



# Using a 'Partnership Rubric' in Participatory Evaluations

## **CLARISSA LEARNING NOTE 3**

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## For the website:

Programmes that aim to tackle complex societal issues, such as the worst forms of child labour, require rich partnerships that bring together different perspectives. CLARISSA's consortium partnership adopts an empowerment approach to the interventions we deliver and our ways of working together. Part of this approach involves ongoing reflection and learning about how we work together in our partnership, and how this can be adapted if needed. This learning note focuses on a method used in CLARISSA to both reflect on and strengthen how we work in partnerships – the partnership rubric. We found that using the rubric flexibly was key to mitigating some of the challenges of such a complex consortium. This included using it in different sizes of forum, with different levels of preparation. Periodically adapting it for country context and as new partners came on board also helped ensure a shared sense of our preferred ways of working as the project progressed.

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## 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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## Learning summary

The main learning from the development and use of a rubric to assess the performance of the Child Labour: Action-Research-Innovation in South and South-Eastern Asia (CLARISSA) consortium partnership is that, as a participatory evaluation tool, **it is most impactful when used iteratively and flexibly**. Situating the use of the rubric within the **CLARISSA** programme's existing learning infrastructure allowed for iterative use in facilitated after-action reviews. The iterative use of the co-produced tool over several years allowed both greater clarity on the partnership principles that emerged and a stronger collective understanding of how to improve performance. Feedback loops were established between strengthening elements of partnership working, such as building trust over time, and the consortium's ability to reflect critically on practice and generate more nuanced and actionable learning. In this sense, the rubric is not simply a tool to evaluate partnership working, but becomes an embedded operational tool to strengthen partnership working through reflection and learning.

Two examples of its flexible use that led to stronger consortium relations are:

- 1 Adapting to country contexts** – The initial partnership rubric was codeveloped by all consortium partners at the beginning of the project, generating a strong sense of ownership that anchored iterative reflections. As the project progressed, new people joined, and operational teams took shape in-country. The rubric was adapted to each country context and evolving partnership environments. This was particularly helpful in generating an increased sense of ownership for those new to the project, and supported refinement and clarification of collective principles for partnership working as it took shape operationally in each country context.
- 2 Using it in different ways in different types of fora** – Reflecting on the quality of relationships between partners at the outset revealed some hesitation to offer observations that may have been perceived as critical. To help navigate this common operational challenge with participatory methods, we experimented with using the partnership rubric in different-sized reflection and learning events in various ways. This included using it within organisational self-reflection sessions, which fed into facilitated crossorganisational reflection sessions, and using the world café method, with cross-organisational groups building collective reflections. Using the rubric for reflection during or before the facilitated group sessions also influenced the outcomes achieved. Using it beforehand within each organisation created more time for focused crossorganisational discussions, leading to greater depth of learning. However, this also meant greater variation in its use, which created asymmetry during the group sessions. In the Covid-19 period, we had to adapt to virtual and hybrid formats in using the rubric during our workshops and we found that in-person use resulted in the most critical engagement and most nuanced learning. In addition, we intentionally did not use the rubric at specific moments, particularly when trust was not strong enough to allow for safe spaces to critically reflect on challenges while working online.

## List of abbreviations

AAR	After-action review
BIGD	BRAC Institute of Governance and Development
CLARISSA	Child Labour: Action-Research-Innovation in South and South-Eastern Asia
CWISH	Children & Women in Social Service & Human Rights
DAM	Dhaka Ahsania Mission
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
GUC	Grambangla Unnayan Committee
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
MEL	Monitoring evaluation and learning
Tdh	Terre des hommes
ToC	Theory of Change
VOC	Voice of Children

