



Addressing Root Causes:

A community-led journey to lasting change

Impact Report- Summary Report

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Background

Global Fund for Children and its Addressing Root Causes Initiative

The Global Fund for Children (GFC) works to build a world where all children and youth are safe, strong, and valued. It partners with innovative, community-based organizations to deepen their impact and build capacity for social change. By pairing flexible funding with targeted capacity development services, GFC empowers grassroots organizations to advance the rights of children and youth in six key areas: education, gender justice, safety and wellbeing, climate resilience, youth power. Since 1997, GFC has invested over \$44 million in more than 700 organizations, guided by values of courage, excellence, learning, partnership, inclusion, kindness, and passion.

GFC's Addressing Root Causes (ARC) initiative is a focused effort to tackle the underlying factors contributing to harm and labor-based exploitation of children and youth in South Asia, particularly in Bangladesh. ARC emphasizes community-led, preventative interventions that address issues such as intergenerational poverty, harmful social norms, gender inequality, limited access to education, and lack of positive employment opportunities.

Using the Community Life Competence Process (CLCP) and the SALT framework (Support, Appreciate, Listen, and Transfer), ARC fosters trust, reflection, and community-driven solutions. The initiative empowers youth and communities to lead local interventions, reduce harm, and promote child rights, while inspiring confidence in their ability to drive meaningful change.

The CLCP is a step-by-step learning cycle that empowers communities to take ownership of their challenges by breaking them down into manageable actions. Each step involves reflection and learning, which then forms the basis for further action. The cycle is continuous, promoting ongoing progress and adaptation without an endpoint.

Community Life Competence Process

The SALT approach accompanies CLCP, providing a supportive and appreciative framework for community engagement. SALT fosters trust and transformation, helping communities navigate challenges and setbacks. Together, CLCP and SALT create a powerful, strengths-based methodology that catalyzes sustainable, community-driven change.

Support, Appreciate, Listen, Learn

These methods support communities in identifying their own solutions to challenges. This phase of the ARC initiative focused on personal growth, which rippled through organizations, cohort organizations, and communities to create sustainable locally driven change.



Four levels of change in the ARC Initiative

The ARC Initiative

The ARC initiative engaged six organizations in the CLCP and SALT methods. These targeted organizations work with marginalized communities in Bangladesh that are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.



The participating organizations are:

1. Alokito Kori in Dhaka, a youth-led organization that promotes youth volunteerism,
2. Ashirbad Mohila Unnayan Samity in Mymensingh, a women-led organization working for the betterment of women and youth,

3. Bangladesh Rural Economic Development (BRED) in Pabna, a group working with underprivileged people facing the impacts of climate change,
4. Development of Health and Agriculture Rehabilitation Advancement in Jashore, a women-led organization working to ensure shelter, health, and education for minority communities,
5. Ethnic Community Development Organization (ECDO) in Sylhet, a group working for the development of indigenous tea garden communities in northeastern Bangladesh, and
6. Grow Your Reader Foundation in Dhaka, a women and youth-led organization that ensures access to education.

About this report and methodological approach

The Global Fund for Children commissioned a monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) partner to support their mission to articulate GFCs community led process and approach undertaken in Bangladesh (and more broadly South Asia) utilizing SALT and CLCP for communication and dissemination. The main activities for the MEL partner to support are the synthesis, articulation, and documentation of GFCs process and approach, with four key learning questions framing this work:

- What are the most compelling ways to present the SALT and CLCP processes, as applied by GFC in South Asia, and the evidence of impact from GFC's community-led efforts in Bangladesh and the region, using both qualitative insights and data visualizations to resonate with diverse audiences?
- What key takeaways from GFC's experience with SALT and CLCP in South Asia can be framed to inspire replication or adaptation by other partners, funders, or regions, while maintaining fidelity/consistency to the nuance and complexity of the community-led ethos?
- What challenges and enablers experienced in implementing SALT and CLCP in South Asia should be highlighted to understand community driven change?
- Why is working in this way making a difference - how is the process itself making a difference and contributing towards outcomes?

The UBORA and Matter of Focus partnership were commissioned as the MEL partners.

UBORA is an European institution with proven expertise in strategic review with an organisational learning perspectives. As an organisation, UBORA advocates for a feminist approach and decolonial lenses, as well as the use of methodologies that enable the capture of organisational and social change. These approaches help the evolving processes within local and regional contexts to be more visible, through participatory MEL practices. To this end, UBORA counts also with a long track record of experience in assessing strategy review, theories of change, organisational MEL plans.

Matter of Focus is a mission-led company and certified B Corp based in Edinburgh, Scotland, UK. Matter of Focus works with organisations, projects and programmes to explore, map, analyse and assess the outcomes that matter to them, the people and populations they care about, and their funders. They provide tools and techniques to bring together evidence, data and evaluation to ensure that projects and programmes can meet their outcomes, are

successful and adaptable, and can demonstrate that success to diverse audiences. Our approach is underpinned by our innovative and easy to use software, OutNav, that enables public service organisations and funders to make effective use of their data and information to learn, improve and tell the story about the difference they make.

A full report can be read here: Link to full report: <https://www.outnav.net/view-live-report/g/mpWBf0GE4bmynNTqapV8tymXYL84YmoH>

Approach and Methodology

This report captures the learning from ARC Initiative's work to date in Bangladesh according to the monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) collaboration between the ARC Initiative (led by Global Fund for Children) and the UBORA / Matter of Focus partnership. The work draws on a combination of documentation and data review, collaborative interviews with ARC colleagues based in Bangladesh, and a joint workshop with ARC and wider GFC colleagues. These informed the development of a series of outcome pathways using OutNav, an outcomes-focused software system developed by Matter of Focus.

