all business owners under one umbrella regulating this sector is not possible. This was a learning for us as well, hence initiating discussion on making a national-level federation.

4. Reflections from the business owners

4.1 Trust and ownership

4.1.1 Trust

Members testified that they felt supported by each other during and beyond their meetings. The trust tool was implemented twice during the process, once during the tenth meeting and then during the seventeenth meeting, in order to understand if there were any changes felt or observed by group members during the process (within the group as well as with CLARISSA staff). They shared their personal thoughts and issues with the group and team, and they did so due to feeling motivated and feeling trust with each other. The group also provided support to each other in terms of investment or conflict resolution with customers or the police. However, distrust was focused on an individual level, particularly when members did not show up for a meeting. Largely there was trust, however, as one group member said:

We are leaving our business with the thought of bringing better changes in this sector, by managing our time (for this meeting and programme), we are here with each other and with positive thinking.

Another member said:

We openly talk with you; we are open with our members. If we did not trust you then why would we be open with you and with our members?

The trust tool was re-used in the seventeenth meeting and members were again asked to analyse trust levels in the group. They reported that they felt happy and harmonious with each other and believed they could rely on each other. They were confident in their colleagues and felt mentally secure in their support. If there was distrust, they resolved issues themselves. The group's trust level was scored as five, even with differences in commitment amongst members. One member said:

We ask for support from each other and share our problems, opinions and ideas with each other and take their suggestions.

Another said:

I had to go to my village for some work and there was only my wife, my daughter and my manager here in Kathmandu. But I did not have any issues because I have trust in my team and the Association.

A trust score of five is described as 'actors are showing up for each other. They feel like a team and can rely on each other for support through highs and lows'.

The final learning and reflection workshop was held with the objective of providing a final reflection on group experiences of the Action Research process, discussing feelings of ownership, and identifying turning points. During this session, ARG members shared their understanding of the challenges the group had faced, feelings of agency, ownership and equity in relation to the Action Research process, and the group's ability to make changes.

4.1.2 Ownership

An ownership tool was used once during the engagement period, which included several aspects such as feeling heard in the group, feeling part of the group, and respect within the group. The members were asked to rate themselves on a scale of one to four, depending on the aspect being evaluated. One of the members had missed a group workshop on laws and

policy on WFCL and felt removed from the group and rated themselves as only a level one on the scale. In contrast, eight members rated themselves at four, indicating that they had been included in all activities and meetings and felt like they were an important part of the group. Additionally, all nine members agreed that the group listened to each other, considered present and future needs, valued each contribution to the group, and gave members appropriate responsibilities to match their skills. While discussing the group's ability to see and make changes, most members agreed on a scale of three. However, one member stated that the group had not achieved its desired outcome due to financial and social reasons, and thus, they were not fully confident in their ability to bring about change. The chairperson of the Association was convinced by the other members to agree on a scale of four but still believed that there was more to learn and that the group had not been 100 per cent successful in bringing about the changes they wanted to see.

4.2 Turning points

Members of the ARG said that they were able to deepen their learning about their own sector, as well as about the AES, as a result of their participation. They said that right at the beginning of the process they had discovered the prevalence of child labour and sexual violence in *khaja ghars*, massage and spa venues, and also in their own sector (especially in dance bars). This led the group to observe *dohoris* and dance bars more critically and learn about laws and policies regarding child labour. The group made changes to their recruitment processes as a result and received support in revising their staff contracts. It also contributed to peer monitoring and plans to continue monitoring in the future. Through their engagement with the action research group, they gained new insights and knowledge.

According to members, having investment and willpower alone is not enough for a business to be successful. Making the right decisions at the right time is also crucial.

With the coordination of CLARISSA, we aimed to improve our dohoris and dance bars business to be successful, strong, and systematic. Thanks to the training about laws and provisions provided to us, we learned that every aspect has its pros and cons. Recognising these and making the right decisions at the right time can lead to success. For instance, we made important decisions after the training, such as seeking legal consultation, improving documentation, cooperating with staff, maintaining trust in teamwork, and fostering good employer–employee relationships. Teamwork is a strength that can help achieve desired results if everyone fulfils their responsibilities on time. Making important decisions at the right time and place is the foundation for future success.

Members said that working with CLARISSA had brought about significant changes within their group and new approaches to running their business. At the workshop on ethical business practices and Nepalese law related to the WFCL, they learned about the definition of ethical business, and how to handle a business legally and to make a business successful. They also gained insights into business and employee management good practice and how to follow legal procedures. As a result of these discussions, they revised their documentation and changed their business directions, which has led to improvements in their operations.

In the end, the team reflected that because of their new discoveries, they became cautious about their own sector and made important decisions to change direction and run their businesses ethically. In order to improve their sector and reduce child labour in *dohoris* and dance bars all over Nepal they are in the process of making a federation of *dohoris*. This will help regulate their sector with one standardised standing operating procedure (SOP) and code of conduct.

4.3 Going beyond CLARISSA

As this ARG reflected on the positive changes resulting from their recent initiatives, they decided they wanted to continue their efforts. Specifically, they will plan to engage with the Night Entertainment Sector Business Association for the location and the surrounding areas, organising meetings and seeking coordination as needed. Their upcoming actions will include field visits to *dohoris*, dance bars, massage parlours, and cabin restaurants to collect data on staff age and to monitor child labour situations. The group also emphasised the importance of completing their 'interaction with stakeholders' action and planning a programme centred around local government (ward), police and other concerned stakeholders. They recognise that support and understanding from these groups is crucial to their business operating systematically. Likewise, they also plan to make a federation.

5. Annexe: Visual description for Figure 2.2

A linear timeline consisting of 15 stages. They are as follows

1. Start of Action Research Group in February 2022 with introduction section.
2. Introduction of the CLARISSA programme.
3. Discussion on the challenges and possibilities within night entertainment sector.
4. Discussion on differences and similarities between night entertainment business with other businesses (spa massage and *khaja ghar*).
5. Discussion, identification and decision to work on major issues.
6. Discussion on the child labour issue and its reality.
7. Collection of evidence like contract documents.
8. Development of Theory of Change.
9. Action planning to work on child labour issue.
10. Monitoring visit of different night entertainment businesses.
11. Sensitising other business owners and discussion on proper workplace environment, especially for female staff.
12. Preparation and participation in gallery walk.
13. Capacity development training at Dhulikhel.
14. Revision of staff contract document.
15. Interaction programme with different agencies in child labour issues.

Return to Figure 2.2.