## CLARISSA in a nutshell

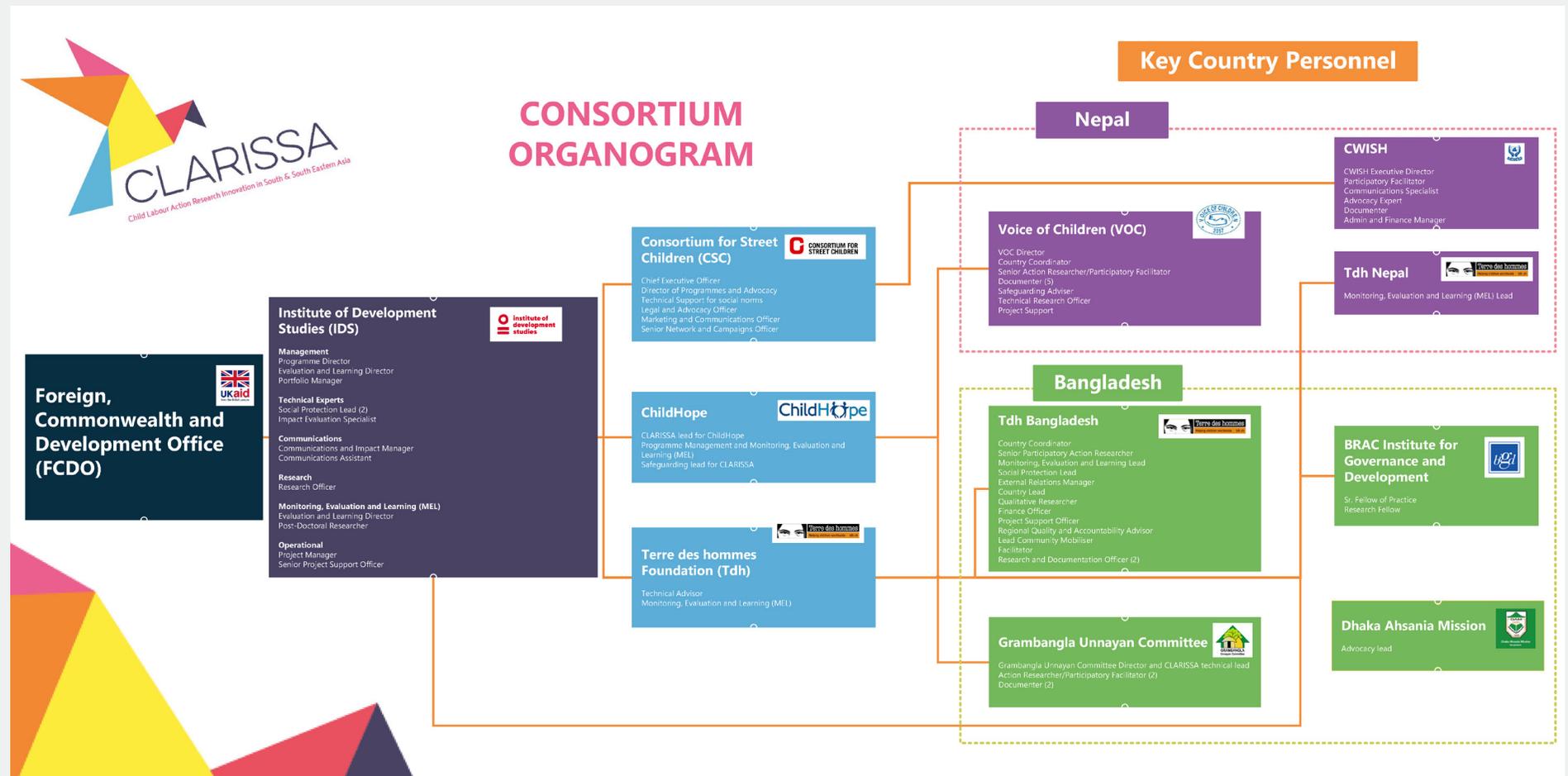
The Child Labour: Action-Research-Innovation in South and South-Eastern Asia (CLARISSA) action research programme uses participatory action research to generate innovative solutions for children in Bangladesh and Nepal to avoid hazardous labour. The programme focuses on the leather sector in Bangladesh, and the adult entertainment sector in Nepal. Aiming to generate innovation from on the ground, CLARISSA is co-designed with all stakeholders to combine evidence gathering and learning from action. These three elements – participation, research evidence and innovative actions – mean that CLARISSA brings together researchers and implementers into one multilayered, multi-national consortium, which constantly feeds back into its ongoing design.

The programme is funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), and led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in partnership with ChildHope; the Consortium for Street Children; Terre des hommes (Tdh), Lausanne; Voice of Children (VOC); Grambangla Unnayan Committee (GUC); BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD); Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM); and Children-Women in Social Service and Human Rights (CWISH).