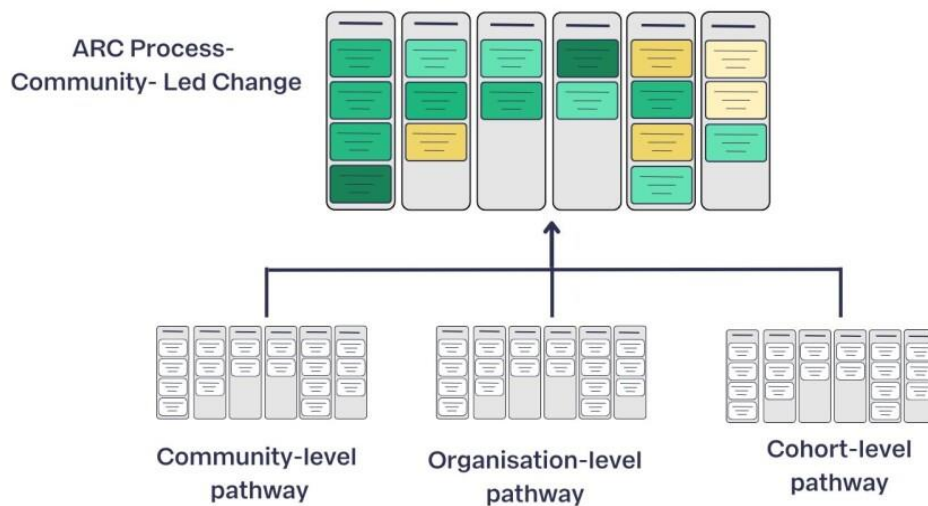
The Outcome Map and Pathways

The outcome map, built in OutNav, includes four interrelated pathways:

- ARC Process – Community-led Change Pathway
- Community Level Pathway
- Organisational Level Pathway
- Cohort Level Pathway

While each pathway reflects a specific level of change, the individual level is embedded throughout - as any meaningful change depends on people, their relationships, and actions. The pathways were agreed collaboratively to show how ARC and GFC activities contribute to outcomes, and what needs to be in place to make this happen, identifying clear change mechanisms by which the programme works.â€

The ARC Process – Community-led Change Pathway is the focus of this report. It has built on the theory of change for the ARC initiative by drilling into a result chain that illustrates how the ARC initiative supports community-led change, and visuals of the three other pathways are included to show how change mechanisms operate across different levels. It has not been possible in the time allowed for this work to provide evidence for all four pathways, but the contribution analysis of the Community Change pathway is illustrative of the process in the other interlinked pathways.



The pathways set out how the ARC initiative contributes to high-level outcomes by following the logic across the pathway, and assigning evidence to each part of the Community-led change work.

Contribution analysis through tracking evidence

UBORA and Matter of Focus used the Matter of Focus approach and software OutNav. OutNav is a software system developed by Matter of Focus that supports organisations to take a collaborative and outcome-focused approach to evaluation planning, implementation analysis and reporting. The Matter of Focus approach is a theory-based approach to outcome monitoring and evaluation, learning and improvement that builds on contribution analysis. This was particularly well-suited to the ARC initiative where outcomes cannot be pre-determined, but are instead defined by the communities who take part.

Each pathway is broken down into “stepping stones” – activities, stakeholders, and outcomes that come together to logically tell the contribution story. Data from the programme was gathered and reviewed and findings synthesised under each stepping stone, cutting across the four levels (individual, organisational, community, cohort) to show how process-driven change contributes to longer-term outcomes. The Community change pathway has been colour coded to show the progress towards impact, and the strength of evidence.

About this report

This report is intended to demonstrate how the activities of the ARC Initiative contribute to reducing inequalities. The report is structured as per the Matter of Focus approach, articulating:

- What the ARC Initiative does (key activities)
- Who with (who is engaged and involved in these activities)
- How they feel (how do the people involved react? What is important to ensure positive engagement?)
- What they learn and gain (knowledge, skills, capacity, attitudes)
- What they do differently (behaviours, practice, policy change)
- What difference does this make? (longer-term social outcomes, what is better for people?)

The report includes:

- The four pathways developed in collaboration with GFC and ARC teams
- Key risks and assumptions informing the MEL work
- Detailed findings across the ARC Process Pathway
- Seven case studies (one per partner) in the final 'What difference does this make' stepping stones, illustrating how change is happening from activities through to high-level outcomes
- Early conclusions that show emerging patterns of change

Each case study shows how the ARC initiative is contributing to change, grounded in the activities, relationships, and contexts of local communities.

Our Approach to Case Study Development

The case study methodology blends two approaches:

Outcome-Oriented Approach: a simplified form of Outcome Harvesting (OH) adapted for this context and timeframe. It supports the identification of both intended and unintended outcomes, using data from local experiences and existing reports.

Matter of Focus Approach: a theory-based approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning that builds on contribution analysis. This involves:

- Developing a theory of change informed by local context
- Agreeing outcome pathways that show how activities lead to outcomes

- Identifying core change mechanisms
- Reviewing data against each stepping stone in the pathway
- Synthesising findings to tell a clear and credible contribution story

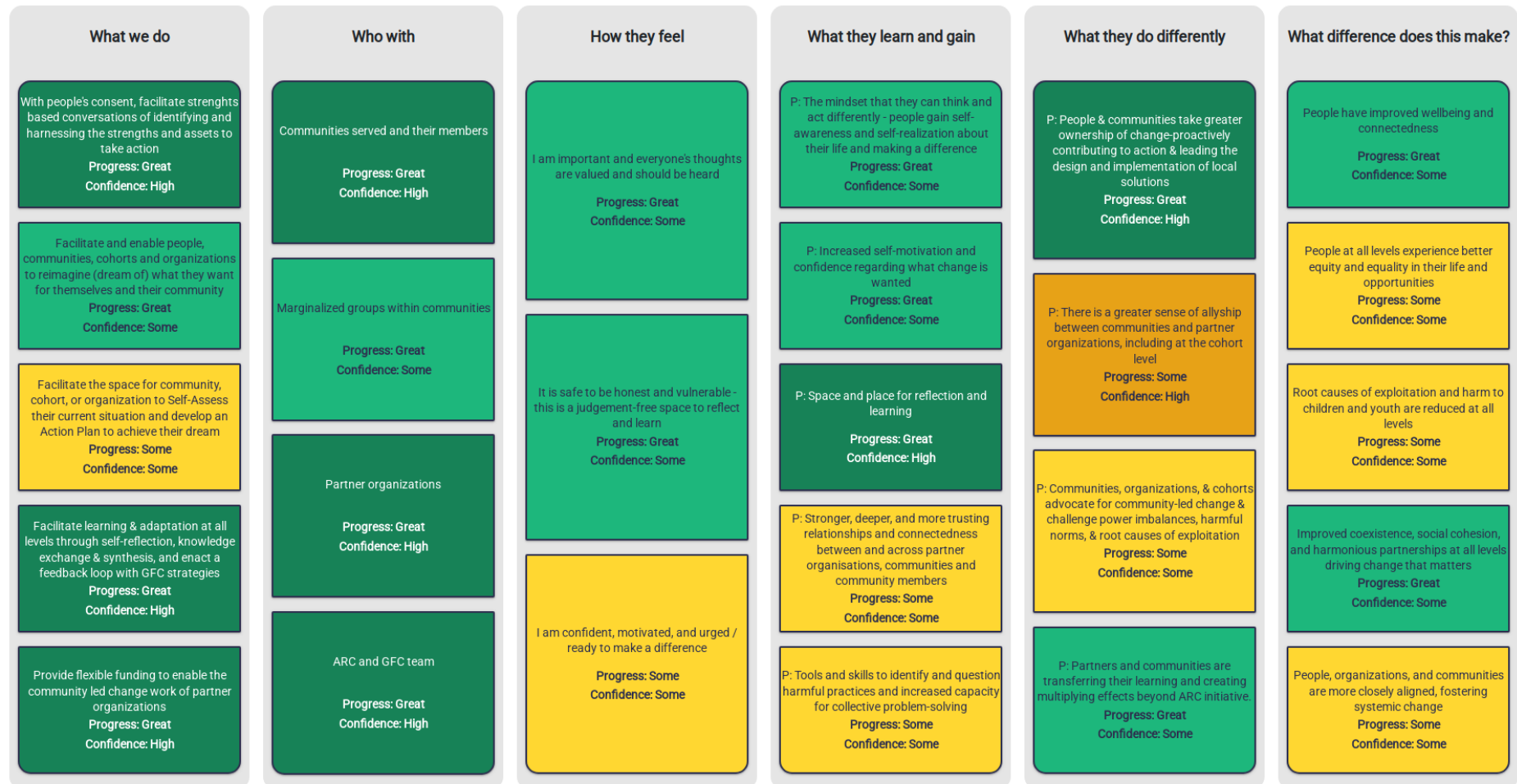
This approach is supported by OutNav, which enables collaborative, outcome-focused evaluation planning, implementation, and reporting.

