

Tips for trainers

In this issue's *Tips for Trainers* section, we have an extract taken from the new *Communication and Power* resource pack, published by Reflect. Reflect is an innovative approach to adult learning and social change, which fuses the theories of Paulo Freire with the methodology of participatory rural appraisal. Reflect has evolved from three pilot projects in 1995 to the present day, where it is used in over 350 organisations in around 65 countries worldwide.

Role play: an extract from Reflect's *Communication and Power* resource pack

Role play is an effective tool both to analyse issues and to rehearse speaking up in new situations or on different topics.

Why?

Everyone has different roles in different spheres of their lives, perhaps as a colleague, employee, mother, daughter, wife, politician, or friend. Someone may be a passive participant in one context, active in another, empowered in one sphere but a victim in another situation. Essential to the Reflect process is exploring the different power relations and patterns of communication between different roles. Role play is an effective way for people to think about different perspectives in a particular situation, and the impact this has on communication – an important step in the process of challenging and changing relationships of power. Role play is an effective tool both to analyse issues and to rehearse speaking up in new situations or on different topics.

When?

At any time.

Role play about HIV/AIDS, Mozambique



How?

Enabling people to reflect on their multiple identities in life can help raise awareness of the idea of roles and role playing and make it easier for people to take on or act out the roles of others. Often participants are nervous at first, and the use of simple props or masks can help them take on a character.

Role-plays may come in many forms, for example:

- **Reenactment:** Participants reenact a real incident, highlighting power dynamics and pivotal moments of conflict.
- **Simulation:** Participants act out a situation that could happen or which represents what normally happens in a particular situation.
- **Rehearsal:** Participants act out a situation that they want to happen – to practice their roles. For example, if the group has decided to send a delegation to the local government offices, the scenario of the meeting can be rehearsed in advance to test out roles, help refine arguments, or

prepare for different responses/eventualities.

- **Projection/inversion:** Participants invert or switch normal roles, projecting themselves into the roles of others: men become women; bosses become employees; the landless become landowners etc., in order to understand better that person's reactions and behaviour. This can help people see other points of view and identify points of leverage for changing relationships.

In each case the role play should be the starting point for discussion and can be re-visited at different stages of the discussion to explore alternative responses or outcomes. It can be interesting to encourage participants to come up with different stereotypes or labels for the behaviour of individuals in group discussions. In situations where this approach has been used, labels have included: rambler, talkaholic, wise-guy, coloniser, aggressor, joker, daydreamer, pontificator, silent cowboy. Having such labels can enable participants to reflect on their own roles and challenge each other with humour.

**Pros and cons of
traditional
farming and
cashcrops, East
Godavari, India**



Examples from practice

In *Tambopata Condambo*, a national park in **Peru**, role play was used to powerful effect. Two groups with a history of conflict were brought together: the population living in the park and the authorities responsible for maintaining the natural environment of the park. In the role play the two groups were asked to play each other, causing much laughter (and hence a relaxed atmosphere for dialogue) and giving both sides new perspectives on the reasons behind the conflict.

The role play was carefully prepared and structured, based on a series of fictional incidents based on

actual situations, which had caused conflict in the past. Role play was also used within a Peruvian organisation, *Madre de Dios*, in order to promote a better understanding of power dynamics.

Different members of the institution, from field level, project office, and head office exchanged roles to act out specific scenarios – and then reflected on the dynamics of power through lenses of gender, culture, and hierarchy. This has significantly improved understanding and working relations within the institution.

In **Honduras**, a visualisation of social problems in a tree (see the

Images section on the Reflect website), led to a powerful role-play. Women were asked to take on the role of husbands, children became women, and men became children – to explore how these different social problems are played out in the life of a family and how they could be resolved. In a Reflect process with a cooperative in **Lesotho**, local people identified jealousy as a counter-development force. In order to explore this, a role play was mounted with one group of people working together to dig a gully while another group of people were excluded and did everything to sabotage or undermine the efforts. In discussions people then

explored how they felt, what tactics were used, and how this can be addressed in future.

■ The Communication and Power resource pack is aimed at practitioners, and draws on practical ideas and experiences from people using Reflect around the world. Based on the understanding that no communication is neutral, and that the capacity to communicate and be heard is determined by power relations, the pack covers different elements of communication. It contains four colour-coded sections: the written word

(which includes what is literacy?, using newspapers, documenting local knowledge), the spoken word (who speaks?, music, song and dance, recording oral testimonies), numbers (oral mathematics, using drama, understanding budgets) and images (mapping, photographs, analysing television). A final section, 'Reflect in Action', gives examples from practice.

All the material from the Reflect Communication and Power resource pack is copyright free and available to download

free of charge from the Reflect website: www.reflect-action.org

Hard copies (priced at £15) are available from: Egigayehu Summers, ActionAid, International Education Unit, ActionAid, Hamlyn House, Macdonald Road, London N19 5PG, UK

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The pack is currently available in English but will soon be available in Spanish, Portuguese and French. Please state which language you require.