### The CLARISSA partnership

CLARISSA is a consortium programme comprising four international partners and five in-country partners. The five in-country partners are downstream partners of ChildHope UK (VOC and GUC) and the Consortium for Street Children (CWISH and DAM). Tdh has country offices in Bangladesh and Nepal. In Bangladesh, the Tdh country office is the local operational lead; in Nepal, this role sits with VOC. The country coordinator sits within the local lead organisation, and is the key connection point between country- and consortium-level operations. The hosts ensure that CLARISSA's in-country objectives are aligned among all in-country implementing partners. The local operational lead are responsible for programme coordination, event management, trainings and stakeholder management. They manage a CLARISSA office, where all partners meet for reflection and exchange. The local operational lead organisations receive more funding and have larger teams.

Figure 1: CLARISSA consortium organogram



Source: CLARISSA (2020) *CLARISSA Organogram*, infographic (accessed 12 July 2023)

Operationally, individuals from the different organisations work closely together in several thematic and operational teams that have responsibility for co-creating the programme; for example, the cross-country Thematic Research Team, which designs and implements a rigorous and coherent research agenda and includes consortiumlevel team members; and the Process Design Team, which is the central space for designing and overseeing all participatory processes, with representatives from all partners and countries. Meeting regularly, the many CLARISSA teams are where decisions are made collectively and learning is shared.

## The partnership rubric in principle

Given the hybrid nature of CLARISSA as a research and implementation programme, the partnership between research, implementation, content and local experts is foundational to the work we do. Learning has always been an explicit goal of the consortium and aims to feed innovation in programme design. Continuous reflection and learning about how we are working in partnership is an important part of this; evaluation of the consortium partnership is therefore a core part of our overall evaluation and learning agenda (Apgar *et al.* 2020, 2022). An evaluative rubric was developed and agreed on with all partners during the inception phase of the programme. It was developed as a tool for internal reflection on the partnership, being used alongside an anonymous partnership survey to jointly evaluate and support consortium relations. Here we focus on our learning from use of the CLARISSA partnership rubric alone.

Evaluative rubrics are used in many different fields, originating in the education sector. In evaluations, rubrics are now widely used as a participatory and transparent assessment tool. In general, a rubric is a qualitative assessment tool with evaluative descriptors of what performance or quality look like according to different criteria. It can help make explicit the judgements about the quality, value and importance of the interventions being evaluated.

A rubric generally has three components: the key elements of performance, the level of performance for each key element, and a descriptor of what each level of performance for each key element looks like (Oakden 2018). The elements used in evaluative rubrics are distinct from indicators: where indicators are made to be easy to measure, precise and narrow, elements in rubrics are harder to measure, approximate and have broader descriptions. This means that it becomes harder to manipulate the evaluation process, because of the more approximate nature of criteria, if people try to act in a certain way to achieve the highest possible rating, rather than they are actually acting out what is a desirable behaviour, in that way, evaluative rubrics give a clear view of what we are striving towards. Furthermore, because criteria are intentionally fuzzy, they are open to different interpretations,; and it is exactly this openness to interpretation that triggers discussions and deepens learning. The process of deliberating what which performance level is right and why is key to the process of using evaluative rubrics.

In CLARISSA, we use the evaluative rubric in a participatory way. Firstly, by developing and adapting the rubric with all partners, which ensures that everyone's ideas around what it means for the partnership to be functioning on a specific level and what is important are integrated from the outset. Secondly, assessments are implemented through facilitated workshops, involving the whole team and with a key focus on people providing reasoning and evidence to underpin their argument for why they think the partnership is operating at a certain level. The reflections generated are then immediately used to develop and agree on actionable learning in response, feeding the programme's adaptive management.

## Box 1: What is the CLARISSA partnership rubric?

The CLARISSA partnership rubric is a qualitative self-assessment tool to monitor the functioning of the partnership, intended to stimulate reflection and discussion across partners.

It covers seven partnership performance elements:

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

It asks for evaluative descriptions of what performance or quality look like at three levels:

- 1 Well-functioning
- 2 Emerging
- 3 Needs help

### **What the partnership rubric is *not***

It is not a set of indicators that need to be achieved to rate the partnership's performance. Compared to using quantitative indicators, a partnership rubric helps avoid the trap of doing the bare minimum to achieve a certain score.