For more on this approach, see: Morton, Sarah, and Ailsa Cook. How Do You Know If You Are Making a Difference? Policy Press, 2023. Matter of Focus Handbook

	Great Progress	Some Progress	Low Progress
High Confidence			
Some Confidence			
Low Confidence			

Colour-coding progress and confidence ratings

Community led change pathway



Community Level Pathway

What we do	Who with	How they feel	What they learn and gain	What they do differently	What difference does this make?
With people's consent, facilitate strenghts based conversations of identifying and harnessing the strengths and assets to take action	Communities served and their members	I am important and everyone's thoughts are valued and should be heard	Increased awareness and confidence to own what they want to achieve for themselves and the community	Solutions are generated and owned at the community level, leveraging and utilising existing local resouces, knowledge, capacities and tools	People have improved wellbeing and connectedness
Facilitate and enable people, communities, cohorts and organizations to reimagine (dream of) what they want for themselves and their community	Marginalized groups within communities		P: The mindset that they can think and act differently - people gain self-realization about their life and making a difference	Bonds between people are strengthened at all levels, fostering collaboration on delivering Action Plans	People at all levels experience better equity and equality in their life and opportunities
Facilitate the space for community, cohort, or organization to Self-Assess their current situation and develop an Action Plan to achieve their dream		It is safe to be honest and vulnerable - this is a judgement-free space to reflect and learn		People take ownership of solutions and take up opportunities relvant to them in their own space	
Facilitate the process of learning, revising, changing and adapting at all levels through self-reflection, knowledge exchange, and synthesis	Partner organizations		Comm: Capacity and confidence to advocate for human rights and the access to relevant services and support	Challenging together the institutions, power dynamics, and sociocultural norms across communities when they fail to support communities with needs	Root causes of exploitation and harm to children and youth are reduced at all levels
We (GFC)adapt programme strategies based on feedback and local knowledge from community, organisations and cohort	ARC and GFC team	I am confident, motivated, and urged / ready to make a difference	P: Space and place for reflection and learning	P: Community and organisations advocate for community led change to local government and donors, for addressing root causes of exploitation.	Improved coexistence, social cohesion, and harmonious partnerships at all levels driving change that matters

Organization Level Pathway

What we do	Who with	How they feel	What they learn and gain	What they do differently	What difference does this make?
With people's consent, facilitate strengths based conversations of identifying and harnessing the strengths and assets to take action	Communities served and their members	I am important and everyone's thoughts are valued and should be heard	Increased awareness and confidence to own what they want to achieve for themselves and the community	Bonds between people are strengthened at all levels, fostering collaboration on delivering Action Plans	People have improved wellbeing and connectedness
Facilitate and enable people, communities, cohorts and organizations to reimagine (dream of) what they want for themselves and their community			P: Increased self-motivation, confidence, and self-awareness regarding what change is wanted		People at all levels experience better equity and equality in their life and opportunities
Facilitate the space for community, cohort, or organization to Self-Assess their current situation and develop an Action Plan to achieve their dream	ARC and GFC team	It is safe to be honest and vulnerable - this is a judgement-free space to reflect and learn	P: Stronger, deeper, and more trusting relationships and connectedness between and across partner organisations, communities and community members	Org: Ways of working are more collaborative, inclusive and equitable, encouraging distributed leadership and collective decision-making	Root causes of exploitation and harm to children and youth are reduced at all levels
Facilitate the process of learning, revising, changing and adapting at all levels through self-reflection, knowledge exchange, and synthesis			Org: People take greater ownership of their work and are better equipped to address the root causes of exploitation in local communities		People, organizations, and communities are more closely aligned, fostering systemic change
Provide flexible funding to enable the community led change work of partner organizations	Organizational colleagues and members	I am confident, motivated, and urged / ready to make a difference	Org and Coh: Enhanced mutual awareness and knowledge between organizations and the communities they serve	Org: A learning and improvement culture is embedded, facilitating a more creative and resilient culture	Org: Organizations have better social, financial, and institutional sustainability

Cohort Level Pathway

What we do	Who with	How they feel	What they learn and gain	What they do differently	What difference does this make?
With people's consent, facilitate strengths based conversations of identifying and harnessing the strengths and assets to take action	Partner organizations	I am important and everyone's thoughts are valued and should be heard	P: Space and place for reflection and learning	Collaborative partners are strengthened in their efforts to influence and drive systemic change regarding exploitation and harm to children and youth	Root causes of exploitation and harm to children and youth are reduced at all levels
Facilitate and enable people, communities, cohorts and organizations to reimagine (dream of) what they want for themselves and their community			P: Stronger, deeper, and more trusting relationships and connectedness between and across partner organisations, communities and community members		
Facilitate the space for community, cohort, or organization to Self-Assess their current situation and develop an Action Plan to achieve their dream	ARC and GFC team	I am confident, motivated, and urged / ready to make a difference	Org and Coh: Enhanced mutual awareness and knowledge between organizations and the communities they serve	Coh: Enhanced mutual awareness and knowledge between partner organizations and between organizations and the communities they serv	Improved coexistence, social cohesion, and harmonious partnerships at all levels driving change that matters
Facilitate the process of learning, revising, changing and adapting at all levels through self-reflection, knowledge exchange, and synthesis			Coh: Access to a larger and more diverse range of information, practice, and advocacy resources		
We (GFC) adapt programme strategies based on feedback and local knowledge from community, organisations and cohort	Organizational colleagues and members				
Provide flexible funding to enable the community led change work of partner organizations					

Key data sources

Midline Learning Report

This report includes results from the baseline reports and emerging outcomes after the baseline studies.