# Developing and contextualising the partnership rubric

## Developing the initial rubric

CLARISSA's partnership rubric was developed with all consortium partners during the programme's early inception phase. Representatives of all the consortium partners met in a workshop to collectively revisit and agree on ways of working together that were consolidated into seven partnership principles that had been outlined during the proposal phase. These seven principles are the key performance elements of our partnership rubric. During the workshop, each partner developed their own descriptor of what each level of performance looked like for each of the seven principles. These were then synthesised by the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) team, agreed on by the Strategy and Operations Team and shaped into the original partnership rubric (Table 1).

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

## Adapting and contextualising the rubric

From the beginning, the evaluation design contained mechanisms to support the evolution of the original partnership rubric. This involved contextualising it to develop country-specific rubrics and the evolution of the rubric descriptors at consortium level. The Bangladesh country team contextualised the rubric in a specific workshop in June 2020, and the Nepal country team during the sixmonthly country after-action review (AAR) in January 2021.<sup>1</sup> The consortium rubric was revised during the October 2020 annual consortium AAR. This means we use three distinct versions of the rubric in the programme.

The Bangladesh contextualisation involved a participatory process including colleagues from Tdh and GUC – the two main consortium partners in Bangladesh. The team discussed the definitions of each element in Bangla, which increased the effectiveness of the discussion as people could own their understandings of key performance elements. They also read each of the descriptors, participants identifying points which needed to be added, revised, edited or deleted. The country MEL lead revisited the rubric document, sharing it with the participants for further review and final endorsement (see Annexe 1 for the adapted version).

The Nepal contextualisation focused on two elements of the rubric – entrepreneurial culture, and inclusivity and equitability – as areas where the team was not clear on their meaning. Through a process co-facilitated by the local MEL lead and an IDS researcher, the team first explored what each of the two elements meant to them, and then what 'well-functioning' for each of these elements looked like. These new descriptors were then updated accordingly (see Annexe 2 for the adapted version).

At the consortium level, the revision exercise involved consortium-level partners reading the descriptors and reflecting on which ones might need updating. The discussion primarily centred on the elements of 'entrepreneurial culture' and 'communication'. A central concept in the entrepreneurial culture element is risktaking. It became clear through this discussion and previous AARs in-country that different people have different ideas about what risk-taking means and that this needed to be clarified in the partnership rubric. Furthermore, the descriptors of communication needed to be balanced out to prevent well-functioning being described as a state of communication overload.

## Using the partnership rubric in practice

Table 2 provides an overview of when and how the three versions of the partnership rubric were used over three years. At the country level, the partnership rubric was used on a regular basis by integrating discussion around the reflections that emerged from assessing partnership performance during the six-monthly AAR.

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<sup>1</sup> AARs are a core part of our learning system. They are a key part of CLARISSA's adaptive management, providing team members the opportunity to step back from day-to-day implementation to look at what has been achieved, and the lessons learned for moving the programme forward. In-country, they happen every six months and once a year at consortium level.

<b>Table 2: Uses of the partnership rubric over three years of CLARISSA</b>				
<b>AAR no.</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Use of partnership rubric</b>	<b>Workshop modality</b>	<b>Methodology (how the rubric was used)</b>
<b>Bangladesh</b>				
AAR 1	March 2020	Yes	Physical	Team members completed the rubric within their organisational teams, followed by sharing and discussion in plenary
AAR 2	August 2020	Yes	Virtual	Prior to AAR, either completed individually and collated by organisation, or by team members together in their organisational team; plenary discussion in the AAR
AAR 3	February 2021	No	Hybrid	N/A
AAR 4	July 2021	No	Virtual	N/A
AAR 5	January 2022	Yes	Virtual	Team members completed it within their organisational teams, followed by sharing and discussion in plenary
AAR 6	June 2022	Yes	Physical	World café method
AAR 7	February 2023	Yes	Physical	Reviewed two elements (openness, honesty and mutual trust and equitability and inclusivity) in crossorganisational groups
<b>Nepal</b>				
AAR 1	February 2020	Yes	Physical	Team members completed it within their organisational teams, followed by sharing and discussion in plenary
AAR 2	July 2020	Yes	Virtual	Team members completed it within their organisational teams, followed by sharing and discussion in plenary
AAR 3	February 2021	No	Hybrid	Contextualisation of the partnership rubric
AAR 4	July 2021	No	Virtual	NA
AAR 5	April 2022	Yes	Physical	World café method
AAR 6	January 2023	No	Physical	NA
<b>Consortium level</b>				
AAR 1	October 2020	Yes	Virtual	Discussion and adaptation in crossorganisational groups Individual organisational rubric reflections synthesised and shared in presentation Partnership survey
AAR 2	August 2021	No	Virtual	Reflection on how the partnership has grown and was challenged by multiple crises
AAR 3	December 2022	No	Physical	Partnership survey and creative session on what the CLARISSA partnership represents
Annual reporting	September 2020	Yes	N/A	Each partner ranked their contribution to the partnership as part of their annual reporting

The partnership rubric was used in five out of the seven AARs held by the Bangladesh team between 2020 and 2023, and in three out of six in Nepal. The use of the rubric to assess the performance of the partnership evolved over time, based on the changing nature of the partnership and reflections on how to optimise its use. At some points, we decided not to use the partnership rubric. For example, during the third country AARs we built on findings from previous reflections that focused specifically on team capabilities as part of CLARISSA capacity development work (Widmer *et al.* 2022). During the fourth country AARs we again decided not to use the rubric due to tensions between some country-level partners. As this was during Covid-19 restrictions, the AARs were held virtually; the facilitation team felt it would be difficult to ensure a safe enough space for what we expected could be difficult conversations.

In the first country AARs (March/April 2020), participants were separated into groups by partner organisation. Within the groups they assessed their contribution to the partnership using the rubric for the first time. For each of the seven elements, they were asked to share reflections about their contributions in a facilitated plenary discussion across organisations. This led to agreements on where improvements could be made in partnership working. For example, in Nepal, we identified that smaller partners felt that communication and inclusiveness needed further development, and that it would be beneficial to have clearer roles and lines of communication between the different organisations.

In the second country AAR in Bangladesh, each partner organisation was asked to reflect on how the CLARISSA partnership was working and complete the rubric exercise within their organisational team prior to the AAR (using the contextualised rubric). This led to variability in the method: the Tdh team completed this exercise individually and the results were consolidated by the MEL lead; the Grambangla team completed this exercise as a group; and the BIGD team completed it individually online first, then discussed their assessment before finalising results as a group.

The findings of each team, including evidence of why they assessed each element at specific levels, were then consolidated. During the AAR workshop across the partners there was ample time to critically reflect on differences and similarities between assessments. This discussion surfaced challenges with communication (in particular, which channels to use as different organisations have different ways of communicating), which had already resulted in some people missing meetings or information. Linked to this were challenges in becoming an integrated team. At this stage, the CLARISSA team functioned through small teams formed around roles and tasks within the programme rather than as one integrated team.

In Nepal, the team used the rubric as a tool during the AARs only. First, team members were invited to individually reflect on how the CLARISSA partnership was working and describe why they assessed each element at specific levels using digital sticky notes ('stickies') on an online Miro board. Stickies were colour-coded for each partner organisation. In plenary, we went through each of the elements of the rubric and discussed key points. This discussion revealed that the partnership still needed help on the inclusivity and equitability element, which was mainly due to new ways of working online during the pandemic, as well as language barriers some team members experienced, given most sessions were held in English only. The team also identified needing help on the 'impact orientation' element, as not everyone fully understood the ToC yet. This led to a commitment to further socialise the ToC; for example, through the creation of a country-level ToC.

For the fifth Bangladesh AAR (January 2022) which was held in a hybrid format (with the international team joining online), we returned to using the rubric because the facilitators felt it would help move the team forward with some of the ongoing tensions, and the hybrid format would enable a safe enough space to be held in the room incountry. As in the first country AAR, partner organisations reflected in their own team first on how they were working in the CLARISSA partnership, this time focusing on providing evidence for their statements. Their reflections were then discussed in plenary. The exercise opened a conversation about challenges in building trust and difficulties with communication that had been under the surface for a while. Actionable learning to respond to challenges prioritised

building trust and mutual respect through strategies such as organising coffee mornings (to build relationships and trust across the team), emphasising more direct communications and being available for more informal interactions.