Baseline Studies: Between November and December 2023, GFC carried out a baseline study with six ARC partner organizations in Bangladesh, using surveys and in-depth interviews. The results reflect the partners' self-assessment across areas such as community engagement, inclusivity, program design, safeguarding, and sustainability, highlighting both strengths and areas for improvement. These findings offer insights into current practices and identify opportunities to strengthen community-led development and ownership.

Emerging Outcomes Post Baseline: from baseline through September 2024 data was gathered from multiple sources, including interviews, reflections from reflective meetings, and partner organization staffs' reflections shared via published blog posts, of which there are 90. The blog posts are hosted on a community forum that is open to those engaging with the CLCP-SALT approach; capturing and sharing reflections in this way is encouraged across all partners.

Risks and assumptions

RISKS

-  Cohort level: A shared vision for the dream may be difficult if organizations prioritise their own goals over those of the cohort
-  Cohort level: Dynamics may be uneven in participation, with larger organizations dominating or overshadowing smaller ones
-  Org level: organizational mandates - esp in donor-driven or compliance-heavy settings - may clash with the emergent nature of SALT/CLCP
-  Org level: Adoption of SALT/CLCP is superficial and tokenistic rather than embodying its philosophy
-  Org level: Internal resistance and skepticism to deep mindset change required to shift from 'doing for' to 'facilitating with'
-  Comm level: Expectations are shaped by past external support or service delivery models, leading to resistance to community-led approaches
-  Comm level: Any perceived favoritism individuals receive from NGOs can cause offence or disengagement
-  Comm level: Power dynamics disrupt/undermine meaningful inclusion, eg dominant groups overshadowing marginalized voices or disrupt existing dynamics
-  Comm level: Facilitators can be too directive, hands-off, or unconsciously biased, leading to the process not being genuinely led by the community

ASSUMPTIONS

-  Comm level: Meaningful ongoing, long-term support will be provided to sustain early gains and contributions
-  Comm level: Thoughtful adaptation for local contexts will underpin the scaling approach of the community-led change process
-  Cohort level: Sufficient time and space is dedicated to the collective processes to allow for the slow pace of consensus-building
-  Org level: The value of facilitators within organizations emerge over time as mindsets, approaches and cultures change

ARC Process: Community-led change pathway - summary findings

What we do

The ARC Initiative uses a strengths-based, participatory approach—primarily through the SALT (Support, Appreciate, Listen, Transfer) framework and the Community Life Competence Process (CLCP)—to empower individuals and communities to identify their assets, envision their desired futures, and take collective action.

Central to this process are structured conversations and learning cycles that promote reflection, build trust, and support locally led change. The initiative has implemented over 2,400 SALT conversations across individual, group, organisational, and cohort levels. These conversations have played a critical role in fostering confidence, shifting mindsets, improving relationships, and generating locally owned solutions.

The initiative aims to foster trust and encourage meaningful reflection in local communities, organisations and cohorts, which in turn should empower places and people to uncover and implement their own solutions to local challenges. By doing this, the initiative creates an environment where individuals and groups can grow in confidence and take ownership of change - even in the face of cultural resistance and deeply rooted power structures.

This cycle is continuous—there is no defined endpoint. The structured steps of the learning cycle help individuals, communities, organisations, cohorts break down what may seem like an overwhelming challenge into specific, manageable components.

The initiative supports communities and partner organisations through key stages to :

- 1.- define who we are,
- 2.- envisioning and building a shared dream,
- 3.- self-assessment of the dream,
- 4.- Developing and planning actions,
- 5.- implementing actions
- 6.- Sharing the learning.

This cycle, often iterative and non-linear, encourages practical, community-driven progress on issues such as education, early marriage, and gender inequality. This work is grounded in deep engagement with diverse and often marginalised communities across Bangladesh, whose participation is critical for identifying and addressing root causes.

Self-assessments and resulting action plans have been developed at individual, community, organisational, and cohort levels. These have contributed , in some cases, to:

- strengthening leadership,
- improving practice in areas such as safeguarding,
- and building collective accountability.

To promote learning and adaptation, the initiative facilitates regular reflection and knowledge exchange activities, including cross-cohort learning events and public forums such as the 2025 Knowledge Fair. These platforms help consolidate insights, build global connections, and maintain a feedback loop between community action and programme strategy.

Finally, flexible funding through organisational development grants enables partners to implement community-led change while addressing challenges related to donor alignment and participatory practice.

"Change begins small but multiplies to create a profound impact." — Raufun Nabi, Alokito Shishu Trust



Dream Building at Burigoalini, Satkhira District

Who with



As of mid-2025, the ARC Initiative has engaged with over 3,300 individuals across seven distinct community settings identified by partners. These include riverine, nomadic, indigenous, and urban marginalised groups in areas such as Narayanganj, Munshiganj, Sylhet, Pabna, and Satkhira. among others.

Intent to reach those most excluded is consistent across partners, though depth and practice vary. Several partners—most notably ECDO and DHARA—have made deliberate efforts to include those often left out of community processes, including youth, women, and indigenous groups. Engagement with marginalised groups such as Dalits, tea garden workers, and river gypsies has been a core focus. However, many individuals are still in the early stages of recognising their own capacity to lead change, indicating a need for sustained investment in building confidence and capability within these groups.

“It will take time for them to rediscover and harness these strengths effectively.” —
Lakshminkanta Singh, ECDO

Partner organisations have each brought a specific expertise or geographic focus to the ARC Initiative, ranging from education access and women's empowerment to climate resilience and indigenous rights, giving access to the community on different expertise when they needed it. While all share a stated commitment to community ownership, baseline assessments highlight variation in the extent to which this is embedded in strategy, decision-making, and feedback mechanisms. Some organisations, such as GROW and Alokito, are further along in integrating community perspectives into planning and monitoring.

“We are not just implementing projects; we are listening, learning, and changing how we work based on what people tell us.”