The fifth AAR in Nepal and the sixth in Bangladesh were the first AARs we could hold in person after Covid-19 restrictions were lifted. This was an opportunity to deepen reflection exercises and to allow for more cross-organisational reflection using a world café format. Participants were divided into seven crossorganisational groups. Each table anchored the discussion for one of the rubric elements, and each group rotated around the tables to discuss each of the elements, using a flipchart to document evidence for how well the partnership was performing on each element. This was followed by a gallery walk, where everyone was invited to view the cumulative results of each table discussion on each of the elements. Finally, in plenary the discussion focused on agreeing on the overall rating for each element and identifying actionable learning, particularly where improvements were needed. In Bangladesh, among other things the discussions surfaced ongoing challenges with communication that in turn challenged team identity. In Nepal, the exercise highlighted that the team felt the partnership was well-functioning overall, but improvement was needed in how to communicate with external stakeholders. While trust and openness were assessed as functioning well, the team felt they could still improve how they received feedback. They noted that impact orientation needed further development.

The sixth and seventh AARs in both countries largely focused on use of the outcomeharvesting method, with less time to reflect on the partnership. The Bangladesh team, however, wanted to allow time to reflect on the amount of work they had done since the previous AAR – specifically, on improving their ways of working. We focused on the rubric elements of inclusivity and equitability, and openness, honesty and mutual trust, which had been identified as needing help in previous sessions. The discussions took place in two cross-organisational groups, with each group discussing one of the two elements. A summary of the discussions was presented back in plenary.

The team reflected that the element of inclusivity and equitability had improved since the last AAR through the team members' commitment to improving their ways of working together; for example, by including each other more in meetings; by using phone calls instead of mainly relying on email communication; and by participating in residential workshops, such as on playfulness in facilitation, as a whole CLARISSA team. The element of openness, honesty and mutual trust was identified as still emerging, though different sub-teams felt variable levels of trust: mutual lack of trust was identified in relation to sharing evidence between the operational team and the advocacy team; whereas in other parts of the partnership (e.g. within the social protection team, between facilitators and the IDS team) trust was high due to informal interactions and regular mentoring sessions.

We initially planned to use the partnership rubric during the annual consortium AARs. However, because the partners were already working with the rubric at the country level, we decided not to use them at every consortium AAR to avoid rubric fatigue. Instead, the MEL team decided to conduct a partnership survey every two years (built around the elements of the rubric) and synthesised findings from: (1) the survey; (2) the rubric reflections from country AARs; and (3) reporting. The findings were shared during the consortium AAR workshops as a starting point for reflections on the consortium-level partnership.

## Learning from experimenting with different applications in country

Early discussions around the rubric in both Bangladesh and Nepal revealed some team members were hesitant to offer critical observations about aspects that were not working well. While facilitators were aware of disagreements and underlying tensions between partners, they were not raised fully during the rubric sessions in the early AARs. This is likely because as a new team with many new team members, there were not yet sufficient levels of trust to allow open and critical exchanges. Further, within the country operational team it is likely partners were concerned about revealing dynamics of internal competition, which are common given the competitive bidding approach of most publicly funded aid programmes but counter to the philosophy of CLARISSA. IDS team members, who are the project leaders, largely facilitated partnership discussions, which may have also contributed to team members feeling uncomfortable about exposing country-level challenges.

Acknowledging this reluctance for critical reflection, we experimented with different designs of the participatory exercises with the rubric as described above. Reflecting on the different ways of applying the rubric, we found that asking partners to complete the rubric beforehand was useful as it provided more time during the reflection session for in-depth and critical discussions about areas of concern. It likely also provided a more private space for partners to be more candid about their experiences. For the facilitators, seeing partner-level assessments prior to the workshop was also helpful to facilitate deeper reflection in particular areas in ways that mitigated any conflict. A downside of this approach was that each partner interpreted the exercise differently, leading partners to share variable amounts of information, which skewed the conversation slightly towards partners who had more stickies on the board (given the individualised method they used).

A facilitation challenge common to all participatory methods is that a certain level of trust needs to exist within a diverse group before participants are comfortable being openly critical about themselves or others. This is especially the case when dealing with a mix of organisational cultures, with complex power relationships between organisations and individuals, and in cross-country partnerships with different social norms around self-criticism and acceptance of failure. As many of the early AAR sessions were conducted virtually (due to Covid-19), we were less able to build trust within the group. This meant that creating a safe enough space to facilitate participants to be comfortably challenged to deepen their reflections was harder to achieve. Furthermore, discussing the partnership's functioning by building on individual organisations' reflections on their own ways of working first may have contributed to a sense of competition across partners, rather than making them feel part of an integrated team from the outset.