— Partner reflection from midline learning workshop

The ARC and GFC programme teams have supported engagement across contexts, playing facilitative roles in learning, reflection, and coordination. Their work includes technical guidance, convening cross-partner learning events, and maintaining programme-level feedback loops. There is an opportunity to build on this foundation by further articulating how team members' expertise and lived experience contribute to community-led change processes.

“Participatory work isn’t just about tools—it’s about trust, relationships, and being present in the journey communities are taking.”

— ARC Programme Team Member

Engagement is going well, although there are inherent challenges. While some communities (e.g., Munshiganj) reported stronger inclusivity, dialogue, and decision-making processes, others—particularly the Dalit and Horijon communities—indicated exclusion, limited access to information, and low confidence in governance structures. Across all sites, challenges related to inclusivity, transparency, and meaningful participation emerged, but early shifts toward community-led problem-solving were noted.

“Our foremost objective must be to help them recognise this potential. Only then can they become changemakers, fully in control of their community’s future.”

— Raufun Nabi, Alokito Shishu Trust

These trusting relationships and deep engagement are the foundations upon which shifts in perception, confidence, and emotional safety begin to take root.

How they feel

Positive engagement is a necessary foundation for achieving significant outcomes or relevant transformative changes. Without systematically capturing evidence of what drives such engagement, much of the creative and thoughtful work may remain invisible. "They" refers to the individuals, communities, organisations, and cohorts involved and engaged in the ARC initiative.

Many participants in the ARC Initiative have reported a growing sense of being heard and valued through their involvement in SALT conversations and other reflective activities. At baseline, community data highlighted widespread feelings of exclusion from decision-

making. For example, 85% of BRED community members reported not feeling that diverse viewpoints were respected. Through the ARC process, this began to shift. Individuals described becoming more open-minded and aware of the need to respect others' views. One participant reflected:

"I had the opportunity to share my own story and listen to others' personal stories... I felt more connected and motivated." — GYRF participant

The initiative has also made a deliberate effort to create spaces where people—especially those from marginalised groups—feel safe to speak honestly and without judgement. Baseline findings showed that many, particularly women and youth, felt silenced or dismissed. Over time, SALT conversations helped establish environments of trust and vulnerability. As one blog noted,

"The trust and honesty we shared during the SALT conversations helped us open up and form deeper connections." — GYRF participant

Similarly, an ECDO participant shared how engaging with the SALT process helped her explore the importance of self-reliance:

"She has learned more about the value of developing inner strength and depending on oneself."

The initiative also nurtures confidence and motivation to take action, with many people reporting a renewed readiness to make a difference in their communities. While early assessments showed moderate levels of collaboration and early community input, examples from GYRF and Arshirbad demonstrate a shift. One participant described how a conversation about their aspirations inspired action:

"We discussed our dream goals and decided that we would not leave any stone unturned to achieve them." — Arshirbad blog submission

Another described the outcome of a shared visioning session:

"In the end, we had an amazing combined plan for our organisation's future." — GYRF blog submission

Together, these reflections illustrate how the ARC Initiative has fostered a more inclusive, trusting, and motivated environment for community-led change. This emotional safety and growing sense of agency enables participants to begin learning new skills, shifting mindsets, and strengthening relationships that underpin change

To strengthen understanding of how individuals, organizations, and communities experience SALT conversations, it would be valuable for the ARC Initiative to explore more accessible and inclusive ways of gathering feedback—particularly from non-English-speaking communities. Encouraging the use of visuals, such as drawings, photos, and videos, can offer creative and culturally relevant alternatives to written reports, making it easier for diverse participants to share their perspectives.

Currently, blogs remain one of the few sources of direct feedback on the SALT conversations themselves—specifically regarding how participants felt during the conversations, as opposed to the broader changes influenced by the process. Knowledge Fair which brings communities together, is another source for listening to communities' feedback. Regular AERs (after experience reflection) with communities on the process has been a tool to reflect and listen to the community.

However, most of the reflections available for this impact study come from facilitators rather than participants. Actively collecting feedback from SALT participants who were not in facilitation roles would provide a richer, more balanced understanding of the experience and strengthen the evidence base around how the process is received by stakeholders. To ensure meaningful participation and avoid perpetuating colonial practices, it is essential to allocate resources for translation, as well as for the use of participatory methods such as visuals and videos. This approach values participants' feedback by enabling inclusive and diverse forms of expression, rather than prioritizing English-language or written feedback alone.



What they learn and gain

The focus is on what participants learn and gain through their involvement. This encompasses changes in knowledge, skills, capacities, and attitudes, reflecting the growth and development that result from their engagement.

Across the ARC Initiative, individuals and organisations report significant learning and personal development—especially in relation to self-awareness, motivation, reflective practice, relationships, and problem-solving.

One of the most consistent themes is a shift in mindset: people begin to believe they can think and act differently, and that they have agency to contribute to change. This self-realisation often begins in SALT conversations and deepens through activities like self-assessment and team reflection.

“Change starts from the self.” — Lakshminkanta Singh, ECDO

“Self-assessment helps us see where we really stand... We start tapping into the indomitable strength within.” — Santi Rambari, Arshirbad

Participants across multiple organisations reported an increase in motivation, confidence, and practical capability to pursue change—both individually and collectively. This included stronger communication, better time management, reduced anxiety, and greater courage in unfamiliar situations. These shifts are seen not only in personal life but also in professional practices.

“By learning about others' strengths... I applied their approach to complete my task more efficiently. It reduces my anxiety and gives me confidence.” — GYRF Change Document, 2025

“We would not leave any stone unturned to achieve our goal.” — Arshirbad blog submission

The initiative has also created important space and practice for reflection and peer learning. From local learning circles to regional events, participants have had regular opportunities to share, listen, and grow together. These have helped embed evaluation and reflection into everyday cultural practices, enhancing team collaboration and mutual understanding.

“We collaborate between documentation officers from all cohort organisations and we are able to hold a meeting together.” — Kabbo and Lipika, cohort team members

“The Iftar gathering helped us reflect and share as part of our cultural rhythms.” — Midline Learning Report

Strengthening relationships has been a key outcome. Participants describe improved trust, empathy, and connection—within families, among colleagues, and across communities. These improvements have translated into greater cooperation and informal mutual support, as well as more inclusive leadership and organisational practice.

“Now when I need to go out, I sometimes leave my daughter with my neighbour because I have built trust in them.” — GYRF Change Document, 2025

“My conflict resolution skills have greatly improved... my relationships have significantly improved.” — GYRF Change Document, 2025

Finally, the initiative has equipped people with tools and skills to question harmful norms and work collectively on shared challenges. Organisational reflections show how the SALT approach is helping move away from hierarchical structures towards more collaborative, team-driven models of working.

“SALT showed us that authentic relationships are the foundation... We now aspire to integrate SALT into our way of working and encourage a culture of shared responsibility.” — Mithun Das Kabbo, Alokito

“It allows us to solve challenges collectively and effectively.” — GYRF Changes Document, 2025

These gains—spanning personal insight, relational strength, organisational change, and practical capacity are translating into concrete shifts in behaviour and practice, as individuals and organisations begin doing things differently to lead community-driven change. This demonstrates the knowledge, skills and capacity impacts of the ARC Initiative at individual, community, organisation and cohort levels.



What they do differently

This section identifies what is done differently as a result of the ARC Initiative. This involves changes in behaviors, policies, or practices that reflect a shift in mindset or approach. Such transformations are indicative of the first level of impact of the initiative, where the learning and insights gained lead to tangible, actionable changes within individuals, communities, organizations and cohorts.

The ARC Initiative has contributed to tangible behavioral, organisational, and community-level shifts, with individuals and communities taking greater ownership of change.

Personal transformation has often been the starting point: as people gain self-awareness and confidence through SALT conversations, they begin to take initiative in their households, communities, and workplaces. These shifts are evident in numerous examples—ranging from health and nutrition improvements to environmental actions and advocacy for education and safety.

In Burogalini, for instance, the community moved from passively dreaming about a better future to actively implementing it. Residents launched kitchen gardens, planted trees, and organised health awareness campaigns.

"These dreams are no longer abstract—they are being realised through concrete action." — Midline Learning Report

At the organisational and cohort levels, many partners have begun adopting less hierarchical leadership structures and fostering inclusive decision-making. A stronger sense of allyship has emerged—between organisations, between people, and between communities and partner organisations. For example, the Grow Your Reader Foundation (GYRF) adopted a new approach in its school programme by engaging directly with families through appreciative SALT visits.

"It isn't just the school that is growing; it is the belief in the children's potential." — Razin Mahmud Khan, GYRF

This sense of shared ownership has enabled communities and organisations to challenge long-standing norms and harmful practices. In Dokkhin Para, for example, families re-evaluated restrictive attitudes towards girls' outdoor activities and created new spaces for inclusion. In another case, BRED's Krishnachura youth group addressed public health and infrastructure issues by organising road safety and sanitation initiatives.

“We used to wait for someone to fix things. Now we know we can start the change ourselves.” — Youth participant, BRED

Individuals and communities have also begun advocating more confidently for themselves, both with local authorities and other institutions. One such example is Humaira Yasmin Peya, BRED’s Head of Programmes, who facilitated a process where her village applied directly to the Union Parishad for a tubewell—breaking the cycle of dependency on NGOs.

“My village didn’t just gain a tubewell; we rediscovered the power of unity and self-reliance.” — Humaira Yasmin Peya, BRED

The effects of these changes are multiplying beyond the ARC Initiative. Several organisations are applying the SALT and CLCP approaches in new programmes and activating their Boards through these methods. Communities are replicating these practices to tackle new challenges and create solidarity during periods of instability.

“We are taking care of ourselves, keeping watch at night, and coming forward to help one another when needed.” — Mofazzal Mia, Bede community member, Munshiganj

These behavioural, structural, and relational changes—rooted in appreciation, self-reflection, and collective responsibility—demonstrate how the ARC Initiative is fostering sustainable, community-led transformation that continues to grow and spread.



What difference does this make?

The ARC Initiative has contributed significantly to enhancing people's wellbeing and connectedness, particularly in communities that have historically experienced exclusion and hardship. This section illustrates with examples the findings on the high level outcomes and impacts in the final column of the outcome map.

Through the use of SALT conversations and self-assessment, individuals have found safe, inclusive spaces to reflect, share, and connect on a deeper level. Many reported a new sense of calm, purpose, and mutual understanding in both personal and professional spheres, for example:

- Families in Dokkhin Para, reported that they had never previously sat down to talk together about their beliefs or how they viewed their daughters' futures. Through the initiative, they created space to do so—building stronger intergenerational understanding and support.

The initiative has also advanced equity and equality by increasing the visibility, confidence, and agency of people from marginalised groups.

- Women in Burogalini village, who were previously restricted from public participation, are now leading initiatives such as nutrition gardens and tree planting campaigns. In the tea garden areas of Sylhet, individuals from the Patro community, traditionally isolated, have begun participating more actively in community events and advocacy.

"I now feel that I have the same right to speak up as others. Earlier I would remain silent, but now I feel that my thoughts matter too." — Participant, ECDO Change Story

- In Narayanganj, SALT conversations helped members of the Dalit community articulate a collective dream for their children's futures and begin advocating for better access to education and local services. These changes reflect not only a shift in attitudes within communities, but also the start of more inclusive and participatory local development processes.

A key achievement of the ARC Initiative has been its focus on tackling the root causes of harm and exploitation, particularly for children and youth.

- In Krishnachura, where adolescents—concerned about the risks faced by schoolchildren—took action to clear mosquito-breeding grounds and improve the condition of a hazardous road.

"We saw a problem and we did not wait. We acted with what we had—starting small but showing what was possible." — Youth participant, BRED Change Document

This experience illustrates that pathways of change do not always begin with actions targeting root causes. In this youth-led initiative, the initial activity did not directly address systemic barriers but sparked critical reflection among participants. As youth shared their lived experiences, they identified deeper challenges such as limited access to extra tuition and insufficient parental support for education. This led them to form a peer support group, demonstrating how early engagement and a growing sense of agency can organically lead to addressing underlying, systemic issues over time.

- In Arshirbad, a participant reported overcoming caste-based barriers within her extended family, which enabled her to bring together her in-laws and neighbours from diverse backgrounds—fostering new social bonds and trust. This reflects how the initiative goes beyond addressing immediate symptoms to enabling communities to confront deep-rooted power imbalances and systemic exclusion. For instance, when girls from the Dalit community participated in an external event, it not only challenged gender-based restrictions on mobility but also supported the social integration of Dalit children into the mainstream.

The initiative has also strengthened coexistence, social cohesion, and cross-community partnerships. Within the cohort of partner organisations, a culture of allyship has emerged. Organisations are now working together more closely, exchanging learning through visits, shared resources, and joint reflection. The translation of the CLCP into Bangla by GROW, later adopted by Ashirbad and used across the cohort, is one such example.

The collaborative shifts have been mirrored within communities.

- In Munshiganj, following the political instability and economic hardship during the national Quota Movement, the River Gypsy community began supporting each other through nightly patrols and shared food resources.