Our use of the rubric highlights a feedback loop between how the partnership functions in practice and how it is evaluated. Trust needs to exist for partners to critically reflect together, which in turn helps to build trust and improve partnership functioning. This led to identifying times when it was better not to use the partnership rubric, as it could reinforce a negative feedback loop where trust was lacking and there was potential for conflict to emerge. The shift to the world café method, conducted in person, helped navigate tensions and allowed for more critical reflections. This offered a safe and welcoming environment for individuals to connect in smaller mixed groups. All the groups could give their input on all the elements through several rounds of small group conversations. A combination of shifting to in-person discussions, time spent working together to improve trust and use of informal spaces to connect, the world café method, and explicit partnership-building activities conducted in both countries contributed to more open conversations when using the rubric, and ultimately built better relationships.

## Using the rubric for adaptive management

Now we describe the outcomes from the use of the rubric and how it contributed to improving partnership working within the consortium. Having a standard tool that all partners agreed on provided a useful framework to return to and build conversations around when reflecting on the partnership over several years. Having the same tool helped familiarise everyone with the shared commitment to partnership working. The descriptors for each of the elements helped to clarify what we meant and were striving towards – it made our intentions clear. This was particularly useful for new people entering the programme. It created a sense of mutual accountability as everyone was striving towards a well-functioning partnership, with clarity on what this meant.

Applying the rubric as a regular tool during the integrated learning cycles – facilitated by structured AARs and as part of the programme's approach to adaptive management – allowed reflections produced through the rubric to be mostly acted on. Starting each session by looking back on the assessment exercise from the previous AAR and reflecting on what had happened since helped to clarify how to achieve a wellfunctioning level, as well as the reasons we had struggled to improve performance in some areas. Providing concrete experiential evidence to justify assessment at any level helped to make discussions concrete. Being evidence based through providing clear examples of what we were observing in the partnership also helped team members open up. For example, regarding team identity in Bangladesh, members of the team indicated that while some felt a strong connection to the CLARISSA team identity, they observed that some team members wore organisationally branded outfits while in the community, which suggested they were representing their organisation rather than an integrated CLARISSA team.

The Bangladesh partnership rubric reflection process evidenced how a rubric can highlight both the ups and downs on the journey of an evolving partnership. It became a tool to make it possible to discuss challenges while also celebrating achievements. This was especially the case in relation to trust and communications. Both were ranked high early in the programme (AAR 2), but then became challenging as tensions increased around different ways of working and lack of communication impeded operational coordination. While suggestions were made after AAR 2 that non-violent communication training and strong facilitation would help navigate these tensions, the same exercise during AAR 5 indicated that the team had not acted on their own learning. Further breakdown in partnership working had led to tensions with community members, as partners were using different approaches to remunerating participants, which led to confusion.

Using the rubric during AAR 5 not only made these challenges discussable but illustrated the real urgency around making learning actionable. This led to a renewed commitment to working as an integrated team, and prioritisation of building trust and mutual respect. During the final partnership rubric session in AAR 7, the team celebrated their success in building trust by implementing non-violent communication training and undertaking facilitation workshops as a team. They were able to find a middle ground to resolve disputes in the interest of the programme, and issues were resolved more quickly due to new and more direct lines of communication having been established.

'Impact orientation' was an element of the rubric, and reflections on it provided valuable information about the extent to which partners understood not just the logic within the high-level programmatic ToC, but the specific use of nested ToCs and the overall MEL approach of CLARISSA. The assessments identified that the team wanted to further develop their understanding of the MEL system and did not feel ownership over the ToC. In response, the MEL team developed contextualised country-specific ToCs, and held follow-up meetings and webinars on the approach to evaluation and learning within MEL.

The element of communication was identified as an area of challenge for all partners at the consortium level. Importantly, this did not just suggest a lack of communication, but also at times referred to over-communication, with too much information leading to overload for some team members. This led to a collective realisation that in such a large and complex programme it is not possible for everyone to know everything, but there is a need for people to be able to access all information if they want to or require it in a particular moment. This led to making all programme information available to all team members via Microsoft Teams. The programme director reinforced this decision to promote the use of Microsoft Teams, which was seen as a responsibility for all. Creating a monthly internal bulletin for the consortium, which provided updates from each of the sub-teams, (country and thematic) was also a response to these reflections.

The specific experience from Bangladesh, as well as broader experience across CLARISSA, illustrates the nuanced views that iterative use of a rubric enables as opposed to a simple indicator matrix, which would only provide a measure of performance over time. The participatory and facilitated reflections using the rubric as an anchoring tool allowed partners to share and hear different perspectives, ultimately enabling more honest and actionable insights to emerge.

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## Annexe 1: Bangladesh contextualised rubric

Element	Well-functioning	Emerging	Needs help
<b>Communications</b>	Partners are clear on how the programme is progressing All partners use Microsoft Teams seamlessly Regular communication through multiple mechanisms	Communication is improving; however, multiple sources of information may sometimes cause confusion The team is adapting to new technology and trying to use new platform (Microsoft Teams) seamlessly Without regular face-to-face meetings, we would not be on the same page about key decisions	Communication is haphazard and creates confusion most of the time Disagreements due to misinformation lead to conflict Some partners feel left out or unsure of what is happening Country-level teams are confused by mixed messages
	<b>Ok</b>	<b>Customised</b>	<b>Customised</b>
<b>Team identity</b>	Decisions are reached through consensus Productive and enjoyable working environment Clear definition of roles helps us work as a team Partners understand the beauty of working in different organisations, but also keep in mind 'A team' attitude	There is mutual respect, but this remains formal People are learning to work well together and establishing a team culture, while also learning about partners' organisational cultures	Each partner focuses only on what is in their contract There is no mutual support and trust between partners Partners feel they can make unilateral decisions
	<b>Customised</b>	<b>Customised</b>	<b>Customised</b>
<b>Openness, honesty and mutual trust</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Problems are identified, shared and discussed openly</li> <li>Criticisms are well accepted by the team.</li> <li>We have positive personal and professional relationships</li> <li>We handle crises without internal conflict</li> <li>Better participatory facilitation is in place among partners to encourage openness, honesty and mutual trust</li> </ul>	Some partners may not always encourage sharing honest opinions with the whole group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participatory facilitation process is progressing, and more work is being done to ensure openness, honesty and mutual trust</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is conflict due to problems not being resolved</li> <li>Participatory facilitation is not practiced by the partners.</li> </ul>
	<b>Customised</b>	<b>Customised</b>	<b>Customised</b>

Element	Well-functioning	Emerging	Needs help
<b>Impact orientation</b>	Agreed ToC provides clear vision and priorities  The MEL system is coowned by all partners and delivers quality information on how we are progressing along impact pathways	There are frequent conversations between partners about the common vision, but it needs continuous conversation and more clarification	Activities are not aligned with the programme ToC  Partners are not aware of how their work supports the impact strategy of the consortium as a whole
	<b>Ok</b>	<b>Customised</b>	<b>Ok</b>
<b>Inclusivity and equitability</b>	Good dialogue that enables all to engage  Smaller organisations feel they have a full voice in decisionmaking processes  Partners are fairly and equally treated in the consortium  Fairness in access to and exchange of information among partners  Partners actively invite each other's contribution and participation	Partners are being engaged in discussions, but voices are not fully or always heard	IDS dominates consortium decisionmaking  Smaller partners do not feel valued equally
	<b>Customised</b>	<b>Customised</b>	<b>Ok</b>
<b>Adaptability and flexibility</b>	Programme stays on track through making evidence-based decisions to adapt  Mistakes are openly discussed  Partners embrace the principle of adaptability and are flexible depending on situation  Uncertainty is inherent in the project and partners understand this	There is some adaptation along the way, but it is not always supported by evidence and not well documented; more work needs to be done on the strategy of adaptation  Uncertainty sometimes poses challenges to some partners	We never deviate from original plans  Budgets never shift throughout the programme
	Customised	Customised	Ok
<b>Entrepreneurial culture – Culture that encourages innovation to bring change</b>	We find creative practical solutions to problems  Partners are equipped with innovation skills	We have lots of new ideas but struggle to find ways to implement them	We implement plans without new ideas emerging  There is fear about taking risks
	<b>Customised</b>	<b>Ok</b>	<b>Ok</b>

## Annexe 2: Nepal contextualised rubric

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



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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, Myanmar, 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.