“We stay alert, help one another, and keep our children close. This is how we stay strong, no matter what comes.” — Elder, Bede community, Munshiganj

Ultimately, the initiative has helped to more closely align people, organisations, and communities—laying the groundwork for systemic change. Senior staff across partner organisations report adopting more inclusive leadership styles and giving frontline staff greater autonomy. Boards are being engaged in participatory reflection, and tools like SALT and CLCP are being mainstreamed into new programmes.

In Arshirbad, the SALT and CLCP approaches were adapted for a digital skills project, applied in collaboration with an organisation working with youth with disabilities. Through this process, young participants built self-confidence, began advocating for their rights, and

accessed new opportunities. Notably, this initiative was supported by a Dalit-led organisation, highlighting a significant shift from traditional narratives—positioning Dalit actors not as passive recipients of aid, but as enablers of inclusive change within mainstream systems.

“Before, we didn’t think we had a role. Now we know that change can start with us, and we are ready.” — Participant, Arshirbad digital inclusion programme

These developments—rooted in appreciation, reflection, and shared responsibility—signal a profound shift. Organisations and communities are not only changing how they relate to one another, but how they envision their futures. Through small, sustained acts of leadership, care, and cooperation, the ARC Initiative is helping to build the conditions for long-term, locally led, systemic transformation. Actions are already resulting in improved wellbeing, increased equity, and stronger community cohesion



A human sculpture representing non-hierarchical BRED — the person serving tea is the Executive Director (ED).

Conclusions

Improvement Opportunities

- The process of drawing together information, data, and evidence for this report highlighted the importance of a clear and consistent approach for cataloguing the SALT conversations across partners and groupings (i.e., at individual, group, family, organization, community, or cohort level). *The change pathways developed in collaboration with the M&E and technical team from ARC—at the community, organization, and cohort levels—could eventually support the systematization of evidence and outcomes. By using the mapping structure, columns, and definitions for each step, partner organizations can better document and demonstrate impact.* It is up to the ARC Initiative to determine what degree of detail is helpful for providing evidence of impact as well as facilitating the ongoing learning processes across participants and back into the programme itself while remaining feasible and practical for Initiative stakeholders to complete.
- The mapping structure and pathways of change developed throughout assignment, could be actively shared with partner organisations and the communities involved. Doing so serves multiple purposes: it functions as a meaningful "return" process, where teams acknowledge and reflect on the collective work done; it encourages transparency and mutual learning; and it helps ensure that those closest to the change processes can validate, question, and contribute to the evolving narrative of impact. By creating space for feedback and dialogue, this practice not only enriches the understanding of what has changed and why, but also fosters a greater sense of ownership and relevance among stakeholders. It can lead to practical improvements in programming and deepen trust across the initiative.
Integrating this sharing process into a Learning Fair or other participatory event, where visual or interactive formats (e.g. storytelling, mapping exercises, gallery walks) can make the pathways of change more accessible and engaging. Such a setting offers an inclusive opportunity for celebrating achievements, surfacing challenges, and jointly identifying next steps—contributing to a stronger, more adaptive learning ecosystem across the initiative.
- Additionally, using the mapping structure may support the integration of visuals—such as drawings, images, or videos—that do not require translation from Bangla to English. This can enable more accessible, creative, and engaging ways to illustrate the changes taking place at community level.

The ARC initiative has supported significant progress across diverse contexts in Bangladesh, with change unfolding at individual, community, cohort, and organizational levels. Looking across these stories that demonstrate the ARC Process of Community-led change from activities through to the high level outcomes of what difference is being made, we can draw several emerging conclusions at this Interim Report stage:

People feel confident, valued and ready to make a difference

Participants across all seven case studies expressed feeling safe, heard, and respected in the process. Many described the ARC initiative as a judgement-free space, where they could be open about their experiences. This emotional safety created the conditions for deeper reflection, leading to confidence, motivation, and a strong sense of readiness to act.

People recognise they can think and act differently

Through SALT conversations and self-assessment, individuals and communities gained a mindset shift: they realised they have strengths, agency, and the capacity to lead change. This self-realization laid the groundwork for people to imagine new possibilities and take ownership of their futures.

Communities take collective action grounded in local strengths

A powerful outcome across the case studies is the way people became more proactive in their contribution to individual and collective action. Communities began directing their own growth, designing and implementing solutions based on lived experience, available resources, and shared purpose - whether building schools, mentoring youth, or transforming governance practices.

Organizational and community relationships are stronger and more trusting building more inclusive and participatory cultures

The work fostered stronger, deeper, and more trusting relationships between and across partner organisations (ARC cohort), communities, and facilitators. Hierarchies gave way to collaboration, . Communities described a shift from isolation to connection, and organisations reported increased openness, empathy, and shared decision-making. *Mutual awareness and knowledge have been enhanced, fostering stronger relationships and trust both within and between partner organizations. SALT conversations have sparked creativity, led to deeper collaboration, and promoted the sharing of skills and strategies.*

Organizations foster a more creative and resilient culture

By developing a more empathy-based governance approach, encouraging leadership, fostering collaboration, and empowering individuals to take ownership of their work, the organization and cohort level was able to more meaningfully contribute to the communities they serve. Moreover, this helped with better social and organizational sustainability through stronger social recognition of their contribution as change agents.

Cohort learning strengthens collective Impact

The ARC Initiative has catalyzed a deep transformation at the cohort level, enabling partners to shift from individual action to a shared, community-led vision. Through flexible funding and the introduction of the SALT approach, organizations built trust, empathy, and mutual understanding—laying the groundwork for a culture of collaboration over competition. By engaging in collective self-assessment and dreaming together, the cohort developed joint action plans rooted in their strengths and aspirations. This process strengthened their identity as a unified network, enhancing their ability to influence systemic change and protect communities—especially children and youth—from harm.

People gain skills to reflect, learn, and tackle complexity

Participants developed tools and skills to identify and question harmful practices, alongside a greater capacity for collective problem-solving. They created space for reflection and learning, both within communities and institutions. These capabilities are now helping people navigate challenges, make better decisions, and foster cultures of continuous improvement.

Communities and organisations take bold steps to challenge harmful norms

Across the case studies, people used their strengthened relationships and confidence to begin challenging and taking action to address social power imbalances and norms. From tackling caste-based discrimination to reimagining gender roles in sport and education, this work has opened space for more equitable, inclusive practices to emerge and grow. *The improved interpersonal relationships has contributed to enable communities to take more active roles in addressing systemic challenges, particularly in combating child and youth exploitation. While progress is evident, addressing complex social issues like gender inequality and caste-based discrimination remains an ongoing challenge requiring continued support, reflection, and commitment.*

Local change is leading to broader systemic change

Partner organisations and communities have become trusted allies in creating long-term, locally driven solutions. The learning and momentum from the ARC initiative is extending beyond its initial scope - with partners transferring their learning and creating multiplying effects. This work is not just supporting individual transformation, but contributing to systemic change, by aligning people, organisations, and communities in shared purpose.

Individuals, organizations, cohorts, and communities are actively addressing and reducing the root causes of exploitation and harm to children and youth.

The community-led change process has the potential to eradicate discrimination and hegemonic practices. In turn, this can contribute to improved well-being and livelihoods, with people having better equity and equality in their lives and opportunities. It plays a vital

role in breaking cycles of poverty and tackling the underlying causes of exploitation and harm, ultimately fostering a more empowered, united, and self-sustaining society.

Appendix 1: Data used to analyse ARC contribution

This table lists the sources of evidence and success criteria that we have referred to whilst developing the analysis presented in this report.

What we do

Stepping Stone	Source
With people's consent, facilitate strenghts based conversations of identifying and harnessing the strengths and assets to take action	 ARC Bangladesh Midline assessment
	 ARC Bangladesh- Aidscompetence blog submissions log
	 Cohort self-assessment
	 Direct correspondence with ARC Initiative staff
	 SALT -CLCP with communities, within organizations & within cohort
	 SALT within Bangladesh cohort
Success Criteria	
	 Asking communities for their consent to be part of community-led change approach
	 Conversations build trust and mutual support
Facilitate and enable people, communities, cohorts and organizations to reimagine (dream of) what they want for themselves and their	 Aidscompetence blog
	 ARC Bangladesh- Aidscompetence

community	blog submissions log  Direct correspondence with ARC Initiative staff  Healthy Masculinity Work Success Criteria <i>No Success Criteria</i>
Facilitate the space for community, cohort, or organization to Self-Assess their current situation and develop an Action Plan to achieve their dream	 Cohort Self Assessment analysis Success Criteria <i>No Success Criteria</i>
Facilitate learning & adaptation at all levels through self-reflection, knowledge exchange & synthesis, and enact a feedback loop with GFC strategies	 Direct correspondence with ARC Initiative staff  Knowledge Fair 2025 - Event Report  Midline self-assessment Success Criteria <i>No Success Criteria</i>
Provide flexible funding to enable the community led change work of partner organizations	 ARC Bangladesh Midline assessment  ARC Bangladesh Partners' Reflection on GFC's Flexible Funding  GFC Global Impact Study Success Criteria <i>No Success Criteria</i>

Who with

Stepping Stone	Source
Communities served and their members	 Alokito baseline report_Quantitative  BRED Baseline Survey of Community Empowerment through SALT  Quantitative data analysis for DHARA and Ashirbad Success Criteria <i>No Success Criteria</i>
Marginalized groups within communities	 ARC Bangladesh: Blog Submissions Log  GFC Website Success Criteria <i>No Success Criteria</i>
Partner organizations	 ARC Bangladesh Midline assessment  ARC Baseline Report_Bangladesh  Knowledge Fair 2025 - Event Report Success Criteria <i>No Success Criteria</i>
ARC and GFC team	<i>No source</i> Success Criteria

No Success Criteria

How they feel

Stepping Stone

Source

I am important and everyone's thoughts are valued and should be heard

 BRED Baseline Survey of Community Empowerment through SALT

 DHARA org and community changes

 Knowledge Fair 2025 - Event Report

 Midline Learning Report

Success Criteria

No Success Criteria

It is safe to be honest and vulnerable - this is a judgement-free space to reflect and learn

 ARC Bangladesh: Blog Submissions Log

 GYRF All level changes from SALT - Bangladesh

Success Criteria

No Success Criteria

I am confident, motivated, and urged / ready to make a difference

 Aidscompetence blog

 ARC Bangladesh: Blog Submissions Log

 ARC Baseline Report_Bangladesh

Success Criteria

No Success Criteria

What they learn and gain

Stepping Stone

Source

P: The mindset that they can think and act differently - people gain self-awareness and self-realization about their life and making a difference

 ARC Bangladesh- Aidscompetence blog submissions log

 GYRF All level changes from SALT - Bangladesh

Success Criteria

No Success Criteria

P: Increased self-motivation and confidence regarding what change is wanted

 GYRF All level changes from SALT - Bangladesh

 Midline Learning Report

Success Criteria

No Success Criteria

P: Space and place for reflection and learning

 Cohort Self Assessment analysis

 GYRF All level changes from SALT - Bangladesh

Success Criteria

 People and orgs have the time and space to develop new ways of working and systematising learning

P: Stronger, deeper, and more trusting relationships and connectedness between and across partner organisations, communities and community members

 Cohort Self Assessment analysis

 GYRF All level changes from SALT - Bangladesh

 Midline Learning Report

Success Criteria

No Success Criteria

P: Tools and skills to identify and question harmful practices and increased capacity for collective problem-solving

 GYRF All level changes from SALT - Bangladesh

Success Criteria

No Success Criteria

What they do differently

Stepping Stone

Source

P: People & communities take greater ownership of change-proactively contributing to action & leading the design and implementation of local solutions

 ARC Banladesh Sensemaking Report

 Cohort Self Assessment analysis

 DHARA Community self-assessment

 Midline Learning Report

 Midline self-assessment

Success Criteria

No Success Criteria

P: There is a greater sense of allyship between communities and partner organizations, including at the cohort level

 Aidscompetence blog

 ARC Banladesh Sensemaking Report

Success Criteria

No Success Criteria

P: Communities, organizations, & cohorts advocate for community-led change & challenge power imbalances, harmful norms, & root causes of exploitation

 Aidscompetence blog

 GYRF All level changes from SALT - Bangladesh

	 Midline Learning Report Success Criteria <i>No Success Criteria</i>
P: Partners and communities are transferring their learning and creating multiplying effects beyond ARC initiative.	 Aidscompetence blog  Ashirbad Changes  GFC Bangladesh Executive Summary  Midline Learning Report Success Criteria <i>No Success Criteria</i>

What difference does this make?

Stepping Stone	Source
People have improved wellbeing and connectedness	<i>Case studies</i>
People at all levels experience better equity and equality in their life and opportunities	<i>Case studies</i>
Root causes of exploitation and harm to children and youth are reduced at all levels	<i>Case studies</i>

Improved coexistence, social cohesion, and harmonious partnerships at all levels driving change that matters

Case studies

People, organizations, and communities are more closely aligned, fostering systemic change

 ARC Bangladesh Midline assessment

This report has been created